

October 31, 2015

To: NPYM Coordinating Committee

From: Joyce Zerwekh, Multnomah Meeting representative to CC

Re: We request that Coordinating Committee develop a structure and process to seriously consider ways to revitalize Annual Session.

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Discussion at Multnomah Monthly Meeting

February, 2014. Reading from Meeting for Worship for Business notes. Annual Session attendance and structure were discussed in response to the NPYM Family Affordability Committee survey. Although Multnomah pays for children, their attendance is dropping. In conclusion, we then called for more retreat type activities, more community building with children, and less centrality of business. Our request was brought to Coordinating Committee.

August, 2014 Multnomah Meeting for Worship for Business, the following was recorded in response to the July Annual Session:

“Concern at the failure of NPYM to effectively address the Multnomah response to the Family Affordability Survey about why we don’t have more families with small children attending Annual Session.”

Discussion at North Pacific Yearly Meeting Annual Session

July 18, 2015. Joyce Zerwekh led a lively interest group at Annual Session wherein possible changes to re-energize Annual Session were proposed. Those ideas were recorded by several attenders and the summary was sent by the NPYM secretary to all NPYM meetings and worship groups. Multnomah Monthly Meeting received a copy and follow-up discussion was planned for Fall.

Response by Multnomah Monthly Meeting

October 11, 2015. A discussion was convened by Joyce Zerwekh and Megge VonValkenburg in response to the Annual Session interest group ideas. Main ideas then were reported and briefly discussed at Meeting for Worship for Business on October 18. The following recommendations have been raised through these discussions:

- Go back to steering committee structure so that issues are well seasoned before Annual Session. Right now minor decisions are forced onto the floor of Annual Session and endlessly debated. In the future we hope the “big stuff” will be the focus in more fulfilling business meetings.
- Look for alternatives to so much business in plenaries.
- Plan more small groups beyond the usual worship sharing. Small groups over meals or games, for instance.
- Find natural environments for a retreat centered AS.
- Adults and children working together, playing together: experiential activities for all ages.
- “Why would a family choose to take limited vacation time to go to business meetings?” Need time for renewal/retreat.
- In monthly meetings we have a whole month of threshing and winnowing between meeting for worship for business. At Annual Session we have one business meeting after another after another. Unwise.
- For important decisions, trust committees to do their work before brought to the floor.
- Consolidate open mic and community night and develop alternatives in the same time period.
- Develop alternative parallel activities throughout the schedule: playful, worshipful, healing, nature-focused, films, etc.
- Make pilgrimages to other yearly meetings who have developed energizing ways of proceeding.

Additional input: Following the Oct 18th business meeting, one thoughtful email from a seasoned Friend expressed some disagreement and proclaimed the centrality of business meetings as essential to do the committed work of dedicated Friends. He protested “the misguided notion that the Annual Session is an occasion for recreation...let us have our vacation at some other place and time.” Likewise this seasoned Friend said that “Family Night is an ancient practice among us...building the sense of unity and community that hold us together and brings us back year after year, and as such should continue not to have conflicting events running aside.”