

Report to Interim Meeting
Ad hoc Intervisitation Committee
March 23, 2013

“Might there not be a richer and more abundant life in so wide a family?” - Ann Riggs¹

I. Proposal to Lay Down the Ad hoc Committee and Create an Intervisitation Working Group

Our Intervisitation Program has given our Yearly Meeting a transformational experience with many blessings, including some quite unexpected ones. We have received more than we have given. It arose in 2004 from pain and frustration but has brought us to a very different place. Through the power of the Divine Spirit and God’s Grace, it has taken us from anger and agony to hope and healing... and even joy, for many of us. It has been a wondrous gift to our Yearly Meeting and, we hope, to the whole Religious Society of Friends. It is time to take stock of that gift and try to see what God would have us do with it going forward.

The blessings have included an opportunity to grapple with the depth of diversity among Friends and seek what lies underneath and holds us together. We have experienced the power of the ministry of presence, which not only can help us deal with diversity and division in the wider world of Friends but also within our own yearly and local meetings. We have experienced the power of being faithful to a core Quaker value of seeking unity with each other in God’s Truth and Love. We have experienced the power of finding a Spirit-led way to work through difficulties, to witness to Truth, and to get along with and bring out the best in each other, instead of quitting and walking away. We have come to understand that’s what being peacemakers demands of us.

The blessings have also included a rich opportunity to develop and experience deeper connections with the broader Religious Society of Friends and with Friends United Meeting (FUM) in particular. As individuals and as a community, we have enjoyed the spiritual gifts that our many visitors have brought to our annual sessions, including some participation by and for younger Friends. We have made some specific deep and sustained connections with both individuals and programs, for example through participation in the United Society of Friends Women International (USFWI). Intervisitation has also deepened connections within the Yearly Meeting by drawing people into more involvement in the Yearly Meeting as well as connecting us with each other in the process of connecting with our visitors.

In particular, the blessings have included reawakening to the value of an ancient and foundational Quaker practice and relearning its ways. We have seen how powerful intervistation and the ministry of presence can be in building and sustaining the Religious Society of Friends. Several other Yearly Meetings within FUM have also seen its power and have decided to revive this practice. Moreover, we have come to explore how to apply it within our Yearly Meeting as well as outside of it. How do we sustain this rich and valuable practice?

As it happens, our committee was created as an ad hoc committee, and Interim Meeting has set its charge to expire today. Yet our charge was one that can never be fulfilled. Our charge, we now realize, is an ongoing and intrinsic practice of our faith. As laid out in our mission statement, our charge is “to strengthen the Religious Society of Friends and nurture the beloved community of Friends... [and]to encourage, prepare, and support Friends to travel among Yearly Meetings with the faith that we can listen deeply, strengthen our relationships, and build our faith community.”

Our committee’s charge has been focused on rebuilding community within Friends United

¹ in a [post](#) on David Johns’ blog, speaking of the Kenyan Quaker outlook on the international family of Friends.

Meeting. As a Yearly Meeting, however, our experience has shown that the potential role for intervisitation is larger than that original charge. In fact, if we look at our Yearly Meeting vision statement, we see that intervisitation speaks directly to it and can help us fulfill it on many levels. The vision includes each of these aspirations:

- “to listen deeply and inclusively to each other...
- “to actively welcome all...
- “to teach and nourish Quaker ways of worship and service...
- “to uphold and promote Quaker values...
- “to support Friends Meetings in our region...
- “to expand opportunities for Friends to meet together and know each other in that which is eternal...
- “to serve others in love...
- “to share our gifts and resources... and
- “to witness in the world to our shared experience of the infinite love of God.”

Action Item: Therefore, we propose that Baltimore Yearly Meeting consider how to integrate intervisitation into its routine practice. To that end, we specifically propose laying down the ad hoc committee and creating in its place a working group of the Ministry and Pastoral Care (M&PC) committee. The charge of M&PC includes:

- “deepening the spiritual life of Baltimore Yearly Meeting and of its constituent Monthly Meetings.
- “calling forth and nurturing the gifts of the Spirit in the Yearly Meeting.
- “encourag[ing] and support[ing] Monthly Meetings as they recognize, publicly affirm and practically support those individuals who exercise their gifts in faithful ministry and service.
- “consider[ing] requests for Yearly Meeting endorsements of minutes of support for members traveling in the ministry outside our Yearly Meeting
- “maintain[ing] the Guidelines for Embracing the Ministry of Friends”

So we feel it is clear that M&PC is the right home for such a working group. In offering this proposal,

1. We believe that rather than adding an additional burden, such a working group can help facilitate the charge of the M&PC committee as it relates to traveling in ministry.
2. We also believe that such a working group may discern a broader charge than that of the current ad hoc committee on intervisitation (which is limited to intervisitation within FUM). We therefore propose that once created, the working group would draft its own charge for consideration by the Yearly Meeting.
3. Several members of the current ad hoc committee have expressed a willingness to serve on such a working group. We would seek the participation of at least one M&PC committee member in the group, partly to serve as liaison.
4. We would further propose that the budget for the ad hoc committee be transferred to the new working group and that disbursements from that budget would be authorized by the clerk of the working group.

Current Mission Statement of the ad hoc Committee on Intervisitation

The Intervisitation Program of Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) seeks to strengthen the Religious Society of Friends and nurture the beloved community of Friends, especially within Friends United Meeting (FUM). While BYM's concern regarding an FUM personnel policy planted the seed, that concern is not the program's focus. Rather, as we in BYM faced the pain we felt as a result of that policy, we awoke to the fragility, and in some cases brokenness, of the relationships among the yearly meetings and monthly meetings within FUM. Thus the goal of BYM's Intervisitation Program is to encourage, prepare, and support Friends to travel among Yearly Meetings with the faith that we can listen deeply, strengthen our relationships, and build our faith community. Our program assumes that intervisitation will be in all directions and those interested will offer and receive hospitality.

II. Call for Outgoing Visitors

It's time once again to start planning for our visits to other Yearly Meetings. This year there is also a special opportunity to attend the triennials of the United Society of Friends Women International and Quaker Men in Indianapolis, IN from July 4-7. See <http://www.usfwi.org/2013triennial.htm>.

We invite all of you to consider if you are led to be part of this ministry of presence and enjoy the opportunity to get acquainted with the wider world of Quakers. We ask prospective visitors to ask their Meetings for a clearness committee to season their leading to participate and upon reaching clearness to get a travel minute from their Meetings. Our committee reviews the travel minutes and refers them to Interim Meeting for endorsement. So please allow time for that process. In addition, we ask all visitors to attend our retreat for traveling Friends (see below). For more on our program, including a schedule of Yearly Meetings to visit, see our website at <http://intervisitation.bym-rsf.net>. You can direct your questions or let us know of your interest by email to bymintervisitation@gmail.com or by calling Jolee Robinson at (301) 588-1580.

Action Item: Endorsement of Travel Minutes for Jolee Robinson

III. Intervisitation Retreat <http://intervisitation.bym-rsf.net>

A Ministry of Presence Equipping Friends called to Intervisitation

- When:** 6/16/2013 12:30 to 4:30 pm (10am worship followed by potluck, 4:30 light dinner)
- Who:** all who have traveled or are considering traveling among Friends, their clearness/support committees, and other interested Friends
- Where:** Adelphi Friends Meeting

Are you interested in traveling or hosting a visitor? Are you supporting a Friend's leading to visit among Friends? Have you been a visitor or a host? What blessings or challenges have you had in your travels?

At this retreat you will have an opportunity to: share your experiences and hear those of others in your travels among Friends; ask questions about the nuts and bolts of traveling and supporting a traveler; connect this ministry with our Quaker faith and practice; and see what new Light is emerging among Friends.

To Register: Send an e-mail to bymintervisitation@gmail.com or call Jolee Robinson at (301) 588-1580.