

YM in Session
Secretary's Late Report
Revised edition
August 9, 2019

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your patience and understanding as you receive this extremely late report. The last few months, weeks, days, and hours have been filled with Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) organizational development initiatives and CYM Personnel matters. It wasn't until the Tuesday of Yearly Meeting in Session that I truly felt ready to turn my attention to this report; Spirit then began to work through me and through the ministry of other Friends. I have been blessed with the insights and ears of many Friends, which helped to clarify my thinking and intentions; thank you, Friends!

I believe CYM is at a crossroads; at a choice point. Maintaining the status quo and a slow pace of change will likely lead to the eventual loss of CYM as we know it. Yet paradoxically, it is my assertion that the answers lie in letting go of CYM as we know it and embracing risk and transformational processes.

The following provides a short account of the transformational work I have witnessed within CYM over the last two years, presents sustainability concerns facing CYM, and offers what I perceive as a way forward. I offer these ideas as one Friend, Cameron Fraser, of Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting. I offer these perspectives from my little corner within CYM as the CYM Secretary. I offer these words in love and faith. I offer this in service to the collective good, to the greater whole.

The commencement of Yearly Meeting in Session 2019 marks the end of the first two years of the resurrection of the CYM Secretary position. As Secretary, I have witnessed and/or supported a wide-range of initiatives. Through dialogue, exploration, and experimentation, Friends have endeavored to realize new ways of operating and engaging in Friends' work.

I have observed transformation within Personnel Committee, Clerks' Committee, Education and Outreach Committee, Archives Committee, the Ad Hoc Committee on Financial Sustainability, Finance Committee, Canadian Young Friends Yearly Meeting (CYFYM), Publications and Communications Committee, CYM Trustees, CYM staff, and Yearly Meeting in Session. Despite the important work Friends have engaged in, these initiatives are largely performed in isolation, in individual committees, and do little to address the significant operational and financial sustainability concerns facing our organization as a whole.

We must respond to these concerns as a collective. We must work together, and draw in Friends from across the country if we are to realize a way forward. We must take immediate and bold action, and work together to find new ways of being.

The great majority of our Members, the baby boomer population, are aging, and we are not effectively drawing new people into the fold. Yearly Meeting and Half Yearly Meeting programs are essentially catering to the adult population. We lack in programming and offer very little reason for children and families to participate; adult-centric programming is not an investment in a sustainable future. Attendance at Yearly Meeting continues to decrease and the costs continue to

increase. The Yearly Meeting in Session relies on paid staff for accounting, financial support, organizing, programming, and many other intangible responsibilities. We are not truly aware of the real costs associated with Yearly meeting in Session, which likely runs close to \$200,000 (minus approximately \$120,000 in registration fees).

CYM's reliance on paid staff for CYM Finances, CYM Personnel, CYM Contributions, the CYM Office, the Canadian Friend, online courses, the visitations program, the CYM website, CYM Archives, and organizational development (the Secretary's work) continues to increase, but our income does not; our current employment model cannot be sustained. Nominations Committee is consistently unable to find enough people to serve CYM committees (23% of positions will go unfilled at the rise of meeting). CYM cannot continue to operate in its current form if the national body of Canadian Friends is going to survive. CYM must transform if it is to survive and thrive.

Transformation is possible, it is naturally occurring and being facilitated by staff and Friends, yet this change is not evolving fast enough. We are slowly losing our baby boomer population, and need them more than ever as we face the challenges of the 21st century. We need to maximize the use of the discernment and wisdom of our elders and weighty Friends. We need these Friends to hold space and reduce barriers to change.

We need Friends to support the laying down and simplification of our work. We need to free our younger generations, and all Friends, from expectations and provide permission and space to be brave, to explore new ideas, and to experiment (CYFYM is already doing this). We can provide space for inspired Friends and staff to innovate and find solutions to our greatest concerns. We need bold action. We need wild experimentation. We need space and an openness to transform.

I believe there is hope. I believe there is a way forward. I believe we have the capacity for great actions. I believe in the future of the Religious Society of Friends.

I present these recommendations for Friends consideration:

- Challenge our committees and Friends to work together, to effectively communicate and collaborate, and find new ways of being together;
- Task every CYM operational body with exploring changes, with experimenting, with taking bold actions and embracing risk;
- Allow space for our committees to lighten their workload, to lay down work, and to focus their energy on finding new ways of being;
- Ask Program Committee, Clerks' Committee, CYM staff, and other inspired Friends to experiment with next Yearly Meeting's schedule, programs, and business;
- Support a process of establish a vision of CYM that includes the voice of *all* Canadian Quakers, and establishing a starting point for enacting our collective vision;
- Overtly acknowledge and accept that things will be different;
- Commit to entering into the unknown;
- Commit to embracing risk and learning from our mistakes;
- Commit to this journey together as a spiritual community; and
- Commit to beginning today.

I have faith. I have faith in human capacity for ingenuity and survival. I have faith that adversity leads to new opportunities. Let us enter into this work as a faithful spiritual community.

I leave you with the following queries:

- Can Friends challenge their individual attachments to Yearly Meeting in Session and Canadian Yearly Meeting as it is? Can Friends suspend their personal needs and wants, and create and hold space for the necessary transformation to occur?
- Can we establish a vision for a national body that serves *all* Canadian Friends, agree to a general way forward, and hold space for continuing revelation?

I believe we have the capacity, the will, and the tenacity to realize a glorious future, maintained by a healthy, diverse spiritual community. I believe we can set aside much of our current work. I believe we must do this to utilize our baby boomer population while we still can. We must set aside much of our work to maximize the energy of our younger population. We must allow ourselves to be guided by our youth, grounded in our past, and focused on the future.

I feel called to do this transformational work in the world, and to do this transformational work with Friends at this point in time. I am not clear how long I will be with Friends as CYM Secretary, but feel confident that I can maintain this for at least another two years.

That said, I do not believe it is right order to direct Canadian Friends' money toward maintaining what is. We cannot justify and ask for more money from Friends as we develop greater reliance upon staff to maintain the status quo. It is my assertion that CYM needs to significantly adjust its staffing costs if it is set on maintaining and retaining the current model. I recommend that CYM seriously consider ending the CYM Secretary role in 2020 if the body is set on maintaining the status quo. I believe it is in right order to invest in the future, to invest in transformation.

I welcome an opportunity to explore how we can collectively support the transformation of this organization. I have faith that we will realize our potential. I am excited to witness and participate in a profound transformation, if it is the will of the body. I have faith that Canadian Quakers can manifest an even more profound national spiritual community!

In love and light,

Cameron Fraser
CYM Secretary