

General Secretary's Report

Years of discernment by several committees led to a series of recommendations to effect the revitalization of this Yearly Meeting. One of those recommendations was the creation of the general secretary position. Friends at that time envisioned that someone serving in this position would serve as a catalyst for that revitalization. That is in large part how I understand my work, serving as a catalyst, since the work is far greater than any one person could hope to address and is rightly the work of us all together. My work is to enlist and support others in this work, the work of fostering greater life in the Spirit throughout this Yearly Meeting. Whether at a level of monthly,

quarterly/regional/half-yearly, or yearly meeting, it is all one work, for we are all part of one Society.

A significant amount of my time goes to representing us in the wider body of Friends, to being ultimately responsible for the good functioning of our staff, and to dealing with the myriad things that come to me day to day. With the time remaining, I do what I can to help us lay the foundations for a vibrant future. That work involves doing, and supporting others in doing, the long-term work of community building, supporting the gifts of others, networking, and furthering the work that will help us to deepen in our practice as Friends.

Visiting monthly meetings and worship groups is a very important part of this work. What I do when I visit varies enormously. Frequently I engage in active listening sessions about the life of a given community. Sometimes I am asked to help with internal conflicts, sometimes to lead workshops and retreats to help a community deepen, sometimes to help Friends better understand the work going on at a yearly meeting level. Often I am able to connect individuals or the group with resources at a quarterly/regional/half-yearly level, at a yearly meeting level, or within the wider Society. Visitation, and the networking it allows, remains the favorite part of my work.

I also make myself available on an ongoing basis, as requested, in supporting meeting clerks, Ministry and Counsel clerks, pastors, and others in addressing problems in their communities. These problems can range from how to handle difficult individuals to financial questions to advancement to questions of faith and practice.

In this past year I did not manage to make as many visits as I would have liked. While being quite sick with Lyme Disease for an extended period did not help any, the larger reason is that I was pulled in too many directions. I have already shifted my priorities some to allow more time for visitation, and I have been working with the General Secretary's Supervisory Task Group to further reassess the priorities for my work.

I welcome invitations to come visit monthly meetings and worship groups, whether to just come to be with you or to address particular issues. I carry a particular concern about helping Friends to deepen in our worship life, and am open to give workshops and retreats on that topic.

In this past year I spent a lot of time with some of our young adult Friends, listening to them talk about their spiritual lives and their sense of how they fit into our community, attending several of their retreats, and leading one retreat for them. Out of those experiences, and in conjunction with the Young Adult Concerns Committee, I worked to design a staff position to address their particular needs. Our Personnel

Committee is in the process of refining this further, and hopes to bring it to General Services this summer.

Tending to this part of our community is important work. Our young adult Friends are indeed a large part of the foundation for our future. We need to do better in caring for this part of our community, and Helen and I do not have the extra time to do so, without neglecting some of our other duties.

I supported the work of the Spiritual Nurture Working Group this past year, especially helping plan the series of retreats that will extend over a two-year period entitled “Feeding the Fire: Growing in Relationship with God.” This series is intended to pick up where the “Drawing Out Gifts” series of a number of years ago left off, supporting individuals in their spiritual growth so that they can better share their gifts at all levels of our Society.

Our Meetings for Discernment have also required a lot of my time as I have supported the work of the Meeting for Discernment Steering Committee, on which I serve ex-officio. Much planning and care goes into those days of Friends’ gathering from across the Yearly Meeting to listen to each other and the Spirit. I see those meetings as helping us to grow in our capacity for corporate discernment. Over time, this should serve us well as we grapple with difficult issues, and learn to do so in a way where we grow in community and in the Spirit.

I also organized and attended the two Nightingales Singing Weekends and one of the two NYYM/NEYM pastors’ retreats, and helped organize the multi-YM Christ-centered gathering, the “Whole Meetings” multigenerational retreat, and this year’s Superintendents and Secretary’s Retreat, all of which were at Powell House. I also helped organize, in collaboration with our clerk, the third consultation on how we support our children, youth, and young adults.

The Nightingales weekends tend to draw Friends from six or seven of our nine regions, building community locally and Yearly Meeting-wide. The pastors’ retreats nurture the nurturers of our pastoral meetings. The Christ-centered Friends gathering nurtures Friends who have felt alienated and marginalized in our Yearly Meeting. The Whole Meetings retreat and the consultations have sought to help us to find ways to become more of one community across the spectrum of age, a vital concern as we are not retaining many of our youngest members.

Most recently, I have been asked by the new clerk of the Advancement Committee to help revitalize the work of that committee. I am glad to do so, as that committee’s work is very important to our growth and future. I also serve on the Traveling Friends Advisory Group, and have agreed to lead that group’s effort to get that program up and run-

ning again. Our practice of Friends traveling is a vital part of how we are knit together into one body, and the more Friends we have visiting meetings, particularly our smallest meetings, the better.

Additionally, I have worked extensively with our Communications Committee as it has birthed our new Web site, a very important tool for advancement. I have also put in lots of time supporting the clerk of Financial Services in a very difficult budget year, and worked with the Liaison Committee/ad hoc group addressing how our budget may better reflect the priorities of the whole Yearly Meeting. I also worked with our Personnel Committee in the total revamping of our *Personnel Handbook*, which was so out of date as to no longer be a useful guide for managing our staff.

There is a lot going on in this Yearly Meeting at this time. Much of it is laying a good groundwork for the future. I feel good about what we have accomplished thus far, and good about the work I am doing.

Christopher Sammond