

Call for Jubilee! in NYQM

20th of First Month, 2019

The New York Quarterly Meeting Ministry and Counsel Committee (NYQM M&C), in gathered Worship together and through Meetings held in prayerful waiting is considering a suggestion from the NYQM Clerk to call a Jubilee Year. Through this worshipful discernment, NYQM M&C agrees. A refresh is necessary.

We began with this Query: "There are many wonderful, loving people who are gathered into our communities and many groups doing important caring work. What is unique about the Religious Society of Friends that makes us worth existing? Are our structures, how we live with each other, actions and message consistent with its fulfillment? If not, how do we fix it?"

M&C recognizes that we are moving towards the completion of business that required many years of long and heavy laboring with difficult issues, pulling us in many directions. As the NYQM approaches nearly 50 years of existence, it feels like it is time to pause and take some time to turn inward, to actively and attentively create space for spiritually nurturing ourselves and our community. We acknowledge that we are in a time of transition.

Jubilee Years, as practiced by many Quaker Meetings in the last quarter-century, are used to revitalize a spiritual community by shifting their focus of time, energy and effort from doing "business" towards spiritual growth, renewal, Friendly Support, and fellowship.

We note that the year of Jubilee is a practice rooted in ancient scripture (Leviticus 25) and was not merely a time for resting. This was a time of acknowledgment that everything belongs to God and not to human workings. In agrarian terms, Jubilee acknowledges the completion of a natural cycle of human effort and while our fields seem to lie fallow, the soils are actively turned and rejuvenated in anticipation of greater growth. Jubilee years look to a year of joy and renewal as we refresh and return to our spiritual roots and Quaker roots. We expect that in order to achieve the transformation we hope for we will need to choose to focus on different activities, not cease acting altogether.

Preparing for this year requires all of us to consider the way forward and will be a year of unfolding as we envision what we would like the NYQM to be for all of us in the decades ahead. We offer the following openings for all Friends to express their thoughts and desires and for seasoning and collaboration—from our Monthly Meetings, from our QM committees—before we begin our Year of Jubilee.

To envision our Jubilee Year, M&C is calling for all to participate in this conversation for preparation. Between now and the April Quarterly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, we invite Friends to worship on this and bring their hopes and thoughts to us. To facilitate this, M&C will do two things: we will be sending queries for the Monthly Meetings to explore and ask that the clerk return a summary of these responses; and we (M&C) will host the third week of each of the next four months (1/23, 2/20, 3/20, 4/17) of the continuing Quarter-

wide Midweek Meetings for Worship as a Worship Sharing to listen to what Friends are thinking about the invitation for a year of restoration and reflection.

M&C spent some time in consideration of a time frame for our year of Jubilee and how such a year would change how we would run our Quarterly Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business and what and how essential business would be worked in. M&C is proposing, should the Body be interested in calling a Year of Jubilee, that we would start in July 2019 and end with the July 2020 Quarterly Meeting. In the Jubilee Year we suggest all Quarterly Meeting Committees, effective after our April 2019 Meetings for Business, lay down all non-essential business until after the Quarterly Meeting of July 2020. Just as one of the functions of the Jubilee Year was to cease planting to give a year of relief for land and laborers, during our Jubilee Year (July 2019-July 2020), we would keep the agenda of our Quarterly Meetings with a Concern for Business as spare as possible. We would encourage Committees of Friends to post their reports at least 2 weeks early to allow for review and comment—and then meet to pass the Consent agenda with very limited discussion/seasoning on the floor. Instead of long meetings deliberating over agenda items, we would use our Quarterly Meeting time to nurture the spiritual growth of our Quaker Community through a variety of programs that all of us would take part in putting together.

We imagine July Quarterly Meetings at the beginning and end of this year to function as a day or weekend-long retreats for the Quarter. We are inviting our monthly meetings (pairing large meetings with smaller meetings) to host the three QM meetings in between (July, October and January), creating programs lifting up spiritual topics ranging from spiritual play to forgiveness to “what do Friends do?” (and topics we haven’t envisioned yet). New York Quarterly Meeting may also choose to host a series of workshops or retreats focused on the various themes of Jubilee during this year. We look forward to hearing suggestions about these from all of you.

Monthly Meetings may also wish to experiment with what activities are essential and nurturing to the Spirit of their communities. QM Ministry and Counsel is seasoning a set of queries to offer to our Monthly Meetings to facilitate this. While it is essential to have monthly meeting participation in the QM Year of Jubilee, we do not expect our monthly meetings to declare one themselves unless they so desire.

QM Ministry and Counsel notes that some other Quarterly Meetings in our Yearly Meeting and throughout the US have the freedom to meet in worship and fellowship without much “Business” on a regular basis, with all of the monthly meetings participating. Thus is fellowship and trust built without the pressure of decision-making; this nurtures the ground so that when a decision is necessary, Friends are not responding from a place of spiritual depletion or mistrust. We hope that taking a year to engage our Quarter in this manner will replenish us to a baseline of familiarity with how Spirit grows in the different fields in our community and how it moves among the Body when we decenter concerns such as finances, property, and legal concerns. Let us see what Love and Community can do!

In Friendship,

Nancy Britton (ex-officio)

Margery Cornwell

Beth Kelly

Joan Malin

Jim Morgan

Steve Monroe Smith (c)

Dan Truman

Robert Wilber