

Meeting Wednesday Evening 22 April 2020

We note this minute from Standing Committee:

SC1.20.6: Right Holding of Yearly (RHYM) Meeting Committee Report

Standing Committee approves the RHYM Committee report:

“We invite Regional Meetings, AYM Committees and individual Friends to respond to RHYM Committee suggestions on ways to streamline our business processes.”

Standing Committee noted the RHYM Committee will lay down its work at Yearly Meeting 2020. The Yearly Meeting will then decide how we continue to monitor the experiments in place.



The Future of Yearly Meetings Discussion

Summary of Discussion Held on 29 March 2020

Design of YM has undergone tumultuous change in the last two months. Quakers are adapting, with un-Quakerly rapidity.

Some of what we are doing now are experimental: some changes will be adopted permanently; others will be abandoned.

Could/Should Yearly Meeting be held less frequently?

The impact of environmental factors needs to be taken into account. Also, there are more options now for experimenting with ways to gather face-to-face and on-line. A less frequent face-to-face gathering (e.g. 18 months, two years) would be more manageable, and could be separate from the timetable for annual reports etc. Standing Committee could do more of the ongoing business in consultation with Regional Meetings. Regional Meetings could organize more regional gatherings.

Eighteen months brings difficulty of summer and winter (holidays) or Spring and Autumn (holidays). Summer now has big threats (weather, fires). Winter is cold in some places. September is unsuitable for students.

We started with a difference of opinion here:

- Some thought that 18 months or two years is ok.
- Others thought that annual meeting important, but that we might run a shorter event. A view that Yearly Meeting should be annual as it is not very frequent anyway. Annual is good for getting together.

- Maybe regional gatherings could alternate with Yearly Meetings. Acknowledgement that cost is a big limitation for some Friends. We might seek ways that it can be limited by reducing the length or combining with online participation.
- No one answer provides inclusion for all.
- Perhaps we need to rotate through several styles of Yearly Meeting.

By the end, we seemed to be leaning toward alternating physical and online gatherings.

Could we alternate between face-to-face and online Yearly Meetings

It would halve cost, have travel, carbon impact, better access for remote Friends.

There was reasonable agreement here if Yearly Meeting 2020 (online) goes well,

- A face to face Yearly Meeting could alternate with virtual Yearly Meetings.
- Business decisions need to be made differently.
- The physical contacts between people are important, and the links that are made. In the longer term, a meeting should be held every year.
- We could encourage regional gatherings. These used to be held but have dropped away.

Might it be good to find a fixed venue?

It would be good to involve younger Friends in offering ideas about new ways to build community.

Moving the venue around as at present suits a diverse and large country like Australia and engages regional/local meetings more. A set venue might work if there was a national planning committee to take on organizing the event.

Fixed venue could be barrier for some Friends.

If we did this, there should be time limit (e.g. 3 years, 5 years, reviewable). Effect of seasons on the choice of the fixed venue should be a consideration.

Should there be a National Yearly Meeting Planning Committee?

It would help to have a group that maintains corporate knowledge, so long as all Regional Meetings are represented to ensure that consultation is adequate. There would still need to be a local group to make specific local arrangements.

We think there is efficiency in this. People may be happier to be on this National Committee if there is a fixed venue.

We reinforce that hosting Regional Meetings need to start planning a long way ahead of the event.

Mention was made of difficulty in getting people to agree to be on this National Committee. It could become too big a work-load for a few. More feasible if a fixed venue was adopted.

How can Yearly Meeting gatherings be made more affordable and accessible?

Could we adopt different times for the gatherings and business? (Similar to A/NZ's pattern)

More business done by Standing Committee and remaining decisions to be made by the whole of Yearly Meeting. Some people stay away because of too much business. Business might engage more people if it was more focussed.

Importance of maintaining an event that contains all the elements (learning, community, business), but less business.

Same venue for 5 years would be easier to organise. Could we find ways to make it cheaper?

Permanent fund for supporting attendance at Yearly Meeting to which people can donate and to which people can ask for financial support.

Can Yearly Meeting business processes be improved?

Yearly Meeting 2020 will bring a lot of experimentation with this. We will be able to assess how effectively the changes contribute.

This requires that Regional Meetings engage with the business processes early.

We note continuing levels of frustration that often: Regional Meetings spend time considering an issue or a question, making a response, then a Yearly Meeting prep session covers issues, then the topic is brought to the Yearly Meeting formal session. Some issues are then not completed and possibly held over to the next year. By this time, the original efforts of Regional Meetings are almost totally diluted and not included.

We were updated on what will happen this year. Will have plenary sessions for shared issues this year rather than prep sessions. We recognised (perhaps for the first time) the need to distinguish 3 types of business sessions (rather than the two we currently understand):

Reporting sessions	New type. Often provide important information about QuakersAustralia activities, even though no decisions need to be made
Prep sessions	Where decision(s) are required. Preliminary exploration of the decision
Formal sessions	Formalisation of the decision(s) needing to be made.

Currently **Reporting Sessions** tend to be ignored, if “no decisions need to be made”.

Perhaps Reporting Sessions can be handled via webinars, separate from YM time demands.

Share and Tells could be repeated online (providing more access) and spread out over weeks or months (more people likely to participate). Would need to decide if would be online event or not.

Can we re-imagine the purpose of QuakersAustralia, of Yearly Meeting (events)?

We affirm that effective design of Yearly Meeting events requires review and change to business processes, so that business is done well, and so it does not entirely dominate Yearly Meeting events.

We are learning to be a more connected organisation.

Can we become better adapted to supporting constituent Meetings (More like the British Yearly Meeting model)?

Need more social networking to engage young people. We have a group of Young Friends coming up. We need to find ways to engage with them and understand how the potential new generation of Friends communicate.

More parts of face-to-face Yearly Meetings could be streamed.

There is potential for greater outreach through the use of webinars for non-Quakers. The involvement of Young Friends in designing better on-line and social media options would be worthwhile. Is there scope for joint activity with New Zealand Friends?

Should we take the opportunity to take things out to the wider society?

Young Friends used to have an energizing effect on Yearly Meeting. We are not yet organized to take advantage of their energetic influence.

What questions is it now possible to ask?

Questions that seemed unthinkable before “Covid-adaption”? We have made many necessary adaptations rapidly.

- Could the structures of QuakersAustralia enable us to respond in a timelier fashion when needed? Concern that current structures serve the preservation of what already exists but impede our ability to be responsive or proactive.
- What do we need to do with Yearly Meeting in order to have the Society continue?
- Is the current crisis the opportunity we have been seeking in order to make needed changes?

We recognise caution about change is expressed by some Friends.

Notes compiled by Michael Searle using notes contributed by David Purnell, Susan Rockliff and Lorraine Thomson.