

**Conclusions and Recommendations**  
**From the Consultation and Renewal Working Group (C'nR)**  
**Interim Report to Canadian Yearly Meeting 2006**

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**Introduction:**

The Consultation and Renewal Working Group (hereafter referred to as C'nR) was formed by a minute of Canadian Yearly Meeting 2004 to conduct a listening project to examine and recommend ways to foster the corporate spiritual life and structure of Canadian Yearly Meeting (hereafter referred to as CYM). We began our work in January 2005 and this is our interim report to CYM 2006. After opportunities for consultation with all Friends in CYM we will submit a final report to CYM 2007.

The working group is Marilyn Manzer - clerk (Annapolis Valley Monthly Meeting), Michael Miller (New Brunswick MM), Caroline Balderston Parry (Ottawa MM), David McKay (Toronto MM), Kwame Barko (Winnipeg Allowed Meeting), Lesley Robertson (Vernon MM) and Gale Wills (Victoria MM).

We began by reviewing the State of the Society reports and reports of previous groups looking at revitalization and restructuring. We followed this with interviews of clerks or past clerks of CYM

committees and CYM representatives to outside bodies. There were 46 interviews in all. Following this we met for 2 days and designed 8 queries to form the basis of our consultations with Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups. We met with 54 active Meetings and Worship Groups in CYM over the fall, winter and spring of 2005-06. We asked Meetings to tell us what is important to them and we did not necessarily focus on our queries. As Meetings are markedly different from one another and each of the C'nR members who visited had different styles, there was no attempt at consistency in these consultations. Some lasted for several sessions – some only for an hour. We also received a few individual submissions. A report on the responses to our queries, including many excerpts from our notes, can be found on the [www.quaker.ca](http://www.quaker.ca) website under “*consultation and renewal working group*”. This site also includes this conclusions report, a summary report of our interviews, a review of the 2003-04 State of Society Reports, and a report on the structure of Australia Yearly Meeting. Reading these reports will help greatly with understanding the rationale for the recommendations made here.

In June 2006 we met for 3 days to compile the results of our consultations and interviews and draft this interim report and recommendations to CYM. **This report is for discussion purposes and we request feedback by March 1, 2007, after which we will prepare a final report which takes the feedback into consideration.** We hope that all Meetings and Worship Groups and Yearly Meeting Committees will seriously consider this report and respond to our clerk (preferably in writing or by email).

We have found our work to be highly spirit-led and have come away from long and difficult meetings with a sense that God has inspired and directed our work. This is deeply rewarding for us and we trust that over the next year all of us (Canadian Yearly Meeting) will participate in the corporate discernment that has pervaded this experience to date. We reminded those who have been feeling disconnected from the Yearly Meeting that Canadian Yearly Meeting is all of us – and we have invited every member and attender of every Monthly Meeting and Worship Group to participate in this process. The means are as important as the results, and as we proceed, we hold in prayer individual Friends, Worship Groups, Allowed Meetings, Monthly Meetings, Half Yearly Meeting and Regional Gatherings, and our Yearly Meeting in session.

We wish to express our thanks and appreciation to the following people who helped us in major ways with our work: Carol Bradley, Stephanie Deakin, Sarah Dick, Kathleen Hertzberg, Pamela Leach, Colleen MacKay, Keith McGowan, Edith Miller, Judith Monroe, Sabra Peil, Lynne Phillips, Linnea Rowlatt, Beverly Shepard, Margaret Slavin, Susan Stevenson, and also a special thank you to all those who helped set up our consultations with local meetings.

We also sincerely thank all those who attended our consultations. Many of you braved terrible winter weather and long drives and we very much appreciated the risks you took in your open and honest sharing in these group meetings. Furthermore we thank those who agreed to be interviewed about your service to Canadian Yearly Meeting and those who took the time to write to us with your thoughts and ideas. We have been deeply moved by the spirit-led participation of all of you in this process. Thank you.

## **Canadian Yearly Meeting – What’s Precious?**

We heard from Canadian Friends that many things about our Yearly Meeting are precious to us, including:

### *At Yearly Meeting sessions:*

- the children’s program and Young Friends gatherings
- powerful sessions of Meeting for Worship for Business that are spirit-led and demonstrate good clerking
- religious education opportunities for adults – the SPG lecture, the bible study, the worship and study groups, the pre-CYM workshops
- the Meeting for Worship on ‘the experience of the spirit in my life’ and the Memorial Meeting for Worship
- opportunities for fellowship and spiritual bonding with Friends outside the local meeting

### *Services of the Yearly Meeting:*

- the Canadian Friends Service Committee
- the Canadian Friend
- the Quaker Book Service
- the pamphlet publications
- Home Mission and Advancement Committee
- educational opportunities
- visits of Friends traveling in the ministry and resource people

### *Other positives:*

- the national voice of Canadian Quakers
- the bonding that occurs between Friends across Canada because of our YM work
- opportunities for communication with wider Quaker bodies
- the impact that being part of a large Quaker organization affords to each of us
- opportunities for involvement of isolated Friends
- being part of a spiritual network
- opportunity to discern and do business in the manner of friends on a larger scale

## **Discoveries:**

Several themes kept recurring during our consultations. In random order they are:

- The centrality and importance of the Quaker Meeting or worship group in the lives of Friends in Canada
- Diversity and intolerance within our Religious Society of Friends
- Concern that the Yearly Meeting tries to do too much and is spread too thin
- Inadequate attention to process, procedures and the Discipline
- Challenges created by the huge distances between us
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of Quaker practice
- Importance of visitation by experienced Friends who could provide religious education

- Serious conflicts within worshipping communities
- Tension between social activism and contemplation/prayer as Friends' priorities
- Appreciation for the public witness of Quakers
- Concern for small numbers of children and Young Friends and lack of programs for them
- Inadequate communication across CYM
- Lack of unity about the meaning of membership

In both Monthly Meetings and small Worship Groups there is a deep commitment to each other and to the group. This seems particularly strong in the Worship Groups.

There is much misinformation about the Religious Society of Friends among Canadian Friends and attenders. Seasoned Friends are not always present in the Meeting or Worship Group to correct misinformation. This is of concern to C'nR and has helped shape our recommendations.

There has been a feeling within CYM over the last 10 years or so that there is a growing movement among western Friends to separate from Canadian Yearly Meeting. We did not find this to be true. There seems to be no appetite for separation in the foreseeable future among a large majority of friends in the west. The one Monthly Meeting which has been clearly in favour of a separate yearly meeting seems open to remaining in CYM but is hopeful that constructive change will take place.

Many Friends attached importance to the fact that our Yearly Meeting coincides with political boundaries because they felt we need to have “a national voice”. However, a few western friends see political boundaries as irrelevant for spiritual community and potential benefit for western meetings in returning to their historic connection with American yearly meetings in the Pacific north west.

Travel distance is a huge problem for some Monthly Meetings and it makes the functioning of at least one Monthly Meeting highly problematic. Travel distance also disqualifies many Friends from participation in Yearly Meeting sessions or committees.

Christianity is a divisive issue among Canadian Quakers despite the fact that diversity is cherished by many and seen as one of our strengths. (See section on “Diversity” below).

There is a lack of understanding of the corporate nature of faith and practice in our Religious Society of Friends. Many times we heard Friends and attenders indicate that their worship or lives should not be 'imposed on' by other Friends. We also heard a strong desire of some groups to have nothing to do with “Quaker business”. A large number of Canadian Friends did not understand the term “gathered meeting” (or “covered meeting”). This surprised us, as many Friends think the concept is fundamental to understanding who we are as Friends.

There is a feeling in many Monthly Meetings that Yearly Meeting asks too much, both in terms of agenda items and service from Monthly Meeting members. There is a clear message that Yearly Meeting needs to simplify and make fewer demands.

There is strong support for continuing to encourage and support travel for Quaker work and ministry. Many Friends feel it should take priority over our concern for the environmental cost of travel.

There is resentment among some Friends and attenders of the way in which social activism activities in their Monthly Meeting dominate worship or discussions at meetings. For some, it comes across as an “ought to do” and supplants the spiritual nature of being a Friend. For some, the way in which our testimonies are regarded is seen as a form of dogma.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **A. Divide CYM?**

There seems to be no appetite for separation in the foreseeable future, with the exception of one Monthly Meeting which seems open to remaining in CYM with some changes to our structure and process. If any Monthly Meeting or group of Monthly Meetings was in unity to leave CYM, it would be a local decision which CYM would have to accept. In both east and west, the thinking is that if Yearly Meeting could occur closer to home, there would be more local participation and local membership would increase. Although it was not discussed in any of our consultations with Atlantic meetings or worship groups, a subsequent consultation at the Atlantic Friends Gathering focused positively on the idea of creating an Atlantic Yearly Meeting. In the west, there are a few Friends who have past experience as part of Pacific Yearly Meeting as well as other cross border gatherings. Among some there is a feeling that those on the west coast have more in common with the Pacific North West than with eastern Canada (Ontario and Nova Scotia in particular). There is however no strong feeling that CYM should be divided at this time.

### **B. Frequency of CYM in Session**

The idea of Yearly Meeting holding sessions every two or three years rather than annually was often mentioned as a cost saving measure or as a response to environmental issues. The suggestions were made without any clear analysis of the implications. Because Regional Meetings currently lack the structure and/or adequate participation to conduct Yearly Meeting business and because of the need to provide programming for children and Young Friends, we do not at this time recommend holding CYM less often than once a year. Many Friends regard yearly meeting in session as absolutely central to building the spiritual community and “recharging” for the year ahead.

**Recommendation B1: that CYM should continue to meet annually as one unified Yearly Meeting at this time.**

### **C. Length of Yearly Meeting Sessions**

We heard a number of complaints that Yearly Meeting Sessions are too long and suggestions that the work should be done in a long weekend. This concern was voiced by Friends with little or no experience participating in a week-long CYM session. Although it is clearly a problem that many Friends cannot take a week off from their work and responsibilities to attend CYM, there was strong affirmation from those who do attend that the total CYM experience is a highlight of their year. For these Friends, the fellowship aspect of the sessions was valued as much as the business aspect. We make no recommendation about changing the length of CYM in session.

## **D. Regional Gatherings**

We believe that because of costs and environmental issues CYM will have to reduce its activities and/or conduct more activities at a regional level. However, at this time we do not have strong regional meetings which could take over any CYM business. Atlantic Friends Gathering (AFG) used to meet from a Friday to a Monday in spring and fall, but it was felt to be too much, since there is another fall weekend gathering with New England Friends. Now there is a one day meeting in the fall for Atlantic Friends to share current concerns in addition to the 3 day spring gathering. AFG has no structure for conducting business meetings. Ontario has three regional meetings – Yonge St. Half Yearly Meeting, Pelham Half Yearly Meeting, and the St. Lawrence Regional Gathering. All three have been experiencing declining participation and exhibit little energy. Western Half Yearly Meeting has about 100 people attending. It used to have higher attendance and do more business. It also has a huge distance problem. Before any more of the Yearly Meeting work could be regionalized, the regional gatherings would have to become prepared or we would need to add regional meetings to our structure for this purpose alone.

We are well aware that over the last twenty years Canadian Friends have recommended and discussed doing more work at the regional level. This is an old recommendation, but one which we believe is still very important, given increasing financial and environmental pressures. Therefore we are recommending that CYM continue to look for ways to do less at a national level and more at a regional level.

**Recommendation D1: that Friends at the local levels seek ways in which the regional gatherings can be strengthened or supplemented, so as to be able to take on more functions such as visitation, religious education and communication through our CYM representatives with other Quaker and religious bodies.**

We have found it informative and inspiring to look at the structure and organization of Australia Yearly Meeting which also has to cope with small numbers over huge distances. Australia Yearly Meeting has strong regional meetings within it. A description of the structure of AYM was prepared for C'nR by Pamela Leach and can be found on our website.

**Recommendation D2: that CYM examine how Australia Yearly Meeting is organized, how well it works, and whether any well-functioning aspects of their structure could be models for CYM to deal with cost, distance, and associated vitality issues.**

## **E. Lack of knowledge of CYM**

C'nR found a surprising level of misinformation among Canadian Friends about both Canadian Yearly Meeting and Quakers in general. It is clear that the Yearly Meeting does not have adequate communication with many Monthly Meetings and especially with Worship Groups. It seems to us that it is probably because of this misinformation that there is lack of understanding and enthusiasm for the work of CYM. We also suggest that the financial problems of the Yearly Meeting may be related to this lack of enthusiasm. Too few Friends have experienced either the spiritual community or the profound sense of a spirit-led Meeting for Worship for Business that can occur at Yearly Meeting. Very

few have any understanding of the work of our various committees. We found a general sense that Yearly Meeting was not highly relevant to many local meetings, although intellectually they knew it was important to be connected to other Quakers.

Many individuals experience much satisfaction with belonging to small worship groups and many such groups seem quite content with their relative isolation and smallness. Because of smallness, isolation and the lack of experienced Friends in many of these groups, there is a lack of knowledge about both Canadian Yearly Meeting and the Religious Society of Friends. C'nR is concerned that many worship groups have moved their centre away from Quakerism and some are deeply divided regarding traditional Quaker practice and testimonies.

We are concerned about the prevalent lack of knowledge about corporate discernment. We wonder if the understanding of this foundational tenet of Quakerism – that we find and follow the will of God as a worshipping community – is slipping away from Canadian Friends. The differences between us (e.g. social activists vs. quietists, non-Christian vs. Christ-centred) seem less important and more soluble than the problems created when a significant number of us believe our individual spiritual practices take precedence over corporate spiritual life and discernment. The lack of understanding of “Gathered Meeting” and the disinterest in the Meeting for Worship for Business at any level raise questions about how we can continue to function as a Religious Society.

**Recommendation E1: that Canadian Yearly Meeting reprint Deborah Haight’s pamphlet “Meeting” and distribute it through the Canadian Friend.**

**Recommendation E2: that Canadian Yearly Meeting establish a religious education program about Quakerism for adults. (See Visitation Program below).**

## **F. Diversity**

On the whole Canadian Friends express a great deal of appreciation for diversity of thought and practice. There is a strong sense that diversity is our main strength and attraction, along with the practice of being “tolerant” and “non-judgmental.” Our lack of creed and dogma, and the opportunity for each person to shape his or her own spiritual path is very important to Canadian Friends.

The Consultation and Renewal Working Group is very concerned that these strong beliefs about the importance of our diversity may be causing us to become an “anything goes” religion with the eventual result that we lose a coherent identity. (See responses to Query 2 in our Report on the Responses to the C'nR Queries.) Most Friends believe that we should be open to diverse theology and different points of view, however we tend not to engage with our diversity. We keep our points of view to ourselves because we often get burned by unpleasant or hurtful responses when we share. Christians feel silenced because it too often happens that others say (even in response to ministry in Meeting for Worship) that they are offended by Christian language. It appears that tension between Christian and non-Christian Friends has created difficulties in many local meetings and that the Christians are the ones leaving. This was often connected to the idea that Friends and attenders have brought “baggage” with them from other churches. Very few of us were born into Quaker families.

We have some serious difficulties with operating First Day Schools because parents cannot agree on what to teach and many parents are afraid of their children being indoctrinated with beliefs contrary to their own.

There is a prevalent myth among Canadian Quakers that we are unique among Christian religions in accepting diversity. These individuals often cite this as their reason for attending Quaker Meetings.

We were often reminded that Friends must be open-minded about language and not get stuck on the words – rather look where words come from; listen in tongues; look for the constructively positive in the words and ideas of those who express their spirituality different from ourselves.

**Recommendation F1: that Canadian Friends openly recognize the Christian heritage of our Religious Society of Friends and its continuing nurture to many of our members and attenders. We ask local meetings and Yearly Meeting to engage us more deeply with the Christian roots of Quakers, recognizing that these have fostered the loving community and inspirational diversity that we experience and value corporately.**

**Recommendation F2: that Canadian Friends deliberately create opportunities for open dialogue about beliefs and expression of spirituality in which we are reminded to look for “the spirit from where words come” (J.Woolman). We hope this would help us to understand diversity within Christianity and its historical relationship to the Religious Society of Friends, as well as the diversity of non-Christian beliefs within the Society.**

## **G. Visitation Program**

Because of the issues raised by our diversity and the lack of knowledge within the Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups about CYM and Friends' ways, and because we heard it requested over and over in our visits, we are recommending that CYM establish a Visitation Program to foster communication and religious education. Our C'nR visits showed us that CYM is rich in experienced and knowledgeable Friends who could be encouraged to visit. There were many expressions of appreciation for the positive impacts on meetings, especially small ones, of the visits of travelling Friends.

Our recommendations centre around giving the responsibility for this program to HMAC where this kind of work was historically lodged. This has considerable implication for the need for change in HMAC which we address in another section below.

**Recommendation G1: that CYM establish a Visitation Program where experienced Friends and those whose call to travel in the ministry has been appropriately seasoned will visit Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups to foster communication and facilitate an educational dialogue with Friends in Canada.**

**Recommendation G2: that Home Mission and Advancement Committee have oversight of programme and co-ordination for the visitation program.**

**Recommendation G3: that a Visitation Program co-ordinator be hired to help recruit visitors and provide administrative support for the program.**

**Recommendation G4: that a comprehensive resource base focused on Quaker spiritual formation be developed for use by those serving as visitors.**

**Recommendation G5: that CYM Trustees and Finance Committee be asked if money in our trust funds could be used for the visitation program.**

**Recommendation G6: that CYM ask its finance committee to set up a fund for the visitation program and CYM ask individuals and Monthly Meetings to donate to this fund.**

**Recommendation G7: that CYM consider how it could offer more intensive religious education opportunities for Canadian Friends, such as “Meeting for Learning” that is popular in Australia Yearly Meeting.**

## **H. Membership**

Membership is a divisive issue in some Monthly Meetings. The meaning of membership is often not communicated to attenders at Friends meetings and rarely in worship groups. Sometimes membership is seen as a tool for “power” in decision-making, which can cause ‘outsider’ feelings on the part of attenders who are not members. The membership process is ill-understood and often poorly done. We are afraid to ask the hard questions. Sometimes we ask those questions in a way that makes a prospective member feel tested and attacked.

Sometimes Meetings are willing to accept anyone who wishes into membership in the Religious Society of Friends. This is not consistent with the membership section in our CYM discipline. Our *Organization and Procedure* treats membership as a commitment, a serious undertaking, and an initiation process into a Quaker community with mutual accountability. There are Friends who believe that a condition of membership should be a willingness to engage faithfully in Quaker process, acknowledging that the Spirit can cause anything to happen, and that Quaker process implies a willingness to put oneself under the corporate discipline of the Meeting.

The membership issue raises questions as to our concept of Quaker identity. Who are we? How are we different from other religious organizations that are similar to us? What is our relationship to Christianity today? Can or should we accept as members people who openly reject our Christian heritage?

**Recommendation H1: Friends are reminded to learn and use the Discipline. When an attender shows an interest in participating deeply in the life of the Meeting, Friends should invite them to consider membership and ask them to read our “*Organization and Procedure*”, as well as “*Faith and Practice*” and “*Advices and Queries*”. Meetings should ensure that the Discipline (*Organization and Procedure*) is well known and easily accessible to all friends. It is available online at [www.quaker.ca](http://www.quaker.ca).**

**Recommendation H2: that Yearly Meeting, Monthly Meetings and regional meetings hold open discussions about the meaning and the process of membership and how it relates to our Quaker identity.**

**Recommendation H3: That Monthly Meetings assure that prospective members have an understanding of the Christian practice within the Religious Society of Friends.**

## **I. Environmental Concerns**

There are serious concerns in CYM regarding our approach to environmental issues and the degree to which our travel contributes to environmental problems. Nonetheless, most Friends feel strongly that a spiritually based discernment requires meeting face to face and therefore travel is essential to keep Quaker bodies functioning. A spiritually relevant CYM is more important to many Friends than our involvement in environmental issues. Many in the meetings we visited saw an environmental witness as first of all a matter of making personal choices.

Although there is no doubt that most Friends are deeply concerned about environmental problems, and that they are major societal issues at this time, we heard strong opinions that CYM as a national body should not be establishing or participating in Quaker environmental working groups. We were told that there are many such groups in the wider society and in local areas in which CYM members can be active, and that it is possible for individuals to belong to the international organization, Quaker Earthcare Witness. This is one significant area where CYM could pull back in order to alleviate the “spread too thin” and “doing too much” problems.

**Recommendation I1: that CYM withdraw membership from Quaker Earthcare Witness.**

**Recommendation I2: that Quaker Ecology Action Network should not become a standing committee of CYM. If there is a strong need for CYM to take on environmental action, it could be done through CFSC.**

## **J. Young Friends**

One child told us that “Quakerism is not the best kid-suited religion.” C’nR is concerned that few children are growing up in our Meetings. We question whether this may be related to our problems with diversity. We heard that sometimes parents do not trust one another to operate a First Day School because of fears that children would be indoctrinated with teachings that parents oppose. We also wonder why a very high percentage of children who grow up in our Canadian meetings and worship groups do not maintain their connection with Quakers as adults. Is this possibly related to the lack of understanding of the role and value of the corporate discipline in the worship and life of our meetings? Our children are raised with values which they may continue to adhere to, but seem to see no importance in the group process.

Perhaps the problem with lack of children is mainly cultural. Families do much less together than in former times. Often families are so busy in so many different directions that they may choose to spend what time they have together doing other things than participating in the Quaker Meeting. We have heard of the problems experienced by many members and attenders, both partnered and single, who do

not have a spouse attending Friends Meeting. Does that make it more difficult to bring children to Meeting? We are uncomfortable with the idea that Quakerism is a religion only for adults or mature people as was mentioned in some of our visits.

C'nR heard loud and clear how important it is for Young Friends and children to meet each other at various types of gatherings. For many it is the only place where they feel they can find like-minded friends and support for their distinctive witness. Often they conduct powerful business meetings at these gatherings. These youth do get good experience of Quaker process. Yet we heard grave concerns from Young Friends about the difficulties experienced by Canadian Young Friends Yearly Meeting.

CYM is critically important in the development of many Canadian Young Friends. We believe serious attention must be paid to the question of whether there would be the critical mass of Young Friends for them to sustain themselves in a spiritual community if CYM met less frequently. Young Friends crave community with one another. Many of them connect at Camp NeeKauNis. But many from east and west don't ever get there. Some participate in half-yearly meetings or regional gatherings, but many who are in isolated meetings or worship groups do not have access to regional meetings. Could we do more to rectify this?

We believe that we collectively need to find ways to encourage participation of young people. Some suggestions:

- make it possible for Young Friends to meet more than once a year
- subsidize Young Friends to attend meetings of Canadian Young Friends Yearly Meeting and perhaps a second gathering. Camp NeeKauNis (recently expanded) might be a logical place.
- establish a mentoring resource for CYFYM
- pool money so that more young people can attend yearly meeting
- enable children to stay in the meeting for worship for the full time
- provide assistance for YF's to mount and use their own website

**Recommendation J1: that CYM find ways to release a Young Friend and support him or her to travel. Part of the role would be to create networks among Young Friends within CYM.**

**Recommendation J2: that CYM appoint an experienced Friend to act as a liaison person between CYM and CYFYM.**

## **K. Electronic communication**

It is now a reality that CYM is reliant on the use of e-media to do its business. In the last 15 years it has come into general use, and has greatly affected how we operate. There are both practical and philosophical concerns about electronic communication. With respect to the practical, we have the problem of access to our process for those not on line and a concern that we are creating a two-tiered society in the Religious Society of Friends – those that are on email and those who aren't. Those who aren't tend to be disadvantaged in their participation. There is also a serious concern within CYM about the misuse of electronic communication. We need guidelines, advices, counsel, and wisdom regarding the use of email, websites and teleconferencing.

There are also spiritual concerns. Can email be used for discernment? Can we have spiritual communion without face-to-face communication?

We seem to have reached a stage where going back to non-use of electronic media to manage our church affairs is not an option. Yet we seem to be unclear about the limitations of its use and its potential effect on our relationships with each other as Friends.

**Recommendation K1: that CYM thoroughly thresh the subject of electronic communication and agree on written guidelines or protocols regarding the use of email, websites and teleconferencing.**

## **L. Finances:**

Friends in Canada know little about CYM finances and it was hardly mentioned in our consultations. We hope that as Canadian Friends become more informed about Quakers and about our Yearly Meeting, CYM's financial problems will be less difficult to resolve. Also, when money is raised for specific purposes, there seem to be fewer problems, for example the outpouring of funds for the World Gathering of Young Friends in 2005. We are therefore optimistic about support for our proposed visitation program and for a released Young Friend.

**Recommendation L1: that delegates to Representative Meeting and Yearly Meeting be sure to report specifically on finances to their Monthly Meetings.**

**Recommendation L2: that Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups find ways to discuss finances and that CYM find ways for the treasurer and members of CYM finance committee to travel to explain CYM finances.**

## **M. Conflict Within Meetings**

We have become aware of major problems in Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups (regardless of size) of deeply dividing conflicts which wound our faith community at the Monthly Meeting and Yearly Meeting levels. The bottom-up structure of Canadian Yearly Meeting creates the situation where there is no authority for resolving disputes within Monthly Meetings. Because of this and the usual huge distance to the next Monthly Meeting or Worship Group, there is no place for a Friend in conflict with their local meeting to go and still remain an active Quaker. Such Friends are no longer able to obtain traveling minutes, membership for their children, marriages, memorial meetings, etc. Who helps these meetings find their way back to peace and unity? How do we deal with issues where arrogance and need for power play a major role? The existence of conflict is a serious issue within Canadian Yearly Meeting and may be connected with the widespread lack of understanding of Quaker ways.

**Recommendation M1: that the religious education program recommended above include a strong section on Friends' approach to addressing conflicts in the Monthly Meeting or Worship Group.**

**Recommendation M2: that CYM consider holding a pre-CYM workshop on Friends ways of dealing with conflict in our Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups which could later be conducted at regional gatherings or in Monthly Meetings.**

## **N. Simplify CYM**

Many of our recommendations here were influenced by the interviews we held with clerks and officers of CYM as well as the comments of Friends with whom we visited. We suggest that reading the background material for both of these activities will help in understanding our rationale.

It was often stated during our consultations that CYM made too many demands on Monthly Meetings and that Yearly Meeting was trying to do too much. C'nR believes that several steps can be taken to simplify the structure of CYM and reduce the need for so many volunteers. We make the following recommendations:

**Recommendation N1: that the Records Committee be eliminated and that the Trustees take responsibility for archives and records. We suggest that Trustees consider establishing an archives and records board with long-term members and that they make a proposal to CYM about how this board would be structured. We also suggest that such a board consider recruiting a “friends of the archives” group to help with the ongoing work.**

We found that the mandate of the Ecumenical & Interfaith Committee was not clear, that the work of this committee has changed significantly over the years, and that there is considerable dissatisfaction with its current structure and role.

**Recommendation N2: that Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee be laid down.**

The responsibilities of HMAc and the religious education committee have been a matter of some debate for many years. HMAc is the older of the two by far. Religious education was formed, probably to relieve HMAc of some of its burden, and the children's programme at YM sessions (which was previously the responsibility of the YM programme committee) was added to RE Committee's mandate.

**Recommendation N3: that Religious Education Committee be laid down.**

**Recommendation N4: that the responsibility for the Yearly Meeting children's program be given back to CYM programme committee.**

**Recommendation N5: that the responsibility for religious education be given back to Home Mission and Advancement Committee.**

**Recommendation N6: that HMAc be relieved of the responsibility for the Quaker Book Service, The Canadian Friend, and the Quaker Pamphlet Series. We recommend that a publications board be established to oversee these programs, probably in the home area of the editor of *The***

***Canadian Friend.* This should not affect the current practice of placing responsibility for both the Book Service and the Pamphlet Series with a Monthly Meeting,**

With some exceptions, we found that there was little support for re-instating the position of general secretary. Indeed there was some opposition to the idea. At the same time, there was great need for administrative support beyond what is presently available in the Yearly Meeting office. We believe that Friends will support administrative help for specific projects or programmes and that the role of a general secretary is not consistent with how Canadian Friends see the management of their affairs.

**Recommendation N7: that CYM lay down the position of general secretary and that this be reflected in our discipline.**

## **O. Representation on Wider Bodies**

There is definitely a failure on the part of Canadian Yearly Meeting to instill knowledge or excitement among the general membership about our participation in wider Quaker and other religious bodies. Those who have had the privilege of hearing first-hand from our representatives are generally enthusiastic about our involvement, but these are very few because our Yearly Meeting does not have a satisfactory reporting system for these representatives.

C'nR believes that CYM is too small an organization to adequately maintain our representation in all the religious organizations of which we are currently members. We heard from several, including the reps themselves, that it might be better to do less and then to do it well.

The most common suggestion we heard was that CYM concentrate its efforts on participating in and supporting Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). It is felt that through this committee we could maintain our world wide connections. We noted that many Canadian Friends are enthusiastic about attending the Friends General Conference (FGC) gathering, however it was also noted that the many other aspects of FGC receive little attention. We understand that individuals are free to attend the gathering and Monthly Meetings have the option of joining as a meeting if desired. We found almost no enthusiasm for maintaining our ties with Friends United Meeting (FUM).

**Recommendation O1: that we withdraw our membership from Friends General Conference and Friends United Meeting, and restore our representation on Friends World Committee for Consultation to three, one each from west, central, and eastern Canada.**

We were unable to unite on the suggestion that we withdraw from the World Council of Churches. This was partially because of a concern that once severed, we would have no opportunity in future to re-establish that connection.

**Recommendation O2: that CYM examine whether our participation in the World Council of Churches is worth the financial and human resource costs to CYM.**

## **P. Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel**

At present, Yearly Meeting of Ministry and Counsel (YMM&C) functions as a parallel meeting to Canadian Yearly Meeting. Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel is a standing committee of YMM&C appointed by YMM&C. It both reports to YMM&C and convenes YMM&C.

Yearly Meeting of Ministry and Counsel is the body of CYM which has responsibility for the spiritual undergirding of our Meeting, but since this body is in effect ad hoc (i.e. made up of Monthly Meeting Ministry and Counsel members who happen to be at Yearly Meeting in session), the major responsibility falls to Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel. C'nR believes it is important that we all feel supported and nurtured by CMM&C and that CMM&C members feel supported by Canadian Friends. Instead, resentment of CMM&C has been expressed and it seems that there is a feeling of separation between CYM & CMM&C.

In our consultations we became aware of debilitating problems for the functioning of CMM&C. The mandate to care for Yearly Meeting, Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups with spiritual nurture has been difficult and often impossible. We heard that the practice of CYM handing over difficult issues to CMM&C has severely interfered with its ability to carry out this mandate. CMM&C has had major problems with continuity of and commitment from its members. The nominations procedure for CMM&C has not worked well, as it leaves little time for proper discernment. Resentment has been expressed about CMM&C and seems to bear a relation to the fact that CMM&C operates independently of the Yearly Meeting and is not required to make its minutes accessible to all members of the Yearly Meeting.

We believe the functioning of CMM&C as a committee of a parallel Meeting to CYM does not serve a useful purpose and that CMM&C would function better as a standing committee of CYM, rather than YMM&C, although it could have input from both and maintain its role as the convenor of YMM&C. Although our *Organization and Procedure* states that both YMM&C and CMM&C “should be in close communication with local Meetings of Ministry and Counsel” and that a responsibility of CMM&C is to “provide care and support for all Meetings for Worship across Canada”, we find that this mandate has not been workable. We believe our *O&P* should be amended to indicate that the mandate for CMM&C is to spiritually care for CYM in session, Representative Meeting and CYM committees. CMM&C should be relieved of the requirement to care for local meetings and individuals.

We believe CMM&C should continue to co-ordinate the development and sharing of the annual State of the Society reports. However we think these reports need revitalization so that they encourage action on the part of the Meetings.

**Recommendation P1: that CMM&C should be a standing committee of CYM, rather than of YMM&C which is a parallel meeting. The nominations for CMM&C should come from CYM nominating committee and be subject to its process and discernment.**

**Recommendation P2: that CMM&C should be responsible for the spiritual nurture and care of CYM in session, Representative Meeting and CYM Committees. It should only be responsible to respond to requests for assistance from Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups where there is no M&C in a Half-Yearly Meeting able to provide this care.**

**Recommendation P3: that CMM&C no longer be asked to respond to the needs of individuals. With respect to the needs of individuals and Monthly Meetings, we would encourage Half-Yearly or regional meetings to establish strong M&Cs.**

**Recommendation P4: that the National Listeners Program be examined by CMM&C to determine its usefulness and whether it should be discontinued.**

**Recommendation P5: that when CYM has difficult or thorny issues to deal with, it should set up ad hoc committees to work on them when this work does not fall within the mandate of a standing committee. When appropriate, CMM&C should only be called on to consult, not to do the work.**

**Recommendation P6: We recommend that CMM&C revitalize the state of society reports by asking Meetings and Worship Groups to address any difficult issues they are experiencing as well as what is good in their meeting, and to include their ideas of how they intend to approach resolving them. This could be done through use of queries.**

**Recommendation P7: that the *CYM Organization and Procedure* be amended to reflect these recommendations regarding Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel.**

## **Q. Representative Meeting**

In our interviews with clerks, we heard many positive things about the work and role of Representative Meeting. Many found participating in Representative Meeting a deeply spiritual experience. The clerks brought to our attention that this is the only place within Yearly Meeting where all Monthly Meetings come together to make decisions between sessions of Yearly Meeting, that it provides continuity and an overview of what is happening throughout Yearly Meeting. We also heard serious complaints about the length of agendas and the lack of time to attend properly to what needs to be done.

C'nR heard support for enhancing the role of Representative Meeting. We found that the representation aspect of RM is not working well in that the delegates often don't effectively consult or report to their Monthly Meetings. Representatives of Monthly Meetings cannot be expected to bring a Monthly Meeting point of view on every issue to Representative Meeting, nor can they be expected to promote their Meeting's point of view in a meeting that relies on spirit-led corporate discernment. However, we believe it would enhance communication between Monthly Meetings and Yearly Meeting through Representative Meeting if the Monthly Meeting Reps are given better opportunity to inform and consult Friends in their Meetings on a regular basis.

We are aware that the manner in which representatives report to their Meeting varies considerably. Some representatives may be able to accomplish their task by regular attendance at a Meeting for Worship for Business. However in many meetings, especially those widely scattered, this is not a satisfactory or effective way to reach many members and attenders. Other possibilities might include writing articles for a meeting newsletter, sharing after Meeting for Worship, visits to worship groups under the care of the Monthly Meeting, or holding special study groups on matters currently on the agenda of Representative Meeting.

**Recommendation Q1: that CYM encourage Monthly Meetings to appoint and support representatives to Representative Meeting who are willing to engage in various information sharing activities within the Monthly Meeting such as writing articles for a Meeting newsletter, visiting worship groups, or holding special study groups.**

**Recommendation Q2**: that attention be given in developing agendas for Representative Meeting to providing both time and opportunity for those individuals with an interest in the issues at hand to receive information and give input through their representative.

We heard a number of suggestions for addressing the problem of long agendas at Representative Meeting. This is a difficult problem that has been wrestled with by many clerks of Representative Meeting. Nevertheless, we think that it is important that continued attention be given to reducing the amount of business at these meetings. Suggestions included asking committee clerks to provide written reports (unless of course they have business for the Meeting to consider), and establishing a small executive committee that could meet more often to attend to ongoing administrative matters. We have a recommendation regarding the latter suggestion in the section on Yearly Meeting Clerks below.

**Recommendation Q3**: that committee clerks only be asked to report on the floor of Representative Meeting when they have a matter requiring a decision and that written reports from clerks of committees be circulated in advance.

## **R. Yearly Meeting Clerks**

Our interviews show that on the whole, most clerks of Yearly Meeting committees and of Yearly Meeting itself carry out their work with great joy and satisfaction. It is seen as spiritually called and grounded work. However there was some evidence that the burden presently being placed on Yearly Meeting “officers” which includes the Yearly Meeting clerks and treasurer as well as the clerk and treasurer of the trustees is too onerous.

We need to acknowledge that being a clerk is a calling and for some whose responsibilities are great, we might consider their work to be that of a “released Friend”. Yearly Meeting clerks and treasurers need administrative support and perhaps the support of a small committee to share the decision making load, similar to what is mentioned in the section on Representative Meeting.

There is a need to clarify the executive/administrative function of CYM so that we can better handle problems like the bookkeeper quitting, insurance issues, calls to chaplaincy, use of trust funds, and unexpected resignations of key volunteers. The mechanism for making decisions between sessions of Yearly Meeting and Representative Meeting is awkward. We heard suggestions that we establish a continuing committee that was smaller and met oftener. Otherwise, the Yearly Meeting clerks, sometimes through the mechanism of the current office review committee, have to assume this responsibility.

**Recommendation R1**: that CYM appoint an executive committee empowered to make decisions between sessions of CYM or Representative Meetings that need timely implementation to keep CYM functioning and that CYM with the assistance of Representative Meeting recommend the kinds of decisions this executive committee could make.

## **Closing Statement**

We were reminded that worship is the central element in all that we do. We may disagree about testimonies that were established in the past, but we unite in worship – worship being at the core of our lives individually and as a religious society. We are called to set aside our individual desires and listen to the guidance of the Spirit that unites us all.