

Future of Yearly Meetings

Summary of Discussion on 29 March 2020

Eighteen Friends attended this meeting, held via Zoom. A paper by Michael Searle had been circulated in advance. After introductions, Lorraine summarised the main points of the paper including the suggested three main purposes of YM gatherings – all ages community, business discernment, and learning and sharing. The meeting divided into five small groups to consider 5 questions. Each group took one question, then reported back. Below are notes on what each group considered.

1. **Is there a right time for YM?** There was no clear answer because of different factors that need to be taken into account, such as time zones, weather, the needs/preferences of families, the possibility of on-line and residential gatherings. One approach would be a combination of 4 days in residence for interactive learning, and 3 days for business (possibly some or all on-line).
2. **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.
3. **Should YM 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 (eg 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 RMs. RMs could organize more regional gatherings.
4. **Should there be a national YM planning committee?** It would help to have a group that maintains corporate knowledge, so long as all RMs are represented to ensure that consultation is adequate. There would still need to be a local group to make specific local arrangements.
5. **How can YM gatherings be made more affordable and accessible?**
 - **Shorter:** 5 days, 4 days (x2).
 - **Alternate** between face-to-face and online YMs ... half cost, half travel, remote access
 - **Same venue for 5 years** – easier to organise, find ways to make it cheaper (x2).
 - **Permanent fund** for supporting attendance at YM, people can donate, people can ask for money.

- **Some of the business at other times**, outside of YM face-to-face, try online preparatory sessions.
- **Frustration** that Prep session covers issues, then re-done in the formal session, some issues held over to the next year!
- **Different times** for the gatherings and business.
- **Share and Tells** could be repeated online (more access) and spread out over weeks or months (more people likely to participate).
- **Zoom connections** offer great opportunities, live talks are better, immediate, nourishing
- **Defined time period:** 1 week or 1 month.

The meeting concluded that a further meeting to discern recommendations to the YM committee would be desirable.

David Purnell