

## **REPORT OF A WORKING GROUP**

*for*

### ***A Bold and Imaginative Model For Restructuring and Revitalizing Canadian Yearly Meeting***

#### **PREAMBLE**

Quakers began as small scattered groups of seekers who met together in silence to wait upon the Lord's guidance. There was no common bond to hold them together other than a shared radical belief in the possibility of Divine inspiration for each person and the need to come together in fellowship. It was George Fox who, upon his release from prison in 1666, began to set in place a common discipline and an organizational structure to support it, an organization that became the Religious Society of Friends.

Fox saw the necessity for a local faith community to meet in worship to test and affirm that the leadings of individuals were in truth from God. Friends believed that Divine Spirit not only lay within the individual, they believed that God spoke through the gathered Meeting. Belief in corporate spiritual discernment opened the way for placing a check on the excessively diverse beliefs of seekers some of whose practices were rapidly discrediting Quakers as a whole and threatening the movement with disintegration. The authority of the Spirit speaking through the local worshipping community was the foundation of order and thus the Monthly Meeting as the primary corporate body among Friends came into being.

Some form of wider order was also needed that would give Friends a corporate identity and allow for communication and mutual support among scattered groups. Meeting of elders from the Monthly Meetings began to gather in the various regions of Britain out of which came the practice of developing a common Discipline. Quarterly and Half-yearly Meetings have their roots in these regional gatherings.

Within a short period of time the need for a nation-wide gathering of Friends was felt, spurred by the need to speak with a common voice to Parliament and to gain strength in numbers to relieve the suffering of Friends and their families persecuted and imprisoned by those who could not tolerate or understand the message they bore. Alongside the Meeting for Sufferings, a national gathering of elders became the practice as well. Here we see the seeds of Yearly Meetings in session, both for practical matters and for matters of discipline and spiritual nurture.

Canadian Yearly Meeting reflects this basic structure with the overarching importance and authority of Monthly Meetings, and the use of regional and national gatherings and Meetings to ensure coherence as a faith community, to adopt a common Discipline and to act together to relieve suffering, now mostly of others rather than of ourselves. Some attribute George Fox's

organizational genius -- and his belief that it reflected “gospel order” -- with the survival of Friends as a religious community.

While we still use Fox’s basic form of organization, we have evolved greatly from the times and practices of the 17th century. The basic principles of organization may remain, but the details change according to the circumstances of modern society. There is no suggestion that we abandon the basic principles of gospel order. But new Light is possible and Canadian Friends may, with Divine Guidance, reorganize themselves to meet the demands of communication, geography, and time that challenge us in ways that could not have existed in Fox’s time.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

There are a few basic principles regarding the relationships between the various parts of Canadian Yearly Meeting that are fundamental. Clarity about these relationships is essential for developing and understanding any organizational model:

the Monthly Meetings are the primary unit of organization among Friends; everything begins and flows from this point

Yearly Meeting in session<sup>1</sup> is the means whereby Monthly Meetings come together to discern matters of faith and of common purpose and activity

Representative Meeting is a body that may be delegated to carry out certain prescribed functions on behalf of Yearly Meeting.

Representative Meeting is a creature of the Monthly Meetings in that each Meeting is represented and its activities are approved by Yearly Meeting in session

these various Meetings are not in a hierarchical relationship; all use Quaker practices of corporate discernment

## **RATIONALE**

We began with a sense that there are problems with our present structure and operation. One of these is a lack of community. On one hand some Friends in the east and west feel alienated from the concentration of Friends in the centre of the country; and on another, individual Friends in their local Meetings are isolated from the Yearly Meeting structures which serve them.

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<sup>1</sup> Yearly Meeting is all of us, the entirety of individuals and organizations that fall within the umbrella of Canadian Yearly Meeting. We use “Yearly Meeting in session” throughout this document where we mean the annual gathering held in August each year.

A second problem is that of resources. Our structure is large enough to meet the needs of a much larger Yearly Meeting, but it does not have the numbers to support it. Both human and financial resources are strained; it is difficult to find the people able to take on all the responsibilities of our national committees and to pay for all the travel they entail.

There are two recent minutes which we took as a basis for developing a model:

Basic principles for any restructuring need to be concerned for

- maximum accessibility of Yearly Meeting to all Friends in all regions of Canada
- right use of financial and other resources
- the need for spiritual nurture
- concern for youth
- the need for carrying out the business necessary to the life of the YM

*CYM Minutes 96 #76*

Representative Meeting may act on behalf of the Yearly Meeting in

- financial matters
- personnel matters
- situations in which urgent action is required
- matters which fall clearly within existing testimonies or policies
- other matters which may be delegated by YM

*CYM Minutes 97 #49*

The model set out below is designed also to take into account concerns which have been raised by Friends across the country. These include:

- the necessity of nurturing our faith and ourselves spiritually
- the importance of preserving the way in which we make decisions together
- the desire to strengthen regional Meetings and gatherings
- the concern to reduce the amount of internal business done at YM in session
- the importance of trust in each other, in the ways in which we work together, and in the committees and Meetings asked to carry out our work as a corporate body

We seek a balance between our national gathering which is important to our life and unity as a community but expensive and distant for many Friends, and regional gatherings which are more accessible and provide for fellowship and the nurture of our faith in important ways. We hear the appeal from many Friends for holding Yearly Meeting sessions that have fewer items of business on the agenda so that we may consider them well and in a manner that is grounded in the guidance of the Spirit.

The major assumption we draw from the above, is that Friends are comfortable with Representative Meeting being given the primary responsibility for attending to the practical matters of common business, leaving Yearly Meeting in session with clearly prescribed authority but with less business. Such a model will depend on Monthly Meetings naming Friends to serve on Representative Meeting who are willing, able and concerned for the nature of the business that

will come before that body. They will be the linchpin pins around which the success of the model will depend, serving their Monthly Meetings who in turn are the primary source of inspiration for what is decided.

After recognizing the basic assumptions and principles upon which our model must rest, the Working Group began by identifying those functions which by nature must be carried out collectively (for example approving the Discipline, communications with external bodies), and those which are necessary, but which do not need to be carried out in a unified way (for example, making religious education resources available, nurture of faith). We then envisioned moving towards a model that places major responsibility for spiritual nurture and fellowship with regional Meetings that are more accessible for all Friends, including isolated Friends. Regional Meetings are not only closer geographically to the Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups, they have an advantage of being able to meet needs among us that are regionally different.

In short, our model places matters of faith and discipline with Yearly Meeting in session, conduct of business affairs with Representative Meeting, and spiritual nurture with Regional Meetings. Of course these can never in reality be discrete and it is vital to recognize that what ties this all together is the Monthly Meetings with their capacity and authority as the primary communities of Friends where faith and action come together.

Realizing the radical nature of what is proposed here, we also recognize that we need to suggest how such change might be managed, keeping in mind Friends' historic ways of implementing change. The model we suggest is one of evolution, beginning with relatively minor changes and seeking to fully involve the Monthly Meetings, Half-yearly Meetings, and Regional Gatherings, as well as existing committees and of course Yearly Meeting in session. It also assumes that readiness for change may vary from region to region and that flexibility and differences in implementation and timing will probably be needed.

## **A VISIONARY MODEL**

We present here a picture of what we see as the end result of a restructuring process, suggesting a time frame of six years for achieving a reorganized Yearly Meeting. Depending on Friends' wishes regarding amendments to our existing Organization and Procedure and on how quickly unity is reached on basic principles, it could take more or less time. It is also important to note that the model presented is a descriptive one that gives form to our ideas without meaning to be prescriptive. It is a model of how a restructured Yearly Meeting MIGHT look, not how we think it ought to look.

### **Monthly Meetings**

The authority, responsibilities and role of Monthly Meetings is not changed from our present practice. The Meetings, Gatherings, and committees that lie beyond these local faith communities

are to serve the Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups as they come together in matters of common faith and action.

### Representative Meeting

Representative Meeting is the administrative arm of Yearly Meeting carrying responsibility for finance, personnel, communications with external bodies (at the national and international level) as well as among ourselves, for overseeing collective work in relation to our testimonies, and other matters delegated by Yearly Meeting in session. Almost all committees could therefore be associated with Representative Meeting and their work reorganized under the oversight of three standing committees:

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| COMMUNICATIONS  | Relations with external bodies (national & international)<br><i>Canadian Friend</i><br>Quaker Book Service<br>Canadian Quaker Pamphlet Series<br><i>ad hoc</i> committees as needed   |
| PEACE & SERVICE | International Partnerships<br>Aboriginal Affairs<br>Jails and Justice<br>Peace and National Concerns<br>Representatives to CCC Coalitions and Commission on<br>Justice & Peace<br>Representative to Friends in Unity with Nature<br>Canadian Friends Foreign Missionary Board<br><i>ad hoc</i> committees as needed |
| ADMINISTRATION  | Finance<br>Personnel<br>Nominations (see below)<br>Records<br>Statistics<br>Grants for educational opportunities<br><i>ad hoc</i> committees as needed  |

Each standing committee would be named by Representative Meeting and the clerks of standing committees (3) would serve on Representative Meeting. We see these committees as umbrella groups of perhaps 6 - 8 persons under whose oversight the work of several sub-committees and individuals is coordinated. These committees would be responsible for organizing sub-committees and naming individuals to serve in various capacities. Where appropriate, sub-committee could be geographically concentrated, (for example, *Canadian Friend* and Records).

## Regional Meetings

Canadian Yearly Meeting does not at present have an entity called a Regional Meeting. We see 3-5 such Meetings evolving and deliberately chose not to use terms such as Half-yearly Meeting so that there would be flexibility as to frequency of meetings. We also deliberately chose the word Meeting to indicate its authority in matters of corporate spiritual discernment.

The boundaries of such Meetings would need to be established according to the wishes of the Monthly Meetings that would be associated with them. There are now natural groupings in the western and Atlantic regions, but there is a vast area in between which might be served best by two or three Regional Meetings. We noted also that Yearly Meeting in session has until the present provided many of the advantages of regional gathering for Friends living in Ontario and Quebec.

Regional Meetings would be charged with primary responsibility for spiritual nurture, fellowship, and communication with isolated Friends and Worship Groups where a Monthly Meeting is too distant. How these responsibilities are organized could vary from region to region, so we are avoiding suggesting a committee structure and have listed here only examples of activities.

- Requesting, receiving and responding to State of Society Reports
- Nurture of faith
- Membership of isolated Friends
- Care of isolated Worship Groups
- Fostering intervisitation
- Quaker camps in the region
- Young Friends and children's programmes
- Distribution of outreach materials
- Spiritual enrichment and encouraging educational opportunities

The nature of the responsibilities of Regional Meetings as outlined here could be greatly facilitated by the work of a Field Secretary in each region.

## Yearly Meeting in session

Yearly Meeting in session is the place where matters needing corporate discernment for the whole of Yearly Meeting rest. Monthly Meetings coming together in these sessions may, with the guidance of the Spirit:

- describe matters of common faith or that extend our understanding of the testimonies
- approve and amend the Discipline
- recognize new, or lay down Monthly Meetings
- receive reports for approval from Representative Meeting

attend to matters referred by, or not delegated to, Representative Meeting

Some committee work will continue in support of the work of Yearly Meeting in session:

DISCIPLINE REVIEW

PROGRAMME

Adult programme  
Children's programme  
Agenda

EPISTLE

Summarizing  
Writing

HOUSEKEEPING

Sundry as needed

There would continue to be a "Meeting of Elders" at Yearly Meeting in session, comprised of members of the local Meetings of Ministry and Counsel. As is now our practice, these individuals would have the responsibility to uphold the Meeting in prayer and to attend to nurturing the Spiritual life of the gathering.

Frequency of Yearly Meeting

The model that we are drawing is neutral to the frequency of Yearly Meeting in session. Nevertheless, we feel that it would be necessary for annual Meetings to take place until the changes proposed have been completed. At that time, sentiments may change because of the changing nature of how we conduct our business affairs. The differences in views now held among Friends regarding the frequency of Yearly Meeting gatherings may in part be fuelled by the difficulties that many have in travelling the distances required and the resulting sense that decisions are being made centrally without opportunity for face to face communication. It may be that when Yearly Meeting has fewer administrative responsibilities, these sentiments may change. Or it may be that as Regional Meetings evolve, they could host national gatherings on some kind of a rotational basis. Experience with a new structure may show the way.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is an entity like no other within Yearly Meeting. It has the legal responsibility of holding property in trust, and for making decisions related to that property including expenditure of interest income from invested funds. It is named by Yearly Meeting in session, but it is not a "committee" *per se*. We see no need to change this arrangement.

Nominations

The role of a Nominating Committee is crucially important to the ongoing strength and renewal of the Yearly Meeting. All Meetings within the Yearly Meeting have a nominating function to carry out and in general, each would have its own committee to assist with this. In the case of Yearly Meeting in session and Representative Meeting, we recommend that only ONE committee be named, that it be associated with Representative Meeting, but report to one or the other depending on circumstances.

We also strongly suggest that a Nominating Committee's role be enhanced to include responsibilities for identifying and encouraging Friends, especially newer and younger Friends who are not now involved, to take up service opportunities. A proactive role for a Nominating Committee could include keeping a list of potential Friends to serve in various ways, and to sponsor training seminars and workshops to assist Friends as they assume new responsibilities.

As a committee of Representative Meeting, Nominating Committee would continue to be named by representatives of all of the Monthly Meetings. This would replace the current practice of holding a Meeting of Delegates during Yearly Meeting in session.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Changes along the lines that we have proposed need to be approached with the understanding that they will be phased in. This will allow for existing committees and others to participate in the process and for dealing sensitively with the differences in the various existing regions of Yearly Meeting. We also need to be mindful of Friends' concerns that we pay attention to right ordering of changes to our Discipline. Our suggestions for implementation are therefore based on two assumptions:

1. that a two phase process be used where we move slowly from a model that is relatively centralized to one that is devolved.
2. that the Discipline be revised before changes are implemented.

### **Planning Committee**

The key to moving forward is the establishment of a committee that is charged with bringing forward a detailed implementation plan. Such a plan would be based on agreement of broad principles by Yearly Meeting in session and full consultation with Monthly Meetings and existing committees.

Individuals serving on a planning committee need to be well suited for the task. Geographic representation is important, but not at the expense of finding persons with time, and relevant experience and skills. Cost will be another factor. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting set up a planning

committee for its reorganisation work by appointing a special Naming Committee to find suitable Friends to serve.

A Planning Committee needs resources. It would need staff support and travel expenses. It would need time to consult and work out a feasible plan. Such work is outside the normal work of Yearly Meeting and could be given a time limit. Under these circumstances, special funds might be found in our trust funds. We may also wish to appeal for special donations.

### Phase I

Phase I would allow for a reorganization of committee work with the existing committees participating in how this would be arranged. Once an overall direction is approved by Yearly Meeting in session, this phase would begin by naming a Planning Committee and by having all existing committees report to Representative Meeting, with the exception of those continuing as committees of Yearly Meeting in session as noted above.

### Phase II

The second phase would be a gradual devolvement of the nurturing functions to Regional Meetings. It would begin with Monthly Meetings deciding on the boundaries and membership of each region and the naming of a clerk. Assumption of regional responsibilities would take place according to the state of readiness of each region. Committee structures would also vary according to needs and preferences within each region.

## **STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

### Phase I

needs strong staff support for transition

RM clerks & committee clerks need support field staff working with the regions

centralize coordination of ALL staff functions\*

consider employing a general secretary

consider naming a treasurer

### Phase II

staff at centre are admin. only

increased use of volunteers

\* We now employ around 12 persons in a staff role. Central coordination of all staff functions would be important to facilitate changes over time. This does not mean all staff being located in one place!

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

### Phase I

increased support costs for RM clerks  
and committee clerks

reduction in RM travel costs

reduction in committee travel where  
geographically concentrated

increased use of Canadian Friend during  
transition

### Phase II

support costs for regional volunteers

employment of field secretaries

no general secretary

financial administration primarily at local  
and national levels\*\*

\*\* Both Monthly Meetings and Representative Meeting administer finances. We suggest that Regional Meetings NOT be asked to carry this responsibility in any extensive way. Representative Meeting would provide funding for regional work either through staff expenditures or through reimbursing volunteer work. This arrangement could also allow for a form of "equalization grant" if there were significant differences in wealth between regions.

## TIME FRAME

Flexibility is important, but a time frame would give everyone involved opportunities to evaluate the progress of the work and to anticipate next steps. A time frame might look like the following:

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| YM - August '98  | Approval of broad outline of new structure<br>Appoint a Naming Committee for recommending membership on a<br>Planning Committee |
| RM- Fall '98     | Appoints a Planning Committee<br>Establishes procedures for retaining staff support for Planning Committee                      |
| YM - August '99  | Interim Report of Planning committee<br>First reading of revisions to the Discipline  |
| RM - Spring 2000 | Approval of budget for 2001   |
| YM - August 2000 | Full report of Planning Committee<br>Approval of Plan Details   |

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
|                 | Second reading of changes to the Discipline<br>Naming of new Nominating Committee<br>Approval of budget and staffing proposal for 2001 |
| RM - Fall 2000  | Plan for staff reorganization  |
| RM- Spring 2001 | Budget - revised 2001, new 2002<br>New structure committees named for 2001-2<br>Staff changes implemented                              |
| YM August 2001  | Further reading of changes to the Discipline<br>Phase I of new structure complete at rise of Meeting                                   |
| YM August 2002  | Report and evaluation of changes   |
| RM - fall 2002  | Planning begins for Phase II   |
| YM - August '02 | Recognition of one or more Regional Meetings   |
| YM - 2003-04    | Devolvement of responsibilities to Regional Meetings takes place as ready  |

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