

## Right Holding of Yearly Meeting Friendly School 7.7.19

10.45-1245

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We started with silence, then went around the circle introducing ourselves and identifying why we felt led to be here.

Emerging concerns from the group:

- It costs money – and it's humiliating to ask for \$ support
- It burdens volunteer organisers
- Other YMs do things differently – USA, A/NZ, Britain
- Should JYFs be involved in business?  
Business-only meetings may not give the Presiding Clerk and Secretary time to work on minutes
- Technology offers opportunities but may impede discernment.

We started with a brief recap of the RHYM Committee's story so far (Anna, Michael, Jennifer)

The original catalyst for the establishment of the RHYM Committee was a very hot summer. The original terms of reference (TOR) focused on the time of year (summer: perceived as too hot, fire-prone) therefore a 3-year experiment was set up:

1. Move the YM gathering to July (September the original recommendation = football season and exams)
2. Use Friends School more frequently (as this means a lower cost).

At more or less the same time there was a decision to exclude older JYFs from YF events (for insurance reasons). Some Friends present felt that this has had an impact on JYF attendance.

At YM18, the RHYM Committee requested a change of TOR, which was approved. The new TOR encouraged the Committee to examine larger issues than the month in which we hold the gathering.

The Committee ran RM workshops and closely read the YM surveys. This enabled the Committee to draw out common themes in Friends' thinking around Australia and develop two models for further consideration. Model A and Model B are outlined in DiA, but neither can be recommended yet. There is still work to do. The Committee hopes to bring forward recommendations at YM20.

### **Small group discussions on the draft models**

Model A – business focused, with or without an adjunct all ages gathering

Model B – collaborative planning for a YM event which includes both business and the all ages gathering.

Reports back to the group were audio-recorded with participants' permission for internal use only.

### **Model B – group 1**

- Venue problem; same venue every year ... problematic? WARM says problems of distance can be overcome
- Collaborative model assumes that other RMs will actually do something – so this could be assigned by Standing Committee (SC) (and if no volunteer, it won't happen)
- Registration system done by Michael Searle; needs succession planning / plan B to mitigate risks
- Children & JYF – it would be easier to organise (by another RM) if no camp were involved
- Tease out components into discrete chunks and delegate to others as much as possible

### **Model B - group 2**

- Venue should be organised locally, also JYFs program
- Many components could be delegated i.e. by the host RM, not asking for volunteers
- Great to have the YM Planning Support Cttee for continuity of expertise - a good idea
- Not inclusive to separate business from community, fewer opportunities for learning and networking. Intergenerational as much as possible. Learn about how we are Quakers together, as a group not as individuals
- Opportunity to learn Q process – what does the Clerk do, what does the Secretary do etc.
- 50-50 split business and learning each day – integration over time (instead of having just one day for learning)

### **Model A – group 1**

- Quarterly DiA to RMs, who discuss and respond, then to SC who meet quarterly (online or face to face) (this group developed a clear graphic on butcher's paper)
- Only items on which there is no unity go forward to YM, which might or might not be part of the all ages gathering

### **Model A – group 2**

- Business has reduced time for YM attendees but increased time at RMs – but very few Friends are actively involved at RM level. Will this change?
- SC will have more power to form the YM agenda
- The Spirit leads us ... issues are the money, the shits, the club
- How do we indicate to our AYM Committees that we value their work?

### **Insights:**

- Friends do not understand Australia Yearly Meeting or the Yearly Meeting gathering/event. We need to report back so Friends can learn.
- The 2 models are not incompatible.
- Are we loading too much onto yearly meeting (the gathering)?

12.45-3.20

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Friends present who had attended other YMs explained how they work.

### **Britain YM**

Around 1,000 people over around 4 days

Many paid staff who do the work, much less decision making. Previous processes had worked well to prepare for decisions

Regular Meeting for Sufferings (admin purpose, around 200 members) - a bit like an expanded SC with decision-making powers. This is where the decisions happen  
Sessions set by a theme (e.g. Inclusion). 'Business' in the morning, interest groups in the afternoon

Disciplined but with lots of ministry. Not much silence

Residential YMs also have community aspects, young people's programs run concurrently  
Cafeteria-style catering, pay on use. Also a café on site plus lots of shops in the area

### **Aotearoa New Zealand**

Business is done throughout the year so only knottier issues go to the business-focused YM gathering

4 days, business focused + Lecture

Geographically closer – it's a smaller country - but travel can still be a time-consuming problem

Have around 60% of our membership, maybe 90 attended the YM gathering (and they were the ones who wanted to be there)

Family gathering is separate i.e. Summer Gathering, with little overlap in attenders: some go to Summer Gathering, some go to YM, some go to weekly m4w and there is not a lot of overlap

### **Lake Eyrie YM (USA)**

2 days, around 60-80 attenders

Workshops

Not business focused, not a decision-making gathering; all decisions made at Local or Monthly meetings. This may take many years. YM is not a governing body

Lots of worship

Lobbying etc happens by the Friends Committee for National Legislation; no need to make public statements at national level

### **Friends General Conference**

2 days or so

No decisions usually; disciplined; much silence, spiritually deep

Most decisions made at Local or Monthly meetings. FGC is not a governing body

### **Southern California YM**

A Friendly time, 3 days, not large

### **QRM – intentions for YM21**

5 day 'business and Backhouse' – Thursday evening to Monday morning in July (dates not yet set)

Prep sessions done beforehand online. Expect to prune YM agenda to focus on 'real' decisions

International visitors are expected to attend

Accommodation and catering on site

Expect to only need a subsidy of \$5k, therefore \$10k available for all ages gathering organised by another RM either in July 2021 or at another time

Details of the timetable will be developed

Annual reports from RMs and AYM Committees could be a separate document, tabled at the YM

### **What is the hardest thing about organising the YM gathering/event?**

#### *Organisers:*

Quakers are so demanding – we are high maintenance – people who don't read the info

- Place, space, money – venue search; space
- Planning Cttee needs to be strong
- Lack of volunteers
- Helping disabled Friends to get from A to B requires volunteers with cars
- Late registrations

#### *Participants:*

- Changing personal requirements e.g. diet, mobility may become problematic in later life
- Child safety
- Technology is sub-optimal
- Lack of discipline
- Vegetarian food is expensive or not adequate or not very good; food greediness meaning that late-comers do without
- Feeling invisible / unwelcome when your personal priority is worship and spiritual nurture
- Feeling unwelcome and isolated when you aren't one of the in-crowd
- The cost. Is there a better purpose for the money we all spend?
- The environmental costs of so many travelling to an annual event
- These issues are OLD. Why are we still having the same conversations?
- Friendly Schools used to have a theme, discussed by small groups. Now it is another Share&Tell
- Mealtimes are hard when you don't know people
- Quaker processes are inimical for change
- Limited opportunities to allow leadership gifts to be exercised

### **What's the easiest or best part?**

#### *Organisers:*

- People have good will

- Team work ... camaraderie
- When you're the host, you are among the largest group of RM members together in one place
- To come to the end and know you've done the best you could – it does finish!
- Gratitude
- To have avoided disasters

3.50-5.30

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*Participants:*

- Fellowship
- M4w in real time with real people and more than 1 other person in the room
- Spiritual depth in m4w
- Friendship; catching up with Friends from far away
- Community
- Shared concerns
- Family
- Need to be there because you are a representative of a committee or organisation
- Fun songs
- Joy of discernment
- Being extended and challenged
- Wisdom brought to business sessions (prep and formal)
- Young people. Want my children to experience what I did
- Being with my mob
- Inspired by hearing about other Friends' works and the Testimonies
- Refreshing old ideas, learning new things
- Puts flesh on the words and concerns I read about
- The space, the spiritual silence within a life journey
- It's different each time – it is an adventure

**What is YM for?** We realise the purpose will vary for each group of stakeholders, e.g. young people, isolated Friends, those who choose not to come, others ...

**What do we need?** We realise particular needs will also vary for each group of stakeholders.

**What do Australian Quakers as a body need?**

- AYM is its own entity. Needs include care, stewardship of finances, self education, to make public statements, networking, to nurture each other, culture change for accountability and discipline. Renewal.
- Is or can the gathering be the answer to all needs?

### **Brainstorm on the needs of Australian Quakers:**

- Fellowship, warmth, networking
- What we need our Society to look like in 20 years' time = ?
- Spiritual revival. If we have excitement and energy people will want to be part of us. Revival means becoming closer to why we do things the way we do. Fellowship and decisions flow from this. We need education to bring about revival
- Community and connection
- Transition in life stages, especially JYF to YF
- Witnessing and experiencing a process which is not the same as at home, but within a larger community
- To be our name, the religious society of friends (religious, society, friends)
- Renewal of magical challenge of Spirit-centred summer schools
- Deepening the spiritual transformation
- Communication and connection online as well as face2face. Online m4w is a blessing and provides a community
- Silent worship at m4w at all levels of Friends: YM, RM, LM, WG
- Enthusiasm – to be filled with the Spirit. The transforming power of commitment
- Administration
- To be better known
- To encourage our children and involve them; nurturing our children
- To have clarity about our way forward into the future
- Kindred spirits ... connecting people around the things that are eternal
- Opportunity for isolated Friends and small meetings to connect with more people
- These needs can't be met at only one level
- This list is largely about internal needs. We are what the world needs. We need outreach, making ourselves more visible, showing how our ways can improve others' lives
- An understanding of our international connections
- Treat each other as the messiah; draw out each other's spiritual gifts; inspire one another; share our concerns; support each other's ministry
- Engaging 'outsiders' creatively

We note nearly all these relate to community. Administration can be boring and can be delegated to Standing Committee. However administration is not unimportant just because it was only mentioned once in the list above. Administration is a necessity but maybe not a need.

How can we be involved if administration is delegated? (Do Friends want to be?)

### **What are our indicators for a successful gathering?**

Small group work.

1. Survey of qualitative experience
2. Environmental impact in line with our Earthcare Testimony
3. Participants so excited by learnings that they wish to share with their LM and RMs

1. We leave rejuvenated, empowered, refreshed, energised, inspired, nurtured
2. Decisions were made in the Spirit: there was clarity and unity (not necessarily unanimity) in decisions made
3. We shared and absorbed the lives that speak amongst and were supported/inspired to take back out in the world/us to let our own lives speak

1. People want to come back
2. There is a sense of energy throughout
3. People outside Quakers are attracted
4. Genuine involvement of people of all ages
5. Suggestions for improvement are triggered

1. It depends
2. If you are meeting the needs of all them there
3. Children are happy so everyone wants to come back
4. If less than 50 people come to a business-only YM, then decisions have not been made in right ordering (not discussed due to lack of time).

**Limiting beliefs identified during the Friendly School:**

YM is a governing body

Decision making has to happen at a national level

Slow process is bad

Are we too authoritative?

It has to be perfect

We closed with grateful silent worship.