

Way Forward Working Group

May 2024 Report to Representatives Committee

With thanks to our dedicated group members and contributing Friends:

John Huyler, DeAnne Butterfield, Jamie Newton, Sara Keeney, Charlene Weir, Marcia Elliott
Bruce Thron-Weber, Bob Barnard, Pam Garcia, and Lee Quinby

Introduction

Responding to what we have heard in visits to Friends throughout the Yearly Meeting – yearnings, frustrations, insights, suggestions – the Way Forward Working Group offers a sense of direction with promise for the future. Our search has led to a vision of Friendly community, spiritual enrichment, enhanced communication and networking, cooperative endeavors, and sharing of resources, supported by light, flexible, versatile organization.

We need one another in this present, as we surely will in the even more challenging future that we see emerging. Our experiences with IMYM Friends over the past year encourage optimism that we can, indeed, be the Quakers we need to be for one another, as we strive to become the Quakers the world needs.

Intermountain Yearly Meeting (IMYM)

IMYM provides support and resources to the unprogrammed Quaker community across the Rocky Mountain states, connecting Friends of all ages in fellowship and worship, enriching our knowledge and practice as Friends, conducting business together, and nourishing our leadings for work in the world. We find joy in gathering together.

Spirit-led Quest

Friends' discernment and actions are achieved through prayerful collective seeking. Our structures, administration, and programs must be designed toward a common purpose with joy, strength and light, in an atmosphere of flexibility. We open ourselves to the Spirit as we worship together, so that each person's measure of the light will strengthen and lead us as we face the future.

Call for a Way Forward Working Group (WFWG)

The Way Forward Working Group was formed in April 2023 by the Representatives Committee to discern the state of IMYM and its purpose, priorities, and future operations, and to report back to the Representatives Committee in the spring of 2024 with observations and recommendations.

[Appendix 1](#) contains the Representatives Committee's charge to the Way Forward Working Group.

The Way Forward Working Group Process

The members of the Way Forward Working Group, plus the IMYM Presiding Clerk and the Representatives Committee Clerk, visited nearly all Monthly Meetings. ([Appendix 2](#) lists our visits.) We visited in pairs, and occasionally singly. Our visits included potlucks, programs after worship, an introductory slide show, leading a "Listening Into Wholeness" session, a short worship sharing session with specific queries, and brainstorming. Queries are listed in [Appendix 3](#).

Organization of the Report

This report is organized around four themes that emerged during our visits to the monthly meetings of IMYM, and through our discernment: **Gathering, Youth, Connecting Friends**, and **Organizational Sustainability**.

Under each theme, we provide:

- Excerpts of what we heard in our visits
- Recommendations for the future, some of which advise that we continue current practices that serve Friends well.
- Items for discernment and possible approval as minutes at meetings for business during the 2024 Annual Gathering.

We recognize that when no one is led to accept a role or take responsibility for a task, that function may need to be changed, dropped or addressed later, as strength and light are found.

In our monthly meetings and throughout our Yearly Meeting, Friends want and need an IMYM organization that facilitates and supports communication and gatherings that can lift, inspire, nourish, and empower us in the life Isaac Penington described in 1667, of “love, and peace, and tenderness ...and helping one another up with a tender hand.”

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Report and Recommendations

1. **Gathering: Continue to gather for fellowship and spiritual renewal**

What We Heard

Members expressed deep gratitude to their Monthly Meetings and IMYM for their Quaker spiritual life. They spoke of a yearning for more spiritual renewal, fellowship, and enrichment. The Annual Gathering is a treasured tradition, offering connection, fellowship, spiritual renewal, youth participation, and doing business together. However, not all Quakers in the Yearly Meeting attend the Gathering and in the last few years IMYM has lost attendance and some of its spiritual depth.

“My expression is gratitude – I am over committed – I have found refuge with the stillness, simplicity here.”

“[The Gathering is about] solidarity building – [to] put things in place for the future; harness the power of the bigger community (probably IMYM) to get things done, fostering Collective spirit.”

2024 - 2025 Recommendations

1. Align our expectations with the capacity of volunteers and staff. In order to continue the Gathering, the expectations of the Gathering must match our capacity. Develop a shared understanding of our cooperative ownership and the shared benefits from our yearly meeting. Each one of us can find ways to add our efforts, singly and in groups, to create a collaborative vision of how the Gathering can continue without placing too high a burden on any one person.
2. Provide the necessary administrative and paid staff to support a yearly gathering. Establish the understanding that increased reliance on staff allows us to function and that we must provide the needed financial support.
3. Establish a norm that everyone in attendance will find some way to serve at the Gathering. Welcome and bless volunteers to contribute in their own ways.
4. Recognize that if no one is led to take on an annual gathering task with strength and light, the activity will be dropped, postponed, or done on an ad hoc basis.
5. Add more time for plenary worship during the Annual Gathering.
6. Ensure an active and involved Ministry and Counsel Committee to guide our transition, nurture worship that is gathered and healing, respond to controversies and suggestions for change, and hold the Yearly Meeting in the Light.

2. Youth: Attract, engage, nurture, and empower younger generations and families

What We Heard

With spirit-led commitment to the children and youth in our care, we can find the creativity and capacity to engage families and their young children more effectively. Let us work together to design fun and meaningful programs that lead children and teenagers to invite their friends. Including more young people would help revitalize IMYM by strengthening the intergenerational experience for everyone. There is widespread distress about the decrease of young families, children, and young Friends in monthly meetings and at the IMYM gathering. Many meetings no longer have a children's program. Young people are inspired by the example of Quakers who boldly live their values and commitments ("walking the talk"). Youth engagement may be the ultimate measure of success for our collective efforts to re-invigorate IMYM and monthly meetings. Remember Isaiah 11:6 - "...and a little child shall lead them."

"Commitment to peace and justice is really appealing and important to young people right now."

"More intergenerational activities that don't divide the ages and encourage youth participation"

2024 - 2025 Recommendations

1. Create an IMYM Youth and Families Advisory Group to serve one year to identify approaches to building a vibrant and growing children's program across IMYM. The advisory group will consist of individuals for whom this issue is a calling, including youth. Their task is to report suggestions and recommendations at the 2025 Gathering, with staff support as needed.
Create a minute with this recommendation.
2. Strengthen our support, financial and otherwise, for Youth Program Coordinators at the Gathering and throughout the year.
3. Increase IMYM support for Mountain Friends Camp, and find ways to learn from Camp leaders regarding ways to involve young Friends of all ages.
4. Facilitate communications using imym.org to help families with children gather informally at campgrounds on their way to and from the Gathering, thus reviving the spirit of Early Days. Networking can foster gatherings of Friends from more limited geographical areas, even "flash" gatherings requiring little preparation beyond reservation of a group camping area and invitations.
5. Engage JYF and SYF in an *Appreciative Inquiry* process by asking what's working and not working for them in the IMYM provisions for young Friends. Ask them to envision better IMYM support for their personal growth and spiritual development.

3. *Connecting Friends*: Expand the collaborative and connecting role of IMYM to facilitate year-long sharing of ideas and information among Meetings, with IMYM as the hub.

What We Heard

Friends and Meetings yearn for a community that grows together in the spirit, and for connections with each other and the larger Quaker world. IMYM is more than the Annual Gathering. How can IMYM resources be used year-round to nurture, sustain, and grow the spirit in our lives and the life of our meetings?

“What does IMYM do, anyway?”

“For a Gathering of unprogrammed Friends, we have a lot of programs.”

2024 - 2025 Recommendations

1. Increase the budget for the IMYM Quaker Intervisitation (or Traveling Friends) program. Place a notification of the program on the website and create an oversight process through the Steering Team (see below). **Create a Minute with this recommendation.**
2. Create a Communication Working Group to identify approaches and determine needs, duties, and skills to support IMYM communications and outreach. Is there strength and light for a communications committee or creation of an outreach plan? Is this a priority for use of paid staff? How do other Yearly Meetings perform these roles? Report suggestions and recommendations to the IMYM Representatives Committee. **Create a Minute with this recommendation.**
3. If there is strength and light, create a Volunteers and Participation Work Group to explore effective ways to increase participation and volunteerism at the gathering and within the Yearly Meeting. Report suggestions and recommendations to the IMYM Representatives Committee. **Create a Minute with this recommendation.**
4. Complete the document archive and repository function on the www.IMYM.org website.
5. Use the IMYM website and directory to facilitate sharing of resources, programs, and information between monthly meetings and Friends.
6. Solicit volunteers to curate, organize and offer a pilot *Quakerism 101* program to IMYM Friends, and/or other approaches to learning about Quaker history, faith, and practice. For example, one monthly meeting held weekly discussions on the chapters of *Letters to a Fellow Seeker* by Steve Chase, a past keynote speaker for IMYM.

7. Renew support for the monthly online Peace and Social Justice Roundtable.
8. Invite and publicize monthly and regional meetings' online offerings of materials and programs that can connect Friends and monthly meetings throughout the Yearly Meeting. Invite monthly meetings to forward electronic newsletters so their links can be posted on IMYM.org
9. Share IMYM digital resources with meetings where there is low or no impact on staffing or the budget.
10. Defer proposals for new IMYM-created content and programs. (See [Appendix 5](#) for future program ideas received in WFWG visits).

4. Organizational Sustainability: Steward IMYM resources toward simplicity of governance, structure, and operations

What We Heard

Friends hope for a simplified IMYM structure that can be sustained with the energy that we currently have, capable of providing the nurturing community and growth that they know is possible.

Friends are led to IMYM service on their own strength and light, but the nominating process is hampered by outdated structures and procedures. Filling positions has put unwelcome pressure on monthly and regional meetings who now have this responsibility. Much is expected of the Yearly Meeting and its committee clerks that can be accomplished only with the support of paid staff.

“It seems to me that we need to think more about WHAT we are trying to sustain, and then the way may be clearer about the HOW for the future.”

“Make the structure simpler so people feel more open/able to volunteer.”

2024 - 2025 Recommendations

1. Approve and authorize an IMYM Steering Team composed of the co-clerks and three Friends who have experience with yearly, regional/half yearly, or monthly meeting leadership. Composition of the team will be approved at the June 2024 business meeting. The Steering Team will be entrusted to steward the operations of the yearly meeting between meetings of the Representatives Committee, making policy and operational decisions, providing guidance on priorities and programs. Following the 2024 annual gathering, the IMYM Steering Team will determine how it will operate, review and revise as necessary job descriptions of the co-clerks, and recommend updates to the bylaws for approval at the IMYM business meeting of 2025.
Create a minute with this recommendation.

2. Ask the Finance Committee to develop a long-term financial plan to evaluate the resources, costs, and priorities of IMYM overall. This group will project, for FY 25-27, sources and uses of financial resources and develop a financial plan that aligns with our priorities, achieves stability, and provides for prudent reserves, while being within the means of our monthly meetings' dues and donations. **Create a minute with this recommendation.**
3. Create a Nominations Working Group composed of current and past Nominating Committee members in consultation with the Steering Team to evaluate and simplify the current positions. The group is encouraged to address a revision of the composition of the Nominating Committee, the process of recruiting volunteers, and the roles of monthly and regional/half yearly meetings in the nominations process. The committee should report within one year. **Create a minute with this recommendation.**
4. Designate the Steering Team to identify criteria for evaluating progress on implementing the Way Forward recommendations, consulting with others as needed. Evaluate IMYM progress after one and three years. **Create a minute with this recommendation.**
5. Defer the practice of considering minutes on outside issues at IMYM business meetings in 2024 until the rise of 2025 gathering.

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APPENDIX 1: Representatives Committee Charge to WFWG

Representatives Committee Charge to Way Forward Working Group:

Under the care of the Representatives Committee, guide IMYM as it seeks unity about its purpose, vision, structure and operations. Identify why we exist, who and what we want to be in five years, broad strategies to get there, and 2024-25 priorities. Building on a Listening Session at the 2023 Gathering, Fall Queries, and conversations with IMYM Committees, meetings and Worship Groups, bring a plan to Representatives Committee in April 2024 for consideration and approval by IMYM business meeting. This plan will be implemented beginning at rise of the 2024 Gathering, recognizing that some activities of IMYM may need to be laid down and new activities may emerge.

Members of the Way Forward Working Group:

Charlene Weir (Salt Lake), Jamie Newton (Gila), John Huyler (Boulder), Sara Keeney (Albuquerque), and Marcia Elliott (Tempe)

The Presiding Clerk, Administrative Co-clerk/Treasurer, and clerks of the Nominating and Representatives Committees served as ex-officio active members of the working group

APPENDIX 2: List of Visits

Meeting	Date	WFWG Visitors
Albuquerque Monthly Meeting	March 16-17, 2024 In-person	Sara Keeney and DeAnne Butterfield
Boulder Friends Meeting	February 17-18, 2024 In-person	Sara Keeney, John Huyler, DeAnne Butterfield
Colorado Springs Monthly Meeting	March 3, 2024 In-person	John Huyler, Lee Quinby
Durango Monthly Meeting	April 6-7, 2024 In-person	Charlene Weir and Bruce Thron-Weber
El Paso Monthly Meeting	March 4, 2024 Zoom	John Huyler
Flagstaff Monthly Meeting	Multiple phone calls and e-mail exchanges	Charlene Weir
Fort Collins Friends Meeting	March 2-3, 2024 In-person	DeAnne Butterfield
Gila Friends Meeting	March 16-17, 2024 In-person	Marcia Elliott and Jamie Newton
Las Cruces Meeting	February 17-18, 2024 In-person	Marcia Elliott and Bob Barnard
Logan Friends Meeting	January 21, 2024 Zoom	Marcia Elliott, Charlene Weir, Bruce Thron-Weber
Moab Monthly Meeting	February 17, 2024 In-person	Charlene Weir and Bruce Thron-Weber
Montrose	May Zoom call scheduled	
Mountain View Friends Meeting	February 24-25, 2024 In-person	Charlene Weir, Sara Keeney, Bruce Thron-Weber
Phoenix & Tempe Friends Meetings	February 24-25, 2024 In-person	Marcia Elliott and Jamie Newton
Pima Monthly Meeting	March 2-3, 2024 In-person	Marcia Elliott
Salt Lake City Monthly Meeting	November 4th, 2023 In-person	John Huyler, Charlene Weir, Sara Keeney, and Bruce Thron-Weber
Santa Fe Monthly Meeting, Quaker House Santa Fe	March 2-3, 2024 In-person	Charlene Weir

Wyoming Friends Meeting	March 9, 2024 Zoom	John Huyler and DeAnne Butterfield
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APPENDIX 3: Queries for visits

Albuquerque Friends Meeting

- What could IMYM do to provide spiritual support to you, your family, and your Meeting?
- How would you envision a sustainable IMYM?

Boulder Friends Meeting

- What are the challenges your meeting faces and what might enrich spiritual life for your family and your meeting? What would be a spiritually led and sustainable yearly meeting?

Colorado Springs Monthly Meeting

- What are your Meeting's challenges?
- What could IMYM provide to enrich spiritual life for you, your family, and Meeting?

Durango Monthly Meeting

- What are your Meeting's challenges?
- What could IMYM provide to enrich spiritual life for you, your family, and Meeting?

El Paso Monthly Meeting

- What are your Meeting's current challenges?
- What could IMYM provide to enrich spiritual life for you, your family, and your Meeting?

Ft. Collins Monthly Meeting

- What are your Meeting's current challenges?
- What could IMYM provide to enrich spiritual life for you, your family, and your Meeting?

Gila Friends Meeting

- What are the challenges that your monthly meeting is experiencing now?
- What might enrich spiritual life for you, your family, and your monthly meeting?
- What could IMYM offer or create to help meet these challenges?

Las Cruces Friends Meeting

- What are the challenges that your monthly meeting is experiencing now?
- What might enrich spiritual life for you, your family, and your monthly meeting?
- What could IMYM offer or create to help meet these challenges?

Logan Friends Meeting

- What are your challenges?
- What might enrich spiritual life for you, your family, and your Meeting?
- What could IMYM offer or create to help meet these challenges? Remember that a joint creation may be possible, and that a one-sided offering from IMYM may not be.

Moab Friends Meeting

- What are you yearning for spiritually, for yourself and your family? What are you seeking? What are you passionate about spiritually? What are you feeling called to do?
- What challenges is your Meeting experiencing now?
- How could IMYM be relevant to what Quakers are called to do in current times? What ideas do you have about what IMYM can do to enrich and support your own spiritual life and that of your Meeting?

Mountain View Friends Meeting

- What's going on in your spiritual life; what has your energy?
- What challenges is your Meeting experiencing now?
- How could IMYM be relevant to what Quakers are called to do in current times? What ideas do you have about what IMYM can do to enrich and support your own spiritual life and that of your Meeting?

Phoenix and Tempe Monthly Meetings

- What are the challenges that your monthly meeting is experiencing now?
- What might enrich spiritual life for you, your family, and your monthly meeting?
- What could Intermountain Yearly Meeting offer or create to help meet these challenges?
[Please remember that a joint creation may be possible, and that a one-sided offering from IMYM may not be.]

Pima Monthly Meeting

- What are the challenges that your Meeting is experiencing now?
- What might enrich spiritual life for you, your family, and your Meeting?
- What could IMYM offer or create to help meet these challenges?
- What vision do you see for IMYM in the future?

Salt Lake Friends Meeting

Specific for younger members:

- What has your experience been with IMYM—if any?
- What might draw your age group again?

All members (Listening Each Other Into Wholeness activity):

- What does it mean to be a Quaker in current times? SK thought too broad, but it was something this group wanted to talk about.

Wyoming Friends Meeting

- What could IMYM provide to enrich spiritual life and connection for you, your family, and the Wyoming Friends Meeting?

APPENDIX 4: Proposals considered and deferred

1. Conduct Yearly Meeting business by Zoom, with all IMYM Friends invited to participate. Business meetings may be scheduled in 2024-25 for September, January, April, and June (hybrid, in conjunction with the Gathering). Each monthly and regional/half yearly meeting and IMYM committee will designate at least one participant who can be an active liaison to the business meetings, to assure consistent representation.
2. Lay down the IMYM Representatives Committee and promote representation and participation through virtual business meetings where decisions, policies and planning of the Yearly Meeting are adopted.
3. Prayerfully discern and approve future budgets for IMYM that align IMYM priorities and activities with projected revenues.
4. Seek additional representation on the Ministry and Counsel Committee to respond to controversies and suggestions for change and hold the Yearly Meeting in the light year around.

APPENDIX 5: Future Program Ideas Received in Visits

Ideas for future consideration

[\(We heard you, and hope IMYM can address these later.\)](#)

- Be a source for spiritual seekers as an introduction and welcome to Quakerism, providing spiritual support and fellowship in their journeys.
- Organize ways for meetings to share basic, operational information such as sources of insurance, buildings and grounds maintenance, meetinghouse rentals to outside groups, and Zoom competencies.
- Organize, publicize, and host IMYM-sponsored interest groups similar to those formerly offered at the Annual Gathering, but supported year-long.
- If inspired, and in conjunction with the Nominating Committee, survey current and recent-past IMYM committee members for suggestions on how to be more effective and sustainable as volunteers: Where did they find strength and light? Could committees be more effective if they were smaller or larger?
- If inspired and supported, initiate and manage social media for IMYM outreach and communication.
- Consult with Young Adult Friends about how IMYM and its meetings can be of service to their spiritual growth, connections, and activism.
- Actively seek out and facilitate information and conversation about topics of the day such as DEI, income inequality, immigration, nuclear weapons, and other areas of Friends' activism.
- Foster interest in and volunteer management of Roundtable-type programs to connect IMYM Friends around specific topics such as climate/earthcare, Native Americans, immigration, criminal justice, and nuclear weapons.
- Explore changes in timing and location of the Annual Gathering to better address needs of IMYM Friends, such as:
 - a. Gathering in person every two years, with enhanced regional gatherings, gatherings on Zoom, and intervisitation in between
 - b. Explore again venues that are more conducive for travel distance, variety of accommodations, easy access to nature, cost, and less formality
 - c. Investigate the feasibility of rotating the Gathering to locations around the region
- Provide information on the website for resources such as speaker lists, publications, events and programs of Quaker organizations to offer imym/org as a robust one-stop resource.

APPENDIX 7: Yet Another Essay about Quaker Burnout

Love is above all, and when it prevails in us we shall all be lovely and in love with God and one with another"

--William Penn

Have you ever felt pulled by the testimonies? All you want is simplicity and peace, and what you get are difficult decisions. "Let your yes be yes and your no be no" and pretty soon you yearn for just one more joyful "Yes." **Yes** becomes more difficult when you start talking about an event that happens only once a year; before the end of a year of work, anything can happen.

Even community can be a source of burnout. Still, I look to community when I want to protect Friends from a feeling of crisis. As a Friend from another monthly meeting said to me this year, "Sometimes we have an amazing unity. Our gathered-ness shows a palpable sense of support."

We deserve to get the support we need. We can tell our monthly meetings about what we are doing that is led by Spirit. They are uniquely able to read our faces and listen to our words and to ask, "How can I help?" at a critical moment. Care groups and faithfulness groups can give us a sounding board and ask difficult questions that help us listen to the promptings of the Spirit. They can reflect on what we say and offer insight. These smaller groups can be given to us by our meeting or can form when we invite people one by one. The Friends in these groups may suspect that we are training them as understudies "just in case," and there may be some truth in that. If you have a fear of becoming suddenly too weak to keep a promise, you are not alone.

It is important to count bygone Friends among those who support you. I value our Faith and Practice for that reason.

Most important to me is taking responsibility for asking for help when I need it. There is a corollary to that. Let each of us think about what we can do, what we can offer, when someone asks for our help.

Marcia Elliott, Tempe Monthly Meeting