

## **Report to Annual Session, June 14-20, 2010**

### **Ministry and Advancement Committee**

A number of new initiatives have taken shape in Ministry and Advancement Committee during the last year; These are

- facilitating a web presence for every meeting to be an electronic signboard,
- providing advice and information on death and dying, and
- dreaming of year-round retreats and workshops, hopefully on a regional basis, to make it easier for more Friends to become involved and to grow in the Spirit.

I'll report on each of these initiatives.

#### ***Subcommittee on a Web Presence for Every Meeting and Worship Group***

We held a Web Workshop in late October 2009. After the workshop, the planners reconvened via conference call. It seemed clear that our first priority was to create a web presence for the eight meetings that did not have one already. We also understood that some of those meetings don't have adequate technical expertise. Following the workshop, Spoon River, Oak Park, and South Bend Friends each created websites on their own initiative. In addition, Clear Creek now has a website and Duneland's is in process, thanks to the volunteer efforts of Rick Robey of St. Louis Meeting. We're waiting for Oshkosh Friends to send us the "homework" we ask for (such information as when and where Sunday worship is held), so that Rick has what he needs to create an appropriate website. Bloomington-Normal Friends' website is also under construction thanks to Kevin Suess's efforts.

The new websites are beautiful! If your meeting that doesn't yet have a website, we encourage you to do the "homework" and send it to me – if you've forgotten what is needed, let me know and I'll send you the email again. In addition, check out the helpful article on do's and don'ts for Quaker websites, which appears in the newest *Among Friends*.

#### ***Subcommittee on Death, Dying, Grief and Transitions***

We wish to continue in the tradition of Friend Ernest Morgan, who recognized that our prevailing culture of denial about death and dying leaves many Friends ill-prepared when we, or our loved ones, sicken and die. Our meetings are also unprepared to support and help one another. We have agreed to the following statement of our purpose and goals:

To provide materials and advice to meetings and committees on Ministry and Oversight (or Ministry and Counsel) that help Friends and friends deal with death as an integral part of our spiritual lives, and practice loving community in the face of a death.

The tasks we have chosen to focus on are:

- Taking death back from the medical and funeral home industries by preparing for end of life issues with such things as a Power of Attorney, advance directives, and preplanning of burials and memorials.
- Making possible more soulful transitions by providing support for the person who is dying, support for the family during the dying, and support for the family after death.

- Providing a practical guide for meetings and mourners who, at an intense time, must take care of a variety of necessary tasks following a death, including the memorial service.
- Helping to break down our culture of denial by collecting Friends' stories about being present at a death.
- In addition, we are finalizing a Checklist for Preparation of Memorial Meetings, which we hope to publish shortly after annual session.

Our basic premise is that every death is a spiritual experience. If Friends can be helped to go into that experience with that expectation, we help make possible spiritual growth through choosing to be fully present in all stages of the death, dying, grief, and transitions process.

### *Thinking about the future*

Thanks to the strong expression of a hunger for year-round retreats and workshops we heard at the Visioning Workshop in January, and forwarded to Continuing Committee by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Mills Property, Ministry and Advancement Committee has begun discerning how we might begin to meet the need. One of our ideas is to have what David Finke calls "traveling road shows," where the same content and format can be made available on a more regional basis in our four-state area. Among other things in the works, Chuck Hutchcraft has volunteered to lead a program at Blue River Quarterly in the fall, at Camp DuBois. Chuck is not only a Quaker, he is a Zen priest, and has offered to share what Buddhism has to say about dealing with our own "Stuff" before heading out to save the world. Planning is in the early stages at this point, but when the announcement goes out via Sharon's e-list, all are welcome to participate. Y'all come!

Also, Saturday afternoon during annual session, Ministry and Advancement Committee is offering a workshop at the (air conditioned!!) Clear Creek House in order to find out exactly what sort of workshops and retreats you would enjoy. Again, y'all come! The more the merrier! We'll have a good time and have a festival of ideas together.

In preparation for this workshop, we held a few "dress rehearsals". Our concern was that many Friends in our meetings don't come to annual session, and we wanted their ideas too. So, instead of asking the mountain to come to Mohammed, Mohammed decided to hop the train and go to the mountain. We enjoyed ourselves, and Friends suggested they'd especially enjoy hands-on learning through the arts, and through lots of interacting and sharing with other Friends. What did they want to learn more about? They wanted spiritual deepening, and they also wanted to learn to walk our talk better. They had lots of creative suggestions along those lines.

In addition to these Meetings for Brainstorming, we conducted a brief survey, gathering information in response to three questions: 1) What practical arrangements do I need to come to an ILYM retreat? 2) What would help me decide to come to a retreat within 125 miles of my home? And 3) If cost would be a limiting factor, what would be my upper limit to attend a retreat? We will continue to collect responses to this survey at the Saturday workshop.

We want to highlight one clear preliminary result of this survey, for Friends to ponder in the coming year: Our respondents clearly were excited about having more retreats and workshops, especially if these were closer to home, but more than half reported having very little discretionary income. Many of these Friends are generously giving of their time and talents to their meetings, but simply don't have the treasure that many of us tend to assume is available for attending retreats and workshops. We need to find ways to make it easier financially for these dear Friends to attend our gatherings. Simply waving our hands and saying, "Ask your meeting," is leaving it up to the individual Friend to come forward and say, "I have limited income. Can you help?" This feels icky. We should be more sensitive. The initiative needs to shift to the meetings, and the quarterly and yearly meeting, to volunteer financial assistance, carpooling, babysitting and pet-sitting, so the opportunity to grow in the Spirit is more readily available. When we look around, we see few younger faces at annual session; here is an important way to make ourselves more welcoming to new faces and new energies.

Finally, Ministry and Advancement Committees are facing the loss of four of our beloved elders at once this year, as they all cycle off Ministry and Advancement at once. We warmly express our deep appreciation for the loving work, over many decades, of these four Friends. David Shiner has been our able committee clerk, as have Janet Means Underhill and Margaret Katranides. Margaret and Nancy Duncan have also served as clerk of the yearly meeting. Janet took the Ministry and Advancement committee from a state of near-exhaustion and made it a living force for Spirit in the late nineties. This Yearly Meeting, and the Ministry and Advancement committee, would not be what they are today without these four dedicated Friends. We thank them with all our hearts, and wish them well in the next stage of their journeys in God.