

**Responses to the C'nR Queries and Thoughts on Canadian Yearly Meeting
Gleaned from the C'nR consultations with Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups:
A Report from the Consultation and Renewal Working Group (C'nR) - August 2006**

The Consultation and Renewal Working Group, appointed by a minute of Canadian Yearly Meeting 2004, met with all active Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups in Canadian Yearly Meeting between August 2005 and May 2006. We spoke in person with between three and four hundred Friends in Canadian Yearly Meeting in 53 consultations. Eight Queries were sent in advance to encourage thoughtful discussion at these consultations. This report presents what C'nR learned from the responses to those queries, as well as excerpts from our notes and other responses about Canadian Yearly Meeting. The conclusions and recommendations of C'nR are written in a separate report.

Query 1. Is your Monthly Meeting or Worship Group a central and life-transforming commitment, or is it one of the activities that competes for your attention, allegiance and money?

The use of the word "or" in this Query annoyed many Friends because they experienced it as "and". Nevertheless this Query brought out profound responses about the meaning of Quakerism in the lives of Friends. The responses generally described Meeting as being central to one's life, a priority among competing activities, and a commitment that changes as folks progress through life's stages. Some Friends rephrased the query to become Quakerism as the central influence rather than the Meeting per se. Most did not see either the Meeting or Quakerism as transforming (although a few did) but rather as "life-informing." Most felt "quaker values" influence the whole of life seven days a week. In both Monthly Meetings and small Worship Groups there is a deep commitment to each other and to the group.

For most of the Friends who attended our consultations, the wider body of Friends was not of direct interest, although many acknowledged that the Religious Society of Friends would likely die out without the wider groups and they therefore saw some importance for Yearly Meeting.

Responses to Query 1.

Lots of extremely positive feelings, like these:

The strongest family that I have is Quakers. I feel a part of the global Quaker family. It isn't about any individual person or event, but I need the challenges and support of a spiritual community for my spiritual growth. It is crucial that we challenge one another. It is the welcoming of a challenge to one's faith, beliefs, and values that make Quakerism a life-transforming commitment. Such challenges are not always pleasant and some people want to accept the easy part of being a Quaker but not the challenge of dealing with diversity.

I've been committed for many years to Quakerism as a path for spiritual life – amount of commitment and allegiance varies according to where I am in my journey and the character of the Meeting. When younger, Quakerism was a recharging experience -- central and life affirming. Now, it is only one type of worship. The nature of a Meeting and my own personal space affects my commitment. I have failed to be a "real Quaker." I would like to say that Meeting is life transforming but can't.

It is best when people change from inside out. Meeting can be a place where spiritual re-birth takes place and people in the Meeting are the mid-wives making it a safe place for re-birth. Yearly Meeting is an extension of that. Participating in YM is like the relation of the home owner to the community. We need the relationship in order to be healthy and productive.

One of the important things for me about Quakers is the testimonies. Whether I was Quaker or not, Quaker values would be important to me. Being Quaker gives me a community that shares my thoughts. Other churches have this, but their way of expressing it is different.

I recognized that here were people who were not chasing after power or short term glory. That sense of seeking rather than having found, of not having a real hard agenda, that willingness to share without denigrating others' experiences or contribution is a powerful, very welcoming glue that helps to hold us together as Friends.

The phrase "central and life-transforming commitment" caught my attention. It evokes the practice of the presence of God in my life which to me means yearning for wholeness of all of my being, not as an idea but as a practice. Steadily coming to all my life. I am now in a place where that yearning is harmonious with Friends' practice. My consent to the presence of the divine is now shared in the presence of others.

One of the things that attracted me to Quakerism was the public voice to the world. It was almost a voice in the wilderness, speaking truth to power, speaking of issues of peace and social justice through CFSC and QIAP. I really value that. It makes me glad to contribute to the public voice. It's really valuable work; we would never do it as an individual Worship Group or Monthly Meeting; we don't have the time or the expertise.

I was an attender for two years. You don't become a Quaker; you realize that all your life, you've lived and thought the same way that Quakers do – trying for understanding, living for peace.

I came to Quakers for selfish reasons via a guru, pursuing my own pursuits in Quaker Meeting. Structure and commitment would be overwhelming. It's been a welcoming and positive experience.

In one way or another, coming to Meeting for Worship week after week makes everything OK. In that sense it transforms life. When I pass through this hour of worship, I come out better able to cope with the world, in a better spirit/mind/emotion.

I find it a great comfort to be with Quakers. It feels like home. It's a central part of being and constantly becoming. After 8 years it's become a wonderful part of coming to know my core. I can find silence, strength, and guidance there which I didn't have before. It's been a humbling and wonderful experience to be part of Quakers. I can count on Quakers to be respectful of themselves and others. Quakerism is central to my core.

If I didn't have Quaker involvements that would be life-transforming in a negative way.

Also, problems with trying to maintain commitment to Quakers:

When you are the only Quaker in your household (or family), which is the case for several in our meeting, it is hard for Quakerism to be the central commitment in your life because time spent with Quakers is time not spent with the rest of the family. *(This was the case for many participants in Meetings and Worship Groups, and for the majority in some of them.)*

It is hard for us to have commitment to the Quaker meeting because most of us are still working and most of us are single, which means we have a lot of responsibilities in our daily lives. In the past, the women did the community building in Quaker meetings and churches and kept volunteer activities going. The energy of women is now being sucked into the work place and there's not so much time for volunteer activities and community building. I am feeling very over-committed just from life. It is hard to want to come to Meeting for Worship. I am stretched too thin. But I am enriched when I come.

Quaker service grinds you down. I am a recovering ex-clerk. There is a lot of anxiety and dissatisfaction that gets focused through a lens onto those in leadership. You get scorched – a systemic sapping of energy.

It takes all of our energy just to keep going. I feel really limited in terms of what we can do and what we can expect of others in the group because everyone is quite busy with other responsibilities. We can't always meet the demands that crop up within our Meeting. The actual membership is about 18. Ten or twelve people come to Meeting on any given Sunday. It is not the same people every week. We have about 20 regular attenders.

Monthly Meeting is central but there are also other activities that compete. I came back after an absence – it is only recently that I became a member after 40 years of being on the fringe. I was surprised how transformative it is. I do not want to miss Meeting for Worship or Meeting for Business. I have become more involved, give more time and money, but it is a balancing act. I give to what I want but I have not given up other parts of my life. The balance is shifting more toward Friends, but I still have other things to do and that is comfortable.

Being a Quaker is central to my identity. This sometimes makes my relationship to my Monthly Meeting and the Yearly Meeting somewhat tentative because it matters so much. My commitment to a larger body than the Monthly Meeting requires some kind of larger evidence of the thing that binds us in spirit. When I feel weak or wounded, I tend to withdraw. I feel safe to go to Monthly Meeting but sometimes not to Yearly Meeting. I worry if I have the emotional stamina to engage. Quakers are very challenging. I have experienced many disappointments. How to handle them? We do not always treat each other well. We expect Quakers to be better but we're not; we're human. We think we're immune to biases (e.g. sexism) but we're not.

And other responses:

One Friend told us that while Meeting is very important, she does not get the nurture she needs from Meeting for Worship. She supplements her Meeting experience with other sources, without which her spiritual life would be very dry.

I met someone who holds meeting in his home every evening, and has been doing this for 29 years. It makes me realize that my commitment could be deeper. It's important to be true to my own need for regular meetings.

Although being a Friend is a central part of my life, I do not want to be a "professional Quaker", i.e. I don't only want to be active as a Quaker, but want to be active in many directions, all (I hope) compatible with my religion, but not all religious per se!

Query 2. How can we openly engage with the diverse Quaker theology within our Yearly Meeting?

Many Friends and attenders seem to feel that a disinterest in theology is a requirement for being a Quaker. Others are very disturbed by this disinterest. The Consultation and Renewal Working Group believes that this Query raised the number one issue in Canadian Yearly Meeting – whether our diversity is causing us to become an “anything goes” religion and will eventually result in us losing a coherent identity. 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 from others when we share. This seems to affect Christians more than others, e.g. “I believe in Jesus, but I wouldn't think of mentioning it in a Quaker meeting.” 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. When asked about

non-Christian/Christocentric tension most Friends agreed that it has created difficulties in their group and that the Christians are the ones leaving. This was often connected with the baggage that Friends and attenders have brought with them from other churches. Very few of us were born into Quaker families. We study our history because of difficulty with defining ourselves in the present.

On the whole appreciation was expressed for diversity of thought and practice. In fact, there was 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 their own spiritual path is very important to Canadian Friends. Along with this is appreciation for the testimonies which were sometimes seen as the alternative to a creed. Some thought that we tend to use our testimonies as a creed. Alongside all the praise for diversity was a small but persistent voice that said yes but, we can't be all things to all people and we do have commonly held values which we should openly adhere to.

New Query: Can we learn to worship together using the different languages of our diverse beliefs and traditions?

Responses to Query 2:

There are two conflicting approaches within Quakerism: 1) those who think they are the final authority on spiritual matters, and 2) those who believe in submitting to group process. The lines are subtle between discerning and leading and judgement.

As a new attender I have been attracted to the Meeting by the openness, wide spectrum of belief and lack of dogma. Divergent views can help with modification or strengthening of one's own views and sometimes are life transforming.

In George Fox' time, one became a member when convinced. It was a direct relationship with God. I have been an "attender" for many years for the reason that "no one should judge if I am fit to be a member." It is between the individual and God. Also, membership would oblige me to participate in business where consensus draws out the meetings too long. Nevertheless, "spiritually I am totally a Quaker."

Although we do not have a creed, there are some similar core beliefs such as consensus and unity, discussion with each other and learning from others. Common concerns come through.

Unless we allow that multitude of thoughts we lose the reason why we are here. If we had a set theology among Quakers, I would leave. I don't want someone to tell me what to believe. When I came into the Quaker Meeting, I found there were others who believed in free thinking and interpreting for yourself. Everyone is free to reach their own beliefs. But too many of us navel gaze. We are to go out into the world and preach the gospel, not sit in Meeting and talk about how great we are.

We need to educate Friends what the Quaker view of Christianity was and is. It is quite different now. Some Friends seem not to hear the Light when it is expressed in Christian terms. People can hear it from George Fox and other Friends who have been dead for 300 years but not from Friends today.

We have Wiccans and Buddhists and Christians. Quakerism comes out of Christianity. Quaker theology is different from theology. Within Yearly Meeting there is a Quaker theology, but we don't know what it means.

If one idea of how we do Quakerism is to seek openings, then we are bound to have diversity of views, by very nature of who we are. We can use that to grow at any level. Therefore we should welcome diversity as part of the seeking -- it's both process and product, or at least central to both.

We need people who don't feel welcome here because they break up our complacency and show us our blind spots and keep us going. How do we invite people into our community and yet keep that balance with our core values?

When I came to Quakers they seemed very liberal and accepting. The longer I stay and the deeper I get involved, I realize there's a structure and a common ground. I can feel it, I can sense it; we don't speak it but it's there. I know that there are certain things I can't do in the meeting; I know what the boundaries are. We don't talk about them very often; if you're alert and you see how people interact, it's very clear to me that there's a common ground, a way of behaving that we all understand and accept at one level.

What worries me about a lack of acceptance about any particular tradition is that we don't go deep enough. I really like it when we have Bible study or Quaker study or when people give ministry informed by deep knowledge of whatever their religious experience is. I like it when I learn from parables, or Thich Nhat Han. It's important to speak from deep knowledge. I don't like that we only skim the surface of so many things. I want us to dig deeply with each other and help each other.

I like that the First Day School has been studying the Bible this year. A lot of Quaker kids grow up not knowing the basis of the Religious Society of Friends. They experience a deep bonding experience but don't necessarily know the tradition that they're bonding to.

All but one of us have come from other religious traditions often having been very hurt, often in a Christian place. From trying to be not hurtful to those who have been hurt, I think we started to discipline ourselves not to use Christian language that had been hurtful. We may have cut off something that's really important.

We need to work to find inclusive language, to listen and to help people recognize and learn from their hurt.

I have always felt a reaching for the Living Spirit. That reaching can be done through Jesus Christ or any path you want. It's what gives life to the Religious Society of Friends and it's the Living Spirit that matters. The moment we try to make people use a certain language, or not use it, there's a misplacement of attention from content to form. If I talk about the Living Spirit in the Goddess, am I going to be tossed out of the Society because I am using different words to talk about the same thing?

I keep coming back to George Fox's statement: "There is one even Christ Jesus who can speak to thy condition." I was very surprised to learn one doesn't have to be a Christian to be a Quaker.

One issue that turned out to be contentious was the cross in that room, which at least one person had to have taken out each week, because Quakerism was her "escape". I came to embrace the Christian part of Quakerism, and the other person's dismissal of Christianity was a little difficult. She couldn't hear the positive value of my experience of Christianity.

Some of the strongest Christ centered ministry in our Meeting for Worship has stopped because those Friends have left.

The spirit of Monthly Meetings varies. In some Monthly Meetings if someone referred to Christ in Meeting for Worship, someone else would jump up antagonistically. That intolerance indicates a serious problem. I see these same tensions and differences in our Yearly Meeting. We are so small now that the disaffected don't split off and form another group – they just simply leave. I am concerned about how much we have lost a spiritual and worshipful approach to Meeting for Worship for Business. Perhaps it's because we have not had enough members with long experience of

Quakerism. We must maintain links with the past. Our blend of Christianity is unique – we must nurture it.

Friends have a great deal of difficulty accepting diversity. In the U.S. Christian Friends are forming separate groups now because they don't feel at home in the Quaker meeting as Christians. It is important to accept the full range of views within the Yearly Meeting. I believe we must not only accept diversity, but welcome it.

We talk about being open and tolerant, but not quite as tolerant to those who are Christian, particularly evangelical Christian.

Since merging in 1955 Canadian Quakers have become universalist, liberal, and unprogrammed. We don't suit all Quakers. Jesus is eschewed and "God" is avoided.

Diverse Quaker theology has been an issue. Our meeting has found its place but some have not come back because of the universalist approach. Others don't know what to do with biblical based ministry. We set up expectations that people won't be given a specific Christian message and people bring their own baggage. This may be why we don't have an active First Day School. Where would it come down - traditional or modern? We're kind of a mish-mash. First Day School makes us be explicit where we normally don't have to think about it.

I think we have to get away from the idea that there is a particular source of wisdom. I haven't quoted anything from the Bible and I think it is a source of unwisdom and a lot of dangerous ideas. I think we have to teach ourselves and portray to others an idea of wisdom which embraces ideas well beyond Christian theology.

People so often panic when there's dissension and rush to resolve things. But the dissension was/can be very important, as long as you don't panic and leave, but stay and work with it. Over time it's refined and we all grow from those experiences. I learned to respect the vocal people who were contrary thinkers.

When I first came to Quaker Meeting I assumed that it was a religious group and I thought that issues of religion would be more easily dealt with because Quakers are more tolerant and honest. But social issues are things that we seem to deal with better and the religious issues are still very much kept to ourselves.

There is a conflict between those who come for quiet and those who want to put their faith in action.

What gives any one of us the right to imagine that he/she has more spiritual understanding than someone else? How can two people have leadings that take them in opposite directions?

In order to be open to that of God in everyone, we have to be curious and non-judgmental. We have to listen non-judgmentally and ask clarifying questions before we reflect critically on what is said. This is important to engaging with theological diversity.

If we can't be open with each other, learning and stretching, how can we speak to the rest of the world?

We don't have an easy way of sharing our mutual journeys. We need a venue for it. There are not many opportunities for sharing our lives.

Quaker theology gets brushed aside in the fear that it might offend. The result is we don't say anything.

It will probably be very difficult to discover each Friend's faith journey. We can see the consequences and we only talk theology when we draw different consequences from what we contend to be the same faith. We struggle over questions that witness to the community, e.g. same-sex unions. We do not know other Friends beliefs, and have been warned against professing. It is the

practice, informed by our being Friends. How much of our daily practice is different from non-Friends? It is in our practice that thoughts are best communicated. Do we draw the same conclusions? Are we recognizable as Friends because the consequences make us different from our neighbours?

What can Quakers offer the world? Radical equality, radical love. Jesus sought out those who were not comfortable and accepted. We have great strengths. We don't speak enough about them to the outside world.

Western Canada has small groups of inexperienced worshippers for whom "theology" is not always available. Openness is good, but there is a body of Quaker experience that informs us. We do have an identity. When it becomes diffuse or not apparent it is a matter of concern. We cannot be all things to all people.

Since most of us are conflict avoiders, we tend to shy away from judgmental Friends. Do any of us have the ability to challenge these narrow views and to let others experience the mutuality that exists among us – engaging the openness instead of the rigidity and the judgmental nature of these Friends?

The diversity of experiences of the Spirit in the Religious Society of Friends is deeply treasured and these experiences in our daily lives are the central and life-transforming aspect of Friends. This rich range is the main reason people come to Friends (rather than other faith communities that define manifestation of Spirit in narrow terms) and is a major sustaining factor.

There are Friends who believe in demons and angels and they do not feel free to share these beliefs within their Quaker Meeting in liberal Quakerism. We have to deal with the question of what is spiritually appropriate or inappropriate, or we don't have an identity.

We need parameters so we don't dissolve into a non-identity and become Quaker mush. A large percentage of people who come to Quakers come in reaction to authoritative religions. They have an assumption that they should not be spiritually challenged.

The issue of how we can openly engage with diverse Quaker theology has been divisive in some areas of Quakerism in the world and unity has not been found. What allows some yearly meetings to stay together and what drives some apart often hinges on the understanding of the relationship between the language and the experience of the Light. If we believe that the experience is primary, and the language we use is an expression of our experience, then we can "listen in tongues". We can hear the way it is described, translate it to the way we describe it, and believe we are having the same experience – still affirming the experience of the Light with whatever language we use. However if we believe that language shapes the possibility and nature of the experience, and people use very different forms of language in our meetings, then we may believe that others do not experience the Light. If we have people in CYM who believe that language shapes the experience, then it is going to be very difficult to have an open and harmonious engagement. It would be healthy to have dialogue over these types of issues. I have not heard such a dialogue among Friends. I think it would be healthy; perhaps it could be divisive.

Query 3. What does our Quaker faith ask us to DO?

This Query initially brought forth lots of typical Quaker quotations – "package responses", but Friends responded more deeply on further reflection. Many Friends responded that we are called to "be" rather than to "do." There was some resentment of the query, either because Friends objected to the use of the word "faith" or the Query was seen as implying that we have "ought to do's." This Query brought up a lot of feelings about the idea that Quakers must be "activists". Many Friends are angry about the assumption of other Friends that all Friends are (or should be) activists, and many others just feel guilty about not being activists.

For some Friends the word “Quakerism” is political and implies an ideology. Many Friends believe that Quakers have a more moral way of life than other religions, and there seems to be a huge amount of guilt about not measuring up.

The C’nR working group is concerned about how few responses to this query incorporated the notion of 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.

Responses to Query 3:

I think the query “What does our Quaker faith ask us to Do?” is the wrong question. It should be “What are we asked to Be”? The “being” comes before the “doing”. If we don’t know why we are, we don’t know what to do. I believe we are asked to be open to the holy spirit and respond as we are led. Quakers early learned to discern what was the holy spirit by testing individual leadings in a worshipping community. If that’s all Quakers are that’s fine. But in 350 years we have become more because of what we’ve been led to do. Action comes from finding unity as a group, not consensus or unanimity. We respectfully discern what the holy spirit is calling us to do. An individual who disagrees, must go through a separate clearness process and decide whether to stand aside or separate from the group. This process can be very enriching and painful. We don’t do the painful stuff well and maybe therefore we don’t get the enrichment either.

My faith is calling me to do a lot less than I did before. I’ve been a doer all my life. Now I am more discerning about where I put my energies. I say no almost as much as I say yes – not just among Friends. More often I say no first and may change my mind. It feels right. The things I do come from a right place. I have a unique contribution to make. I need time to be discerning about use of my time and energy. Doing has become less important than waiting.

A profound leading turned me from being driven to being a follower, following toward the light. In stress, I strive forward, but being relaxed and sitting with the group allows me to listen to the spirit and receive guidance from wise people. Quakerism 101 was profound. We need to study our faith.

Creating repeated opportunity for worship, every day and week, is as necessary as meals and rest, but I needed that to be pointed out to me.

As Quakers we are called to witness for peace, justice, environment. It is a duty.

What the Meeting decides in good order to do, is what we need to do.

I would say in the first place, to listen. To listen to leadings that we get and to listen to one another with understanding

I am out from under a great weight of needing to be a “model Quaker.”

You could summarize it in the biblical quotation, what does the lord require of thee? To do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God.

To be a Quaker is a whole way of life. It’s quite a different way of life from what I’ve seen of other religions.

It asks us to live a considered life; to develop an integrated view of life; to try to find a moral life; not just follow rules and rituals, but to think through what we do. We are also asked to seek where wisdom comes from and to listen to others – lest we go off on individual crusades. The group is very important for our spiritual life.

This faith culture has something in it to strive for and to represent. But the vast majority of Friends have no idea of the basics of their faith.

The central element that we consistently agree and have complete unity on is the commitment, awareness, practice and faith and the propriety of worship in all that we do.

Our world puts such pressure on us to do – to be busy. When I listen to this I am in difficulty. Good becomes measured by quantity of doing. The quality of life and spirit suffers. I have struggled with this as a released Friend. I have learned that it is OK to spend my weekly staff hours in prayer. Working at the pace of Spirit is so much better. I achieve more with less expenditure of energy. We do not set goals and objectives. We take our Quaker practice out into the world and our grounding practices are serving us and the Spirit well. They are a part of our witness. Other groups value our attention to how things are done. Setting goals comes from the ego.

I had a very strong visceral response to this query. I am very defensive. I don't want others' leadings thrust on me and I do not necessarily jump on everything everyone has a leading to do. The activists can lay expectations on us and I resent this. "Back off." I'm here for spiritual practice. Respect that I'm not going to do everything you feel led for me to do.

I think there is an intolerant radical element in Quakerism today. I'm not comfortable with the political aggressive confrontational approach of these Friends.

A Friend who grew up in a Quaker family, but did not attend the consultation, wrote the following in response to reading the notes:

When I go to meeting, the meeting part is renewing and re-charging for me. But the after conversation, the part that is supposed to be for announcements, seems to leave me feeling exhausted. My memory of our meeting (when I attended regularly a few years ago) was that the announcements part of the meeting was kind of a litany of "all that is bad in the world and why aren't you doing more to stop it?" It was too much. I wish I could leave meeting without having to listen to it. It makes me feel that I will never ever be able to do all the things I'm supposed to do – to be a good Quaker, or even acceptable Quaker. That alone didn't drive me away, but it did make me feel different and unacceptable to Quakers. I work in a field that is not "good," I have "bad" consumer desires, I do not spend my free time (what I have of it) protesting and working for peace. As well, I was frustrated by the fact that the kids had to be quiet and listen to all of this rather than enjoying the bunch of people that (presumably) enjoyed them. I understand that the meeting wants and values and misses the kids now that they are not there. But the over-riding feeling I got when the kids were present toward the end of the meeting, when there was actually a few minutes to interact with the kids, was: don't bother us – we're too busy saving the world. Unfortunately, the world was right there in front of them.

If people have conditions that allow them to discern what they are called to do, then we can prepare for transformation. Early Friends changed society by taking steps that didn't at the time seem to make sense. They didn't set out to change the system. They did what they were led to do. We are so goal oriented we strategize. That's not how God or nature works. There is a difference between the leftist view of economy and a society that rests on gospel order. We do not plan an economy, the economy changes because we follow what we are led to do. We do not run the show. There is something else going on.

I'm not in Quakerism for speed.

When Meeting for Worship is over they start talking about all the terrible things that happen in the world. It makes me very uncomfortable. I think it destroys the meeting.

Query 4. Where do you experience a "gathered meeting"? What would foster it?

This term was not used or understood by many Canadian Friends and some Friends questioned the point of this Query. There seems to be less understanding in western meetings than in eastern meetings. On the whole, there was little understanding of the classical corporate mysticism* of Friends that surrounds this phenomenon, and it would seem to illustrate lack of understanding of corporate discernment. Some questioned if there could be a gathered meeting if some present did not think it was. There is more understanding of 'gathered meeting' when more of the people in the group have participated in larger Quaker gatherings, e.g. Half Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting, Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, Friends World Committee for Consultation. The experience is central for many Friends.

*mystical: a clear experience of God, of the divine.

New query: Is it a gathered meeting if some present don't think it is?

Responses to Query 4:

I think a gathered meeting is eternally there, and you click into it sometimes by grace and sometimes by conscious intention.

We could foster gathered meetings by preparing before Meeting for Worship – e.g. by reading.

Does everyone present have to share the experience of being gathered? I know I have in the worship group, even though others may not have done so. I have experienced it sitting with a group of kids, wrestling with a problem and succeeding. I had a meeting with people from 4 to 65 to reach agreement. We worked hard, and the meeting was gathered. Another time in Meeting, I was working on personal growth. The entire Meeting noticed and gave support.

There are degrees of gathered Meetings and the meeting does not always have to be religious.

There is always a gathered meeting and the question is whether I'm open to that reality or not. When I walk into the bush there is a gathered meeting there and the challenge is: "am I open to experience it, to feel it, or am I just lost in myself?" When I assume that there is that of God in each of us, it is difficult to imagine that that of God in each of us is not aware of that of God in the other whether we are aware of it or not. Just like when I go for a walk in the woods, though I may not feel it at first, I then begin to feel it and say, "Oh Wow, there it is!" That is what is beginning to come through to me. What we call a gathered meeting is the reality of life. The question then becomes what fosters the awareness that brings you into that, but that is a different question than what fosters the gathered meeting.

It is not only where and when, it is also why. A gathered meeting can be so incredible. It is a rare event, but is central to Quakerism. Quakers talk about it like it justifies the whole thing – the pearl in the oyster, Quaker nirvana. It is an event that no one can predict or conjure up, but it is always collective. The Holy Spirit enters. Our highest achievement as a religious community is this mystical thing that God is in the middle of that which we share. It illustrates our mystical nature.

For me there can be no true worship, let alone gathered meetings when Friends are sitting together with pain and hurt towards other Friends in their hearts. In the Anglican communion service we were reminded not to come to the communion table with unresolved conflicts in our hearts. I think Friends need to practice the same.

In the past I have had trouble going into deep silence when there are children present who are engaged in activities, especially if there is a lot of social interaction or if the kids are teasing one another or trying to get attention. But now I have had the experience of being part of a gathered meeting where there was a large group of children. The leader of the children's program had worked

hard to minimize the amount of physical activity by carefully choosing the materials available to the kids, and by avoiding activities that would be likely to draw in the adults.

Query 5. How can our Quaker practice involve everyone in every stage of life, from childhood to old age?

Many meetings expressed difficulty in caring for the elderly and a concern that we are an aging society. Many also expressed a concern that we have few children and young people. But few actually addressed what to do about it! Meeting the needs of an aging population with our meetings is hard with few numbers and sometimes many needs. Some Friends said maybe it doesn't matter if we don't have young people because Quakerism is really more appropriate to mature people and there will always be lots of new members by conviction.

Larger gatherings were often the solution for involving children and Young Friends, as few Monthly Meetings or Worship Groups have enough of any age group to form a nucleus. The time, distance and expense involved in attending the larger gatherings weighs in against this solution.

Responses to Query 5:

We set up expectations that people won't be given a specific Christian message and people bring their own baggage. This may be why we don't have an active First Day School. Where would it come down - traditional or modern? We're kind of a mish-mash. First Day School makes us be explicit where we normally don't have to think about it.

I am concerned that my son is not getting any type of spiritual education in Meeting. He likes the people, but he doesn't like Meeting, because there is nothing there for him. We need to supply some sort of theological context.

Meeting is different when almost everyone comes to Quakerism by conviction, as adults.

It is not possible to integrate a 20 year old with a group that is 40 and older. We would need a cluster of younger ones.

I see a real need of some kind of co-ordination, either national or provincial, to meet the needs of youth and young adults. How do your own children meet other people of like mind and faith in such a small group over such a large area? Friends General Conference (FGC) is a partial answer; in Canada, Camp NeeKauNis is a big thing, but it's only summer. FGC is organizing a youth secretary to support both countries.

So many people come to Quakers from other religions. It seems blasphemous to ask, but why is it important to involve children? Maybe Quakers will simply be able to carry on with older convinced Friends.

Maybe Quakerism is a religion of one's mature years.

A clear example of unease about the spiritual life of the Religious Society of Friends is that the children who have grown up in our Meetings do not in general attend our Meetings for Worship and other Meetings as adults, even though they live their lives within the testimonies that they learned as Friends. We could conclude that our testimonies have been very well inculcated in our children, but that we have not been able to make our spiritual community a priority for them.

contributed by a boy of about 10:

In daily life I don't really think about how I'm a Quaker. There are so many other things that take over your time. When religion comes up, I just think I'm Christian. I go to a Baptist church and I have

mixed beliefs between the two. In the Baptist church there's a lot more talking and they have Baptism etc. Quakers is not the best kid-suited religion.

Some of the children stay within the Meeting for Worship the entire time. This has been an extremely enriching experience for us.

My concern is that the children feel turned off in being in a place where they are told they have to be quiet and sit still. It doesn't mean that you are excluding or disrespecting children by finding them something that is more developmentally appropriate if they are not in a space to sit silently in Meeting.

There are other people with kids who don't come because they don't feel the kids are welcome.

After our experience at Western Half-Yearly Meeting, we would like to try having the children present in the middle during our meeting rather than taking them out.

Query 6. How does the structure of our organization shape your experience of Quakerism? for example bottom-up/top-down, local/regional, national/international.

There were wide differences between those for whom the local Monthly Meeting or Worship Group is the center of their Quaker lives and those whose main energy comes from outreach or larger Quaker gatherings. For most, the local meeting is most important. Yearly Meeting is distant and vague for those who have never attended a CYM session or served on a CYM committee. A few Friends see Yearly Meeting as their community more than their local meeting (especially true for Friends who have no local meeting close by.)

There was a strong feeling that we should be organized bottom-up and that there should not be too much business coming down from the Yearly Meeting. We heard a deep difference in understanding in Canadian Yearly Meeting about where authority rests. In many small worship groups Friends expressed their aversion to structure and to the idea of holding "business meetings". In opposition to that there were many Friends who felt strongly the value of Meeting for Worship for Business at the different levels and are concerned that not enough of us understand or experience this value.

Responses to Query 6:

The structure is very much do it yourself - where you see a place to put your hand to the wheel, please do so. Then there's a corporate reference point; we don't let someone run off with a cause celebre. It's a lot of discernment, where people see a need and have some energy, mitigated by the rest of the group helping, backing the individual.

The Cazden book was an eye opener of a dichotomy that I hadn't known in Quakers.

Canadian Yearly Meeting is very explicit about our structure. In our *Organization and Procedure* there is a paragraph stating that the basic authority is with the Monthly Meeting and any 'superior' authority has authority only to keep the groups united. I understand that this scandalized other Yearly Meetings. When Helen Rowlands (UK) talked with us after her lecture at CYM 05, she said in Britain that the Yearly Meeting needs to be the authority. She was very skeptical of the way we do it.

All of this seems very important, but I also feel very disconnected to CYM. It doesn't feel to me that it's a part of what I know or who I know on an ongoing basis. I'm glad its there, but it doesn't feel like it's me.

In some respects I see CYM as the framework, the underpinning that allows the things that I think of as value to occur. Without it we just wouldn't be here, we wouldn't exist.

At one time when our Monthly Meeting was having a great deal of trouble and nearly folded, Canadian Yearly Meeting sent in two resource people, which was very helpful. Traveling Friends have also been very important.

There is a cycle that moves from the individual to the group. A call from the Holy Spirit is taken to the group which makes a decision about action. The original structure of the Religious Society of Friends was preparative meeting to monthly meeting to quarterly meeting to half-yearly meeting to yearly meeting. Everybody became versed in how to do Quaker business. In Canadian Yearly Meeting we have a different structure, excused by our geography. Many of us participate in worship groups and yearly meeting without involvement in other levels. Because of this we are not practiced in doing Quaker business. At Canadian Yearly Meeting we're not a people with a similar understanding of how we act as a community. I think a worship group should be a temporary status, and not go on for year after year. I think it is unhealthy for worship groups to exist where no one goes to Meeting for Worship for Business. We need to go back to a preparative meeting structure. Perhaps this is starting in New Brunswick Monthly Meeting and Victoria Monthly Meeting. Early Friends had a sense of flow from the individual to the group, but we haven't developed that from the grass roots here.

The value lies in historical credibility of the voice of Quakers. There is a danger when people act out of their own leadings which are not tested by a larger body. Monthly Meetings should also test their leadings in the larger body of the Yearly Meeting. There is a body of literature and wisdom that we must be part of – not just be alone on our own path. When Quakers approach something new, for example same-sex marriage, I am thankful for the existence of the larger bodies to help.

The structure is a local phenomenon: our Meeting (worship group) is loose, not formal, not so much an institution – it's more genuine. It's all about people, not institutions, doing things bottom-up vs. top-down.

In the beginning Quakers were struggling with top-down organization. They recognized that of God in each person and started meeting in peoples' homes. This feels like the heart of Quakerism.

The structure of our organization has caused me much frustration over the last few years. Many Friends at many "levels" of CYM have explained to us that they are deeply aware of the problems within our Monthly Meeting but due to the structure of our organization no one outside of the Monthly Meeting has the authority to ask the Monthly Meeting to deal with its problems.

Consequently we can and do have meetings that have a "franchise" for an area but are not functioning well as a Monthly Meeting.

Query 7. How can we be faithful to our concern for the environment, live this out with increasing integrity, and maintain a Canadian Yearly Meeting?

There were surprisingly few considered responses to this Query. The most often-expressed was the idea that Canadian Yearly Meeting meet in session less often than once per year, but few if any Friends had given much thought to the implications of that or whether reducing CYM sessions would really decrease our environmental impact. Although a few Friends mentioned it, there was not much argument for dividing Canadian Yearly Meeting on account of environmental impacts of travel. There were lots of suggestions for how we might minimize impacts, most of which would require careful research as to their real effectiveness.

There was a strong leaning toward seeing action on the concern for the environment as a matter of personal choice and a caution that we must not apply our personal testimonies about travel to the Quaker meeting without also applying it to our personal desires for travel. Most Friends feel strongly that a spiritually based discernment

requires meeting face to face and therefore travel is essential to keep wider Quaker bodies functioning.

Several suggestions were made regarding simplifying Yearly Meeting structure which would both reduce the need for travel and the demands on local meetings.

Responses to Query 7:

Until we get a sense of purpose about doing God's work on earth, we may not get anywhere with our concern over the ecological footprint and right relationship with creation. Our testimony of integrity requires that we see ourselves as equal parts of the whole of the creation; not as masters of the universe or owners of the planet. The economic system under which we live is not in right ordering, it is not within the spirit of Christ and all we can do at the moment is the best that we can.

If we are looking at environmental cost, we can't ignore the environmental cost connected with the technology of electronic communication. We have landfills full of computer parts. This also has an impact on how we relate to each other. How much do we lose when we use this medium? 70% of our communication comes through our body. So if it's all written we have only 30% left. The level of our capacity becomes dependent on our ability to use technology. Let us not use the cost of travel as an excuse to move to another form of communication without considering the cost. What is the cost of our not coming together and holding hands?

Associating north/south instead of east/west could reduce need for travel.

Are the environmental costs of having Canadian Yearly Meeting greater or less than the benefits? The one doesn't exist without the other, so costs and benefits both must be considered.

If a majority of Friends would refuse to burn fossil fuels under any circumstance, then CYM would have to change. But as long as I'm prepared to take holidays or drive around, then we shouldn't give up Yearly Meeting. It would be a hypocrisy. Like John Woolman preaching about giving up slaves if he still had some himself.

If we compare what gets spent in 3 minutes of war to our bit of travel, there is no comparison in scale. What we do is extremely cost efficient compared to armament, tobacco, social waste. Our contribution to environmental problems through Quaker travel is not statistically significant and it is outweighed by our positive contributions. We feel guilty about buying gas and it is getting very costly, but in terms of expense and the morality issues around ecology, it is insignificant. The real culpability is our failure to fight against war and pollution. The worst is to not support CFSC. We need to live our lives in community as a witness. Travel cost is a false argument.

Living simply might include not buying the latest electronic gadgets, avoiding "consumerism" and the pressure from ads to buy, buy, buy! Building a culture of "enough is as good as a feast."

It is good to be shocked at the environmental information, but some travel is necessary. We are not going to stop travelling. As Canadians I don't think we can.

If Friends are concerned about travel, what other forms of travel do they do? We can make up as much as possible for what we do use in other ways. Decide in your own heart and mind "is this travel necessary" and make a choice. An example of making a choice is the story of the woman anointing the feet of Jesus with costly oil.

I've used up my lifetime quota of emissions from using airplanes. I take personal responsibility for it and need to be faithful to this testimony. I don't need to fly any more.

I agree that splitting YM is not a good idea. It's been talked about for over 20 years and it is good that it is up for discussion. Canada as a nation has this problem. Limited funding and the need to meet face to face is indeed a challenge. It is a structural tension that is hard to resolve, but it is doubtful

that splitting into two will resolve the tension. Will we come out with a net gain? Rather, take advantage of cost effective ways of doing business, for example use of email. YM has to do some trimming. At times YM has lived beyond its means in both money and human energy.

WHYM could not take on more without making significant change. It could take the same time slot but it needs commitment from more people. People who get together in special interest groups are those who are already interested in the issue and so tend not to think outside the box. If YM was no longer what it is, would more people be willing to take on more at HYM?

Query 8. How do relationships of Canadian Friends with other Quaker, Christian, non-Christian and interfaith groups enrich the life of your Monthly Meeting or Worship Group?

There were many many expression of appreciation of the positive impacts on meetings, especially small ones, of the visits of travelling Friends. The suggestion was made over and over that Canadian Yearly Meeting sponsor more of this.

For most of the Friends who attended our consultations, the wider body of Friends was not of direct interest, although many acknowledged that the Religious Society of Friends would likely die out without the wider groups and they therefore saw some importance for Yearly Meeting. Except for those few who have had the opportunity to learn about it, there is a lack of enthusiasm among Friends in Canada for Yearly Meeting's participation in wider Quaker and religious bodies. On the other hand, the State of Society Reports frequently mention the positive involvements that Monthly Meetings have with inter-faith and ecumenical groups at the local level.

Responses to Query 8:

In general, the growth of Quakerism these days is in small meetings. The difficulty with that is that it produces a very idiosyncratic picture of Quakers – the small meetings usually based around one or two reasonably solid Friends. It is therefore important that we go to Yearly Meeting sessions and also to other levels of meetings (even committee meetings) besides our own. In large meetings, there might be a base of experienced Friends to limit that unbalanced picture manifesting itself; even within large meetings it is essential that we visit other meetings, other levels of meetings, and so on to round up our outlook on Quakerism. Inter-visitation with other Quakers is crucial to our present growth – exposure to wider Quaker bodies and to see how things work is very important. The ecumenical meetings may not necessarily speak to everyone's condition.

The Worship Group is a central and re-energizing force in my life. The worship and the fellowship are both very important to me. I have really treasured the contact through wider bodies through Yearly Meeting and being the CYM rep to Friends United Meeting, as well as serving on Home Mission and Advancement Committee. I feel personally very enriched; it broadened my spiritual experience. I find the larger bodies really worthwhile because of the capacity to bear larger witness. Given the culture we live in, I'm very pleased to be part of a group that does a group witness and attempts to have an impact on larger issues. When CYM makes a statement, I feel part of a bigger group and it re-energizes me to come back to my smaller community.

It seems to me that the spiritual needs of Quakers are met at the MM level and not at the YM level. Maybe we need more training on how to help people /counsel people . Is this something that CYM could help with? Much of the training we go to is political in nature and not about care-giving and giving support.

Exposure to a number of other Friends groups – Young Friends of North America, Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, Friends General Conference – was crucial to my development as a Quaker. For example, observing how business meetings were clerked at YFNA and FLGC was a real

start to my knowledge of how well these meetings can be run and how important it is that Meetings be run properly. This also furthered my interest in studying clerking and exposed me to other things in Quakerism.

I offered to be the representative to Friends United Meeting because I wanted to be challenged. I am challenged constantly by this. I go and I think, why am I here, why is CYM part of this group? How do we fit together? I'm not sure what I'm giving to my Monthly Meeting and CYM but know that I am being stretched and changed; I assume that's having some effect. I have something different to offer than I did a year ago.

I participate in two other faith communities, one is Anthroposophical (how I run my farm, based on Rudolf Steiner's revealed knowledge), and one is based on a very loose Wiccan/Goddess community. Whenever I carry myself into these communities I am very pleased to be a Quaker. I am very welcome. They don't see me as any less of an Anthro or goddess-woman because of my Quakerism. I see it as all of a whole -- I enrich them, they enrich me. I feel saddened I can't carry as much from those groups into Quakers as I can vice versa.

My son was at the World Gathering of Young Friends. It was flabbergasting. An area of commonality was that all of them knew about Quaker process, about Quaker meeting for business. They were able to wait on the Lord, wait on the guidance, use Quaker decision making.

Maybe we could encourage Friends to be released from their jobs or other commitments to travel among Friends. Give them a 3-month salary to do that. That way we wouldn't just have retired people traveling. Young Mormons take 2 years of their lives to serve the church.

Our Worship Group has been enriched by its relationship with aboriginal groups.

What C'nR heard about Canadian Yearly Meeting

In CYM most Monthly Meetings don't communicate much with each other. Our YM is a coordinating body. How do we balance a mystical journey with the need for accountability?

CYM was never very important to me. CFSC has always been important. The electronic newsletter from CFSC unites us with what's happening. Having CYM occur for a whole week is very difficult. I went one time and found it overwhelming. I think of CYM as being just administrative.

The Monthly Meeting is my home. CYM is not part of my consciousness much. But CYM keeps us from being isolated. We might not grow and evolve without the stimulus of other Quakers in Canada. I think we derive a benefit from CYM, but it is subtle and unconscious.

Some Yearly Meetings manage to do their business in a weekend meeting. I think this makes more sense.

The office administration goes very well. But there's a lot of difficulty in decision making in Yearly Meeting business. Our office administrator, whether a Quaker or not, would not have the role of decision maker. Decisions have to come from a body, a group or a person who is/are appointed to do so. In our YM, we have no executive, or appointed individual. The decisions about the way to go ahead or what ought to be done or not done are made with great difficulty. Right now we have a problem with communication among those who are the immediate decision makers that there's such pressure of e-mails, some of those YM decision makers can't stand it! That's the way the communication is being done. I don't think the problems will be helped by having a general secretary.

Three Yearly Meetings coming together as one was a major accomplishment, and one would hope that we can find ways to keep that going. We may not need to meet every year. Regional meetings or gatherings could be helping Yearly Meeting with its work. It is very important to have one Yearly Meeting, probably not for spiritual reasons, but to have a voice in this country.

I ask myself what role nation states have in Yearly Meetings.

I have noticed hubris in CYM sessions. It isn't just Quakers that are working in the world from a spiritual centre. We need to be more humble.

The YM structure ensures continuing change with the 3 year terms. We have a problem of losing expertise.

It was better when YM committees were larger, but small committees do not so easily build up expertise if there is a turnover. Until the mid 1970's there were only about 2 people on YM committees who didn't live in Ontario. When travel funding for committees was introduced, the costs went up and the size went down. Before we had 3 year terms some people stayed for a very long time. Sometimes they got bored. Sometimes they got invested in just staying on – it became part of their identity. It was a good move to shorten the length of terms to 3-6 years. It could be that since committees became smaller the length of service maybe does need to be lengthened in order for enough people to have historical knowledge of the functions and operation.

I think there is an element of arrogance in some actions CYM has tried to undertake. With slavery, Quakers didn't take action until everyone was clear. I think with about 500 active members we tend to try to make too many public statements, without the work being done to achieve knowledge and clarity within the Religious Society of Friends. If we did that work, then each Friend could speak to the issue – we could address fewer things more deeply and broadly.

I don't go to CYM primarily because of the burden of business. They don't know when to lay things down. Related to the impacts of our travel on the environment, I am uneasy with the amount of time and resources going into national committees. Fewer could do this work -- but we lack the trust.

We need to focus on the local, and strengthen Worship Groups and Monthly Meetings. Presently we drain away too much energy to serve on Yearly Meeting committees and projects. Yearly Meeting needs to serve the local groups, not the other way around. CYM should help with books, materials, and arranging conferences when necessary, and provide the CFSC as an opportunity for service. I suggest the Yearly Meeting should be three days, not 6 or 7. Rather than try to have all the different programs and interest groups at CYM, encourage these to be included in Regional Gatherings, and use CYM for a winnowed down, threshed, filtered amount of important business, such as testimony decisions, and have an inspirational speaker and perhaps a focus on a particular theme (e.g. Quaker education, prison reform, strengthening families) but not on every possible Quaker interest each time.

I'm not connected with CYM and I hope this will change. The time and expense of attending is a major challenge.

For a lot of us things resonate at the local level. And I wonder about a structure that requires CYM to ask Monthly Meetings (with a list) for people to do things on national level. We are challenged as a small group to find person power and time power. How do we maintain a strong sense of Quakerness at the local and Yearly Meeting level when we are so challenged to find people to fill spots? When I was on Representative Meeting off and on for ten years, it was lovely to be at gathering point from Friends across country. It seems as if trying to serve CYM depletes what we can do locally. I don't have any sense of how we could resolve this.

CYM is unwieldy – committees for the sake of committees. I am frustrated that the Child Abuse Protocol has been delayed way too long.

Some Friends feels 5 days of M4W4B is too daunting. Others find it inspiring.

One of my most important experiences with Quakers was to sit in on a Meeting for Worship for Business at Yearly Meeting. It was all done by consensus. The way the business meeting works is incredible.

I would like to be more involved with wider Quaker bodies. It is helpful to connect with other Friends' groups. I would participate more if business were done on a regional level. I would like a loose affiliation on a national level but Yearly Meeting is too much. The environment is a real consideration.

There's this us/them feeling -- people with a lot of background -- they're needed/helpful - yet it creates a kind of in-group/out-group division. Some people kidnap meeting with their personal agendas.

We could, as a Worship Group, support the YM more than what we do. We're just sort of going along on a free ride, here. I think the parent organization does do a lot of good work and it's part of what attracted us to Quakers.

Yearly Meeting was meaningless to me until I went. There I found layers beyond meeting for Worship -- corporate discernment for example. Last year at CYM, discernment was spectacular.

I did a thought experiment. Suppose there was a decision to stop publishing the Canadian Friend and pamphlets, to abolish CFSC, to fire the office staff. Quakers would have no voice to lobby government. Local meetings wouldn't have to send money to CYM, so there would be more for the local meeting but the trust funds would sit in bank accounts. There would be no way of community building across Friends because there would be no formal structure. How long would Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups sustain themselves and maintain their Quaker values? I get values and wisdom from these wider Quaker gatherings. CYM is not only important, it is essential; without it our meetings would eventually die. Although we have not grown, we have held membership numbers constant unlike other mainline churches whose membership is diminishing.

I attended YM without a break for 23-25 years, starting in 1976. I have only gone occasionally in the last few years. Over that period I saw spiritual ups and downs in the YM sessions. I have seen very bad spirit at YM, sometimes zero spirit, with rancorous and hateful disagreements, particularly with the current sociological issues. People who were not in favour of what is seen as "the" way to go were treated very roughly. The problem is for YM to maintain a constant worshipful spirit. The YM clerk plays a key role. The clerk is to be a facilitator, not the director. It is not a passive role.

In 1880 there were 8000 Quakers in Upper Canada. We built a foundation for an 8 story building and we only have half a storey on it now. CYM must provide an opportunity for building the grass roots.

When I was clerk of a Monthly Meeting I decided not to feel obligated to participate in everything CYM asked for. I think that YM by its overly large structure drains Monthly Meetings of the energy that they need. I'd be willing to see a smaller YM in order to revitalize Monthly Meetings. We are constantly forming uneasy alliances with other groups because we don't have enough bodies ourselves.

CYM has a high proportion of its members who are active on YM committees. Our structure could carry a lot more members without getting more complicated. Therefore we should be growing. It will cost us less. The smaller we get, the harder it is because we can't reduce our YM committees.

We have half a dozen committee members to do things for CYM and yet we cannot get things done locally. There is more nurture going from Monthly Meetings to CYM than the other way around for the majority of us (85%) that don't go to CYM.

CYM draws energy away from the local and regional meetings.

I think there is more possibility of Atlantic Quakers joining with New England than Ontario if CYM splits.

I have a vision of eastern and western YMs which send 50 representatives each to a CYM meeting which would help to facilitate the eastern and western YMs but provide combined national committees for justice, HMAAC. We'd still have a national presence but we'd keep our YM as small as possible. We would have a triangle power structure. Two YMs that send only a hundred representatives to a national meeting.

Decisions are made by consensus at yearly meetings. Every year Canadian Yearly Meeting is different because it meets in a different place and draws different Quakers. That means that eastern meetings, for example, make different decisions than western meetings.

We seek to meet both social and business functions with the CYM gathering. Do these functions fit with one another? Or are they separate?

It is important that our practical matters be derived from the spiritual element of doing business in the Yearly Meeting. An example of this connection would be seeing the water issues as a human rights one, rather than a commodity. We could tap from the spirituality we gain together from Yearly Meeting (with a great sense of power and respect) in helping the world in its proper functioning. It would also make Friends feel connected even if they have not attended YM sessions for some years.

A grave concern was expressed that Friends are searching for consensus in our practices instead of looking for something beyond consensus. Do we say our beloved society anymore?

Concern over misinterpretation/miscommunication via computer, blow-ups between Friends, far too much e-mail, no body language, but the internet is a useful tool for committee meeting organizing. We need face-face for a "gathered meeting" – something happens there that is not in computer/phone contact.

CYM is putting the cart before the horse if we were to make a decision about our structure based on ecology, while at the same time not making the Quaker Ecology Action Network a standing committee or giving it adequate funding.

CYM does not communicate directly with the members of the Monthly Meetings often enough or adequately. The financial donations from individuals are very small because there is no relationship. CFSC on the other hand does a much better job of this. Canadians are not as conscious as Americans about expenditures in operating an organization because we don't have to pay for everything individually. We need to develop an awareness of the operating costs of the Religious Society of Friends.

Why don't we expect Yearly Meeting in session to be a revenue generator for CYM? Could we consider participation in CYM sessions as a great privilege and an opportunity for spiritual growth that is well worth paying for, instead of thinking of it as an onerous burden?

It feels good to know that CYM does a lot of different things. This is important to who we are as Quakers. We don't individually have to do everything, but collectively we do a lot – our work is beyond our actual numbers. We have a "big reputation" in the larger Quaker world for doing important work. We need to acknowledge and celebrate our Yearly Meeting work. Fellowship, community building, and sharing as well as intellectual and spiritual stimulation at Yearly Meeting are very important. The integrated experience of business, study, presentations and community building in Canadian Yearly Meeting is very important to us. There is a profound difference between our Yearly Meeting and those that only do business. It would be a profound loss if we cut any parts of this experience from our YM. The week at CYM has a flow. It shows an efficiency in our YM that we can do so much. This would be lost if we just tried to do the business in a weekend meeting. We don't have churches. CYM in session is our church.

Question: How would your Meeting be different if there was no CYM?

Answer: We would cease to exist within ten years! CYM has had a big impact on us and provides support for us in very many ways. We are able to identify who we are as Quakers because of our involvement with CYM.

When I was preparing for this session, I read that factors impacting CYM are rising costs and yet I don't find that any of the queries that we have been given address that factor.

I keep hearing a poverty mentality in the Monthly and Yearly Meeting. There is never enough. Never fast enough, never enough money, not enough people attending Yearly Meeting, never environmentally conscious enough. How does one get to a point of feeling there is enough?

What C'nR heard from and about Worship Groups

Almost no one in the worship groups felt any necessity to participate in Quaker business meetings.

In the early '90's we were described as a "Quaker-Style Meditation Group". Most of the participants were not motivated to become Quakers. They were looking for a compatible meditation group and found that in each other. It was also a social activist support group, and a place where they could have intergenerational activities based on some shared spiritual values and give their children opportunities to interact with other like-minded adults.

The large Meeting I used to attend was so large, so many things you have to do, so much you're accountable for you end up breathing and eating Quakerism, it was almost a drudge. Here it's refreshingly simple. It's almost like a deeper commitment because there are so few people. We're not spoonfed Quakerism here – I have to be in charge of my own growth and commitment.

They came for the quietness. It wasn't about being a Quaker, and I miss that. The spiritual side of Quakerism tends to be forgotten in people's determination to make everything right in the world.

I think we do dwell too much on the dark side with too much eagerness. If we are going to talk about dark things, the purpose must be to put some light on them. I don't hear active positive change ideas here. I hardly dare bring friends here because they would think it's a place to complain about the world. I think there is something fascinating about darkness – it sucks us in. It requires enormous strength to realize it has no substance unless we give it substance. We should look at it and then go into silence (worship), but not discuss it. We need to put light on it – Quaker light that answers that of God in every one.

another speaker following on this one:

My partner and I discussed this. We think it is important to remind ourselves that our discussions should be in the manner of Friends with silence between. Many times in our half hour following Meeting for Worship, we have conversation (back and forth chatter). I think we mean to do it in a more Quakerly way – speaking with care out of the silence. The result of this is very different from the kind of conversations that troubled our Friend. Often we don't come to Meeting for Worship in silence, but with chatter. Things are better when we follow the Quaker process.

It's a long drive to Meeting for Worship!