

Gathering of local meetings who will be leaving NWYM, or may be, or individual Friends who want a meaningful inclusion in this project.

April 22, 2017

Eugene Friends Church

Minutes

Present: Seventy-seven Friends registered their attendance. They represented the following seventeen meetings: Bridge City (North Pacific YM), Camas, East Hill, Eugene Friends Church, Eugene Friends Meeting (North Pacific YM), Friends in Common, Hillsboro, Klamath Falls, Newberg, North Seattle, North Valley, Reedwood, Silverton, Spokane, Tigard, Tweeners (worship group in Tualatin), West Hills. There were two unaffiliated Friends. Several children enjoyed child care and playground time, provided by EFC members.

The meeting was opened in prayer at 1:12 by pastor Clyde Parker, who welcomed the group to Eugene Friends Church. He noted that this is the third gathering of folks from churches that will soon no longer be part of NWYM. The first meeting was February 18 at North Valley FC, called by NWYM. The second meeting was at Hillsboro Friends Church. Today's meeting, Clyde was hopeful, will begin to make some progress toward developing some organized response to the new reality of separation from NWYM. He introduced Jan Wood (North Seattle), who will clerk this present meeting, and Tom Stave (Eugene), recording clerk **pro tem**.

Jan Wood assumed the clerking of the meeting.

We began a meeting for worship for the conduct of business. Jan invited us into a period of waiting worship. Jan described this worship experience as both spacious and disciplined—spacious to give room for learning, and disciplined on the basis of a covenant relationship with one another. When we enter the door we lay down our preconceptions, convictions, planned speeches—and take on a neutral space in the spirit of Christ, to align with the heart of Jesus. It's like shedding the garments that need to be shed, that encumber us, and take on the garment of Christ, that frees us. Whenever an organism experiences pain, the natural reaction is to resort to coping mechanisms, to change our behavior to protect itself, to protect itself from that pain ever happening again. We are being birthed out of woundedness and pain, and are vulnerable to resorting to these defenses. We need to release those we are angry at, hold in judgment, have wounded us—release them into the hands of Jesus.

[We entered a period of waiting silence.]

Several Friends shared out of the waiting silence. One shared from a Pendle Hill Pamphlet by Robert Griswold, "Seven Key Words Plus One", and hoped this could be influential in our conception of who as a group we are to be. Another noted the difference in concern between long- and short-term planning. Another described the experience of Christians alienated from evangelical churches that had been their spiritual homes—"evangelical refugees"—because of personal convictions about peace and inclusion; and noted that we have a chance to create a church that is a "refugee camp" for people (evangelicals and others) who have no home

BODY BREAK

Jan described two pieces for us to work upon: 1) an interim structure to gather us and move us to next steps; and (if there is time remaining) 2) explore more who we are, what are the common threads? She

made a proposal to begin with, to edit if desired. The proposal had been brought by several other Friends who are involved in the churches affected.

These are the elements of this tentative structural starting place: There would be appointed a temporary interim steering committee that would be totally transparent and widely distributed. The steering committee would be made up of two or three persons from each of the five churches who must leave the YM (Eugene, Camas, Klamath Falls, West Hills) or who have minuted their intention of leaving (North Seattle). Each church would then decide whether to attach itself to any new organization that might emerge as a proposal from the interim committee. Any church coming along later could join. In this conception the task of the Steering committee is not doing the tasks, but gathering folks and setting up a comprehensive way to do communication, creating the broadest group of people. Jan noted that there is an inevitable awkwardness about this, and it's hard to start from a vacuum, but that Jesus is a great guide.

[Note: in the recording of the discussion most speakers will be identified by "F".]

F: what about meetings that are not clear and won't come to a quick and easy decision? Could this body consider what a possible role might be for individuals in churches that may split internally?

Jan: This is one of the main things we need to discern. She thinks that between now and YM sessions we can consider how to address that.

Eric Muhr: the number of individuals who have been attending these meetings is greater than the total number of people in the churches who are leaving.

Jan enumerated the likely tasks of such a committee:

- 1) Communication.
- 2) "People work". Jan asked Eric Muhr to elaborate on "people work". He offered that we are usually inclined to think in terms of structure, rather than infrastructure. We might want to give attention to concern about an undergirding infrastructure to provide for the individuals not connected with these five churches, but who might want to be involved.
- 3) Research into what's been done before in similar situations, what the YM is requiring, what bylaws are needed. Retha McCutchen, NWYM Interim Superintendent, noted that we don't need a full *Faith and Practice*, but merely bylaws (Roger Watson added later that we will need articles of incorporation as well).
- 4) Identity work (who are we, what throws us together).
- 5) Plan for ways to serve the interests of folks not affiliated with departing churches.
- 6) [This was added later in the discussion.] Plan for alternative, parallel business meetings to be held during YM sessions in July 2017.

Jan would like some people at the end of this meeting to form up for the task of establishing communication.

F: there has been talk in Puget Sound Area of a possible monthly meeting for LGBTQ people who want to be included in our project.

F: we could task the steering committee with addressing the needs of the individuals not affiliated with departing churches.

F: we're still part of NWYM, so what we're doing should become public through YM channels.

F: NWYM and the transition team will need someone to talk to regarding the distribution of assets need someone to talk to, so communication with NWYM should be a part of any interim committee's role.

F: could the steering committee make a document saying what their purpose is.

Jan: their task is to create proposals that would be brought to us for discernment together.

F: could we approve today the inclusion of two of the ad hoc members?

F: I'd be interested in hearing from Friends who don't feel comfortable with the idea of a steering committee.

F: what are the pros and cons of a steering committee?

Jan: let's go into silence and see what arises.

[We entered a period of waiting silence.]

Jan: is there someone who is not clear with the steering committee idea?

F: it would be helpful for those in the nebulous state, to know that the steering committee's work and charge would be re-evaluated at YM 2017.

F: can we clarify what the process of who and how the steering committee's proposals will be approved/discerned?

F: the steering committee should include people who are not part of the initial structure.

F: likes idea of ad hoc for people who are not in a departing church. They could meet together and choose who will be members of the steering committee.

F: Klamath Falls feels that if we really use Quaker process, it will be the right way to move forward.

Jan: her sense is that everyone wants to be fully Quaker. Being guided by Jesus as our present teacher is absolutely essential. A date needs to be set for the naming of the representatives.

F: my sense of Quaker organization is that a Quaker meeting is a group that meets to test its discernment, which is tested with a larger meeting, a YM. What if you're alone and don't have a meeting to relate to?

F: One other large Friends church is split strongly, and there will be plenty of people needing a home.

F: maybe the steering committee itself could nominate non-affiliated members.

[The clerk called us into waiting silence.]

Jan summarized the discussion to this point: we are pretty clear on a steering committee with a limited shelf life expiring at YM, a timeframe for the steering committee to be formed, and a strong concern for a large, pained group in the middle without a departing church to affiliate with, and an identification with their pain.

F: communication needs to be centralized.

F: the most important things out of this meeting are inclusion and communication. The steering committee should be as broad as possible.

F: the churches that are undecided need to be included.

F: I know that having somebody else decide what's going to happen to you is hard. But we have five churches who don't have a choice. They should be tasked with figuring that out; they need to make some progress because they don't have a choice.

F: Silverton feels lost, trying to keep their head above water. SFC needs to have a way to find out what's going on.

F: a steering committee seems very internal. Is it possible to create an externally focused structure to relate to the struggling churches and individuals?

Jan: this is simply a structure to give us a place to start.

F: the type of support I need is not based upon the steering committee or its makeup. I would like for the committee to consider institutional support for meetings that are currently unclear, churches that are restructuring, or new plants or new worship groups.

F: have we decided not to be evangelical?

Jan: this is something for the group to work on down the road. We need to linearize this, and cannot solve everything today.

F: remember that the internet is a tool that can serve us. He volunteers to work on that.

F: think of the steering committee as the hub of a wheel, with infinite spokes, and the hub is responsible for reporting information from all the spokes.

F: We can take advantage of experience beyond our YM; many other people are listening and praying.

F: Can we call the steering committee an "interim" committee? Is this the group that will plan the ym alternative meetings?

Jan: Yes. This is item 6 for the interim steering committee.

F: the five churches have an immediate interest. Two reps from each is a big committee.

F: I trust the five churches to act for the rest of us.

We then approved the following minute:

We approve the creation of an interim committee for the purpose of proposing a structure for the association of the five churches that must leave Northwest Yearly Meeting by 2018, to be comprised of two members appointed from each of these churches. It will serve as the point group for communication among the Friends coalescing around the formation of the new entity, and for communication with NWYM. The interim committee will decide on the scope and priorities of its work. We will ask the five churches leaving NWYM to name their representatives by May 21, 2017. The work and continued existence of this group will be re-evaluated at a meeting of the departing churches to be held during NWYM's 2017 annual sessions.

Roger Watson, NWYM Director of Finance and Development, spoke to us about relevant legal and financial matters. As a NWYM staff member he has a fiduciary responsibility to us, in both practical matters (such as IRS 501(c)3 eligibility), and also matters concerning our relationship with NYWM. Transition team is working on a plan for the fair and equitable disbursement of the earnings from financial assets. The larger representation our group can achieve, the larger our share in the earnings from the financial assets. We need to show ourselves as a "going concern" here today and at least through the next year. To show good faith effort, we must show ourselves as a legal entity. This involves creating incorporation papers and bylaws. The *Faith and Practice* of NWYM is their bylaws. In establishing *who* you are, it's important also to establish *why* you are, your purpose. Incorporation needs to be filed with either Oregon or Washington. Although churches are assumed by IRS to be 501(c)3 (exempt for tax purposes) organizations, we really need to file a group exemption to cover all the churches. Banks like to see documentation that you've done due process. It's a sign to the Administrative Council of NWYM that we're serious enough about what we're doing, that we are going to incorporate. Other relationships should be established, including a bank account and relationships with insurance companies. [In response to a question:] There is no line in the NWYM budget to support these financial expenses. But as expenses arise, they'll find a way to deal with them. The "fair and impartial" language in the AC's document, to Roger, implies that we get a part of him, including his advocacy for us with the YM. In fact, he has already advocated for us. The entire YM staff is to serve us as well as the rest of the YM. The AC, which acts on behalf of the YM, intends to act in relationship not with each of our individual churches, but with an organization that includes the individual departing churches. We have good representation on the transition team. He notes that the transition team is working hard and trying to be fair. Roger invited us to send him questions at rwatson@nwfriends.org.

Jan asked people who are able and willing to work on the communication piece, to gather at the close of this meeting. Those persons offering to serve are Gil George, Rachel Hampton, Connor Magee, Thomas Magee, Eric Muhr, Kjiersten Schmidt and Lorraine Watson.

Julie Peyton noted that she has received four letters from other Friends groups, which she will share soon with the group.

The next meeting will be during the 2017 NWYM sessions in July.

The meeting closed with the singing of the Doxology at 5:15 pm.

Submitted by Tom Stave, recording clerk pro tem