

Report based on Discussion of NYQM Queries about a possible Jubilee Year held at Flushing MM on 16 February 2018

Present: Jeff Angell; John Cho; Liz DiGiorgio; Jeffrey Guyton; Ron Hogan; Caroline Lane, ; Matty Lau; Linda Shirley; Bob Wilber (NYQM M&C); Hugo Lane (M&W and discussion clerk); Dan Truman (Discussion Recording Clerk)

Friends gathered in silent worship at 12:55 in preparation to consider the queries and call for a Jubilee year to mark 50 years since the establishment of the New York Quarter. They are as follows:

1. Is this leading being brought to us in the right spirit?
2. What obstacles and challenges does it offer us?
3. What opportunities for growth does it bring with it?
4. Are we willing to participate in the success of this leading?
5. What other related considerations would we undertake as we season this leading?

After reading the queries, Bob Wilber suggested attending first to the call and then to the queries. The call was greeted with enthusiasm with one Friend sharing that the call to use the year for spiritual growth was challenging but worthwhile. Bob Wilber then suggested dividing the discussion into two parts: 1) Things done in preparation for the Jubilee Year and the events and 2) events and experience of the Jubilee Year once begun.

I. Preparations for the Jubilee Year are already underway. 1) These include discussions in monthly meeting like the one we were taking part on. 2) The establishment of a Quarterly midweek meeting for worship held at 15th Street Meeting each Wednesday, where the third midweek meeting for worship with worship sharing about the Jubilee proposal after the end of regular worship.

II. The question of things to be done during Jubilee Year once begun brought much discussion. Given that the Quarter has not yet decided, it was suggested that we focus more on events and foci we might wish to have at the Quarterly level, and then talk more about things Flushing MM might do once the Quarter had made its decision. Before proceeding further, however, Bob Wilber went over the concept of sabbath and Jubilee as used in the Bible. These include: the forgiveness of debts; the release from shame; setting aside of grievances; and the laying down some of the work that has been completed and reflection on what work lies ahead. Given the recent completion of the separation of Friends Seminary from the Quarter, an event that was exhausting, has created rancor among us, Quarterly Ministry and Council sees the idea of a Jubilee year seems appropriate. Envisioned as part of this process would be time and opportunities for healing amongst us, as well as activities like workshops, retreats, special opportunities to worship and other renewing activities that would be made

possible by the laying down other work. As an example, Bob Wilber noted that the QM Clerk has estimated that if the usual practice of all six meetings in the Quarter reporting about their activities at each Quarterly meeting were changed to each meeting giving one annual report, at least an hour would be saved at each Quarterly meeting. Monthly Meetings could also host one or two events with smaller meetings cooperating so that the burden was not too great.

This discussion immediately engaged Friends, as many who were unfamiliar with the implications of Flushing being part of the Quarter sought a better understanding of what the Quarter does and how its functions differ from those of the Monthly Meetings on the one hand, and the Yearly Meeting on the other. The reasons for the establishment of Quarterly and Yearly Meetings were set up by early Friends were mentioned, as was the specific history of Meetings on Long Island, Manhattan and in Westchester, all of which had initially been part of Rhode Island Yearly Meeting. Further starting in 1670 those meetings operated as a Quarterly Meeting. Only in 1684 did Monthly Meetings begin part of the structure based on extant minutes. An explanation of the business conducted at the Quarter was likewise given. In particular, the Quarter's role as a property manager of both Brooklyn and Fifteenth Street Meeting Houses, as well as of the small intentional community Pennington House neighboring 15th Street meeting House and the Quaker Cemetery in Brooklyn was noted.

Attention was then refocused on the Jubilee Year, and what it might involve and what growth it could lead to. This led to questions about Flushing MM's capacity to participate. Given our own divisions, concern was raised that our meeting might well benefit from adopting the Jubilee Year with a focus on our own meeting rather than on the Quarter. The question of what the Quarter's Jubilee would mean for us as individuals and a monthly meeting was raised, and one friend even suggested that we as a monthly meeting may be hurting too much to participate in the Jubilee at the Quarterly Meeting level. The concern was also raised that while it might be easy to support the idea of the Jubilee in theory we needed to know the details and remember that supporting the idea would involve a commitment on our part as well. At the same time, another friend lifted up the need to determine what would be deemed essential business at either the Quarterly or Monthly Meeting level. It was noted that some Friends in the Quarter depend on support from the Quarter's Education Fund Committee in order that their children can attend Brooklyn Friends or Friends Seminary.

One issue specific to Flushing is that while Flushing MM has a long history of connection with other meetings in the New York Quarter, in its current form, Flushing MM has only been a member of New York Quarter since 2002, having originally decided to affiliate with Long Island Quarterly Meeting when New York City Quarter was set up nearly fifty years ago. We joined New York Quarter when it became difficult to find members able to attend Quarterly Meetings held at other Meetings in Long Island Quarter. While there is enthusiasm among Friends to revitalize our connection to the Quarter, it is also true that the tensions created by the separation of Friends Seminary and NYQM have affected us and some members' feelings about the Quarter.

Bob Wilber noted that one reason Quarterly M&C is proposing the Jubilee Year is it would help us solve the problems in the Quarter organically.

As the Meeting progressed the Clerk of the Session reflected back Friends saw the value the Jubilee could have in bundling our connection to the Quarter and that it could also create opportunities for our meeting to grow by giving attention to the spirit of Jubilee. He also noted that while not covered in order, we did appear to have addressed all the queries put forward by NYQM M&C. Regarding Query 1 and 3. All seem to believe the proposal has been brought forward in the right spirit and that a number of opportunities are seen. A number of challenges (Query 2) were noted. These included practical matters like determining what would be essential business. considered, as well as how being active in a small meeting like Flushing MM can create responsibilities that make it hard for Friends to feel they can visit other meetings or attend Quarterly Meeting. This may affect our ability to participate in the leading, even if people approve of the idea (Query 4).

The opportunities this leading presented were several. Participating would inevitably bring us closer to the Quarter. In participating more in the Quarter, the experience could deepen our appreciation of the value of doing business according to Quaker practice and finding unity of spirit among a larger body of Friends than we habitually do during Monthly Meetings. The experience would likely lead to new friendships and more personal interaction with Friends we do not know as well. There was also the hope that our participation would not just lead to increased activity, but growth, both on a personal level, and in respect to increased attendance and membership. It could be a powerful opportunity to present to the world that we are Friends provide the chance for just to show people what Friends do. More narrowly, the Jubilee could help offer ways for the Quarter to get beyond the Brooklyn MM - 15th Street MM corridor that dominates the Quarter.

Consideration of this leading also sparked other thoughts (Query 5). One friend reflected that we gather once a week in silence for an hour and asked what would it be like for us to silent for an entire year? In that spirit the idea was expressed that Flushing MM might still wish to consider having its own Jubilee year, even if the the Quarter does not proceed with the leading. At the same time, if the Quarter does go through with the Jubilee, but only those members of Flushing who already participate in the Quarterly Meeting attend, those people would still bring back the nourishment they received to Flushing MM. It was also noted that just because we would be laying down some work, we should not feel it necessary to overload ourselves with too many activities. Jubilee will show the way. Once Jubilee begins, way will open, and taking the opportunity to do less “business” and focus on joy than we currently imagine when we invite attenders to “come try meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business.

There was enthusiasm also for a variety of potential activities and initiatives that might be made more feasible with greater connections between the QM and Monthly Meetings. For example, it was noted that despite recognizing the need. Flushing MM has been unable to organize a way to offer support to Friends when they are sick or

pregnant, but connections with the Quarter might allow way to open on that. Other activities that Friends raised up as ways to mark the Jubilee included:

Possible Activity Topics (QM and MM)

- History of the Quarter could be a worship sharing topic
- Friendly -8s dinners that brought together people from more than one Monthly Meeting for a potluck meal, was suggested as a way to help build community through softer interaction. But needs someone to organize it —a variety of events, some for singles, some for families, some mixed.
- Cross MM or QM prayer partners/check-in buddies. There's no reason 1 or 2 people cant' talk to each other on a weekly basis to check-in.
- QM may wish to investigate technology (Like Zoom-video conference meetings Buffalo MM is experimenting with to increase access for home bound or ill Friends. Not ideal but some benefit.
- Day retreat at cemetery by MM's or by QM.
- Could have camp-out again at FMM —open to wider QM community.
- Take turns leading a monthly worship-sharing session or sharing of own spiritual journey while being held in the Light during account.
- Found time at QM could be used for grater silent/expectant worship between agenda items.
- Essential business - QM&C would bring recommendations and Quarterly Committees might bring forward recommendations of what business they feel would be essential.
- We have to eat anyway, so let's eat together more often.
- AT FMM we're an actors meeting (many actors are members or attenders) maybe we could do a reading of selected early meeting minutes.

The meeting ended in worship