

**Big countries, few Quakers:
Yearly Meetings in Australia and Canada**

by Susan and David Stevenson

a report from Vernon Monthly Meeting to

**Western Half Yearly Meeting and
Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers)**

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Foreword

One of the recommendations of the Consultation and Renewal Working Group was "that CYM examine how Australia Yearly Meeting is organized, how well it works, and whether any well-functioning aspects of their structure could be models for CYM to deal with cost, distance, and associated vitality issues." (C'nR Report, p. 8). In Vernon Monthly Meeting, our interest was aroused by the similarities of Australia Yearly Meeting and Canadian Yearly Meeting where in both meetings there is a small membership spread over a large country. In Vernon Meeting we have often had long and detailed discussions regarding an appropriate Quaker structure for Canada and how to use an organizational model first developed in a small country like Britain. We were particularly interested in the regionalization that has evolved in Australia YM.

Therefore, at our fall retreat in 2007, Vernon Monthly Meeting was very pleased to hear from Susan and David Stevenson that they were prepared, with the support of VMM, to visit meetings in Australia while they were traveling there. They took with them a Traveling Minute and a Traveling Letter from Vernon Monthly Meeting.

Prior to their visit we discussed the C'nR information that Pamela Leach and the AYM Secretary had provided for C'nR use. We also assisted in the development of the series of questions that David and Susan used during their visit.

We were delighted to receive the initial report of their travels and visits with Australian Friends. Again we provided some feedback and discussion prior to publication of the present report.

The Stevensons have suggested several recommendations which we hope other Monthly Meetings will consider and then bring to CYM for further action. Many of the recommendations will, in our view, strengthen CYM. They have recognized that the location of our population differs from that of Australia and it would not be possible to completely follow the regionalization model of Australia YM without very major changes to CYM. We ask that Friends consider the report with the care and attention that the Stevensons have devoted to its preparation.

Vernon Monthly Meeting
September 2008

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1 Introduction

From 2004 to 2007, Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) was engaged in an examination of our structure and its relationship to our corporate spiritual life. This process, known as Consultation and Renewal (C'nR), resulted in a set of conclusions and recommendations that were presented to Canadian Yearly Meeting in August 2007. Many of the recommendations of the Consultation and Renewal Working Group have already been approved by CYM and are currently being implemented; other recommendations have yet to be considered by CYM.

One C'nR concern that remains unresolved is our inability, so far, to find acceptable ways to move toward a more regionalized structure, thereby decreasing our travel costs and our environmental footprint: "We think that this tension between needing less travel and the unwillingness to create more organizational support structures locally must be resolved. We simply cannot have it both ways." (C'nR Report, p. 3).

The C'nR Working Group suggested that it might be helpful to look at how other Yearly Meetings with similar problems of distance and size are managing. Like Canadian Yearly Meeting, Australia Yearly Meeting (AYM) covers a huge area with a relatively sparse population of Quakers. However, it has a more regionalized structure. The C'nR Working Group recommended "that CYM examine how Australia Yearly Meeting is organized, how well it works, and whether any well-functioning aspects of their structure could be models for CYM to deal with cost, distance, and associated vitality issues." (C'nR Report, p. 8). This recommendation was approved by CYM in August 2007.

We (Susan and David Stevenson of Vernon Monthly Meeting), were planning a work-related trip to New Zealand in February/March 2007, followed by a holiday in Australia. Upon prayerful consideration, it seemed that way was opening for us to move forward with this concern. We consulted with our Monthly Meeting, who approved a travelling minute. This minute was subsequently endorsed by Western Half-Yearly Meeting and by Representative Meeting of CYM.

Our month of travel in Australia was greatly facilitated by AYM Secretary Jude Pembleton, who advised us on our itinerary, contacted meetings on our behalf, and briefed us on the workings of AYM. We visited with Friends in five of Australia's seven Regional Meetings: Queensland Regional Meeting (Brisbane Local Meetings), South Australia Regional Meeting (Darwin Recognized Meeting, Eastern Suburbs Local Meeting in Adelaide), Victoria Regional Meeting (Friends House Local Meeting in Melbourne, Mornington Recognized Meeting, and an isolated Friend in Noojee), Canberra Regional Meeting, and New South Wales Regional Meeting (Blue Mountains Local Meeting). Unfortunately, we were unable to fit visits to Western Australia or Tasmania into our timetable. We are aware that the information we gained was limited by our travel schedule, and that we might have had different impressions had we been able to visit the other two regions, more isolated Friends, and more Young Friends.

Since our return, we have discussed our proposed recommendations with the Prince George Allowed Meeting, with Vernon Monthly Meeting, and at Special Interest Groups at Western Half-Yearly Meeting and Canadian Yearly Meeting. An draft of the report was reviewed for accuracy by the AYM Secretary. We hope that this report will become the basis for further discernment in meetings across Canada, and that the recommendations will be considered for approval by Canadian Yearly Meeting.

We greatly appreciate the warm welcome and generous sharing we experienced throughout Australia, from groups and from individuals. We are especially grateful to the following Friends and their spouses, who hosted us and/or organized our visits: John and Anthea Michaelis, Jude Pembleton and Peter Grimbeek, Elizabeth and Ping Kwan, Topsy and David Evans, Tessa Spratt, Victoria Regional Meeting (Friends House), Chris and Richard Spears, Carol and Rick Holden, Renée Ellerton, Elspeth and Paul Howard, Brian and Roberta Turner, Sabine Erika, Blue Mountain Local Meeting (Friends Cottage).

2 The structure of Australia Yearly Meeting

This account draws on documents by Pamela Leach of CYM and Judith Pembleton, AYM

Secretary, both of which are available on the CYM website. We also consulted AYM Handbook documents, which are available on the AYM website. We have emphasized the similarities and differences between AYM and CYM.

Australia and Canada, and their Yearly Meetings, have some general similarities:

	Australia	Canada
Area	7,600,000 square km	9,700,000 square km
Population	21.6 million	33.3 million
Administrative units	6 states 2 territories	10 provinces 3 territories
Yearly Meeting membership	983	1,168
Attendance at Yearly Meeting sessions	350 (in 2008)	180 (average attendance 2000-2007)

In both cases a single Yearly Meeting covers the entire country. Friends' Meetings are sparsely distributed across the landscape, and mostly centred in the larger cities.

Because of the way Australia was settled, the organization of AYM differs from that of CYM. AYM consists of seven Regional Meetings, most of which cover areas corresponding to states or territories. Early in the history of Australia, these states were quite autonomous, governed as separate colonies. The colonies had their own Monthly or Quarterly Meetings, which in the early years related separately to London Yearly Meeting. In 1901 Australia became a Confederation of States, and a united General Meeting – still under London Yearly Meeting – was formed. It was not until 1964 that an autonomous Australia Yearly Meeting was established. **Regional Meetings** developed from settlements of Friends around the capitals of the states: Canberra Regional Meeting (covering Australia Capital Territory and parts of New South Wales), New South Wales Regional Meeting (based in Sydney), Queensland Regional Meeting (based in Brisbane), Western Australia Regional Meeting (based in Perth), South Australia Regional Meeting (based in Adelaide and including Northern Territory as well as South Australia), Victoria Regional Meeting (based in Melbourne), and Tasmania Regional Meeting (based in Hobart).



Regional Meetings conduct business on a regular basis, often monthly. They circulate their minutes to all other Regional Meeting clerks. This allows for consultation among Regional Meetings, especially when they are dealing with similar issues.

A Regional Meeting is normally an incorporated organisation under the law of an appropriate State. It is the primary level at which Friends' business is done in Australia. Regional Meetings have a variety of powers and responsibilities, including holding memberships, conducting marriages, providing pastoral care, holding property, making public statements, recognizing Local Meetings and Recognised Meetings, and appointing representatives to the Yearly Meeting.

All the **Local Meetings** within a region together constitute a Regional Meeting. This concept derives from England in the 17th Century, when George Fox persuaded separate groups of Seekers in an area to come together regularly for mutual support. They met each month. In due course, the Seekers who gathered in this way and who became Friends came to be called the Monthly Meeting. The Australian Regional Meeting unites the component Local Meetings, Recognized Meetings, Worshipping Groups and isolated Friends. The chief purpose of the Local Meeting is to hold Meetings for Worship. However, the Local Meeting also conducts business; it cares for its members, carries out local activities, and sends representatives to Business Meetings of the relevant Regional Meeting. It may also raise money for Australian Quaker activities, and host Yearly Meeting Committees. Local Meetings appoint Friends to various positions: Clerk, Treasurer, Elders,

Overseers, Librarian, Archivist, and Public Officer.

Worshipping Groups exist wherever there are sufficient numbers to meet for worship; these groups may meet in people's homes, and may vary from 2– 12 worshippers, who may be members and/or attenders. If they just meet for worship, but hold no business meetings, a correspondent would be appointed to keep them in touch with the rest of the Regional Meeting, and with Australia Yearly Meeting.

When a group grows large enough, or feels sufficiently drawn to begin holding Meetings for Worship for Business, they could first become a **Recognised Meeting** (similar to a CYM Allowed Meeting).

Isolated Friends are attached to a Regional Meeting and may also be attached to a Local Meeting of their own choice.

Within the seven Regional Meetings in Australia, there are 51 smaller groups: Worshipping Groups, Recognised Meetings, or Local Meetings.

In Canada, the Yearly Meeting consists of 23 Monthly Meetings, which hold memberships and are the primary unit at which business is conducted. Under the care of the Monthly Meetings are one Preparative Meeting, six Allowed Meetings and 26 Worship Groups. Monthly Meetings (and numbers of Friends) are very unevenly distributed among provinces. For example, there are 11 Monthly Meetings in Ontario, but a single Monthly Meeting covers Saskatchewan, Manitoba, western Ontario, and a Worship Group in the Yukon Territory.

Both Australian and Canadian Friends share concerns for their environmental footprint, the cost of travel to annual gatherings and the cost of maintaining the key functions of their respective Yearly Meetings.

Each year, normally in January, Australian Friends gather for one week as a Yearly Meeting; it is usual for the venue to change from State to State in sequence. The host Regional Meeting is responsible for selecting the site and making all the arrangements for the Yearly Meeting Session, including the children's program. Thus the work that is done in CYM by Programme Committee and the Youth

Programme Coordinator is done in AYM by a **Regional Planning Committee**. Two or three Regional Planning Committees are active at any one time, planning for future Yearly Meeting gatherings.

There is no central fund for helping remote Friends attend the Yearly Meeting, but funding may be available from Regional Meetings or other sources to assist remote Friends with travel expenses.

The body that carries on the work of AYM between YM gatherings is called **Standing Committee**. It includes the Presiding Clerk, AYM Secretary and AYM Treasurer, *ex officio*. It also includes the Past Presiding Clerk for two years after leaving office, or longer if the current Clerk serves for two terms, plus the incoming Presiding Clerk in the 12 months prior to taking office. In addition, there are two representatives of Young Friends and two Friends appointed by each Regional Meeting. Unlike CYM's Representative Meeting, the membership of Standing Committee does not include Yearly Meeting committee clerks.

Standing Committee is similar in function to CYM's Representative Meeting. However, it meets only once between Yearly Meeting sessions, whereas Representative Meeting meets twice. Travel is paid by AYM for members to attend the mid-year meeting of Standing Committee. Standing Committee also meets on-site just before Yearly Meeting.

Unlike CYM, AYM has a **Yearly Meeting Secretary**, whose role is similar to the discontinued General Secretary position in CYM. This Friend works four days a week in a paid position running the AYM office. The secretary handles most correspondence, pays bills, responds to enquiries, maintains the Australian Quaker home page, prepares the Yearly Meeting Documents, puts out her own monthly newsletter, and is at the hub of most communication within AYM. She maintains regular communication with the Presiding Clerk, visits Meetings and isolated Friends throughout Australia when possible, and is *ex officio* on most committees. In consultation with the Presiding Clerk and a Regional Meeting clerk, the Secretary may speak publicly about the Society and its testimonies. The Secretary is supported by an advisory committee from her home Regional Meeting.

In Australia, as in Canada, much of the Yearly Meeting work is done by committees. We counted **31 AYM committees** and working groups (not counting individual appointments, representatives to outside bodies, or Young Friends committees), and 21 CYM committees and working groups.

AYM committees are structured in such a way that very little travel is required. Some AYM committees are localized in regional centres, with the Regional Meetings “hosting” those committees for AYM. “**Hosted**” committees tend to be adopted by Regional Meetings with members who have experience in this kind of service; not all Regional Meetings host equally. Some committees are hosted by the same Meeting for many years. This structure has several benefits. There are savings in travel and environmental costs. Local Friends are drawn into AYM business through the hosting of ‘resident’ AYM committees. And this decentralization helps to limit expectations around AYM administration.

One way Australian Friends mitigate the decentralized character of their Yearly Meeting and enhance fellowship opportunities is through the work of **Meeting for Learning**, a hosted committee responsible for programs of personal spiritual development. Friends who participate in a Meeting for Learning program attend two week-long retreats, a year apart, and carry out a learning project during the intervening year. Meeting for Learning also oversees a distance-learning course called Quaker Basics. Financial support for the committee’s work comes from direct donations, grants, special funds and from Regional Meetings.

Unlike CYM, AYM has no equivalent to Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel at the Yearly Meeting level. The functions handled by Continuing Meeting in Canada are handled by **Ministry Committees** and **Oversight Committees** at the Regional and/or Local Meeting level in Australia. A **Yearly Meeting Pastoral Care Committee** has that task of caring for those attending the Yearly Meeting.

AYM committees that are not hosted are ones that require regional representation (e.g., Nominations Committee) and ones that require specialized expertise not found within a single region (e.g., Publications Committee).

The responsibilities of AYM’s **Nominations Committee** are fewer than those of CYM’s Nominating Committee, because nominations to hosted committees originate with regional nominations committees, who send them to AYM Nominations Committee to be presented to the Yearly Meeting. Nominations Committee is composed of one Friend from each region and a Young Friend. It is responsible for nominating the AYM Presiding Clerk, AYM Treasurer, delegates to outside bodies, several committees, the Regional Meetings for hosted committees, and any other appointment that Yearly Meeting may lay upon it. Nominations Committee usually meets at Yearly Meeting. Long-distance work is accomplished by telephone or e-mail.

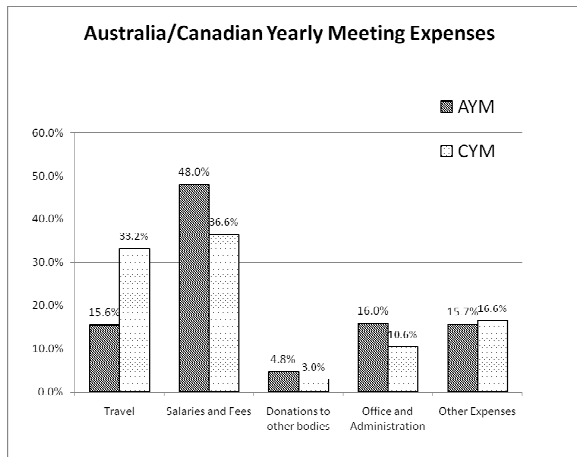
Quaker Service Australia (the Australian equivalent to Canadian Friends Service Committee), the service and overseas-aid aspect of AYM, is what we might call a ‘hybrid’ committee of AYM with both a representative and a hosted component. It is separately incorporated and financially independent of AYM, and its employees are not AYM employees. It is composed of at least seven members appointed by the hosting Regional Meeting (currently New South Wales), a representative from each of the other Regional Meetings, and the AYM Presiding Clerk and Secretary. Its Annual General Meeting is held during Yearly Meeting, but other meetings are usually attended only by those in the hosting Regional Meeting. Under the current structure, responsibility for Quaker Service Australia rotates from one Regional Meeting to another every six years but, as discussed in Section 3, this may change.

Young Friends: There are two regular gatherings of YFs each year, one at Easter and another at YM, apart from other formal and informal occasions. Contact is maintained with New Zealand counterparts. There is a web-site (<http://youngfriends.co-operista.com/tiki-index.php>) and considerable emailing within the group.

Finances The manner in which Friends’ work is funded in Australia is quite different from that in Canada. AYM establishes the budget for its General Fund, which covers the ongoing, administrative work of the Yearly Meeting. This budget determines the quota for each Regional Meeting, based on adult membership. The

budget, including the Regional Meeting quotas, is taken to Standing Committee for approval. Regional Meetings then raise money from their individual members. Some Regional Meetings determine their own overall budget and then send a “quota” request to each of their Local Meetings, which may then add their own request. In other cases, the Regional Meeting communicates directly with its members and attenders, letting them know how much is needed to cover the AYM and Regional Meeting costs.

Regional Meetings are responsible for transferring to AYM their budgeted quota, regardless of the actual amount collected. If there is a shortfall, they must make it up from other funds. This funding procedure is discussed further in Section 3.



The bar chart shows how AYM and CYM allocate annual operating expenses, as a percentage of the total current budget, among several broad categories. Because of differences in how expenses are grouped, the categories do not correspond perfectly, but the most obvious difference is certainly valid: CYM spends much more of its annual budget on travel than does AYM. AYM spends substantially more on salaries. For AYM, the “other expenses” category includes *The Australian Friend*, committee expenses, a subsidy for the Yearly Meeting session, subscriptions, and a few smaller items. For CYM, the “other expenses” category includes committee expenses (other than travel) and a subsidy for the Yearly Meeting session.

3 Discussions with Australian Friends

In consultation with our Monthly Meeting, we prepared a set of nine broad discussion questions to hand out in our sharing sessions with Australian Friends. Associated with each of the nine questions were several secondary questions. We explained that the questions were intended to elicit sharing about the matters that surfaced as the most important personal concerns in each group. Some groups addressed all the questions, but most addressed only a few of them. We asked, and were granted, permission to take notes on what was said. We also received follow-up responses by e-mail from a few Friends who were unable to attend the sessions, or who wished to add comments. Our notes, and the e-mail communications, form the basis of the summaries presented below.

3.1 Organizational structure and Friends’ needs for spiritual nurture, fellowship, and doing business

We posed two sets of questions on the broad topic of the effectiveness of Friends’ organizational structures. As there was considerable overlap in the responses, we have combined them into a single summary. The questions were:

How well does the structure of Regional and Local Meetings meet Friends’ needs?

- *At the regional level, how do Friends organize their gatherings (in time and space) to meet Friends’ needs both for spiritual nurture and fellowship, and for doing business?*
- *Is there any sense of competing demands between the Local Meeting, Regional Meeting, and AYM for Friends’ time and energy? If so, how do Friends deal with this conflict?*

How do organizational structures affect your own spiritual experience and your experience of corporate discernment?

- *What group do you feel is at the core of your Quaker experience (committee, Worshipping Group, Local Meeting, Regional Meeting, AYM)? Where are you most likely to have a deep spiritual experience? What fosters that experience?*

- *How does the structure of AYM shape your experience of Quakerism? Do you see it as more of a top-down or bottom-up structure?*
- *How do you experience corporate discernment at these various levels? How do they differ, and which has been most meaningful for you?*
- *Are there theological or philosophical differences among Australian Friends (e.g., more Christ-centred, more universalist; more focused on the individual spiritual experience, more focused on the corporate spiritual experience) that are associated with specific Regional or Local Meetings, and if so, how do these differences affect the functioning of AYM?*

We heard almost universal agreement among Australian Friends that the group they meet and worship with regularly – whether that group is a Local Meeting, a Recognized Meeting, or a Worshipping Group – is at the core of their Quaker experience. The local group is the Quaker community most Friends identify with most strongly. We heard repeatedly that even small local meeting can have a vibrant spiritual life.

In Australia (as in Canada) many Friends who are satisfied with their local groups also value their connections with wider groups. Cross-fertilization was seen as especially important in small meetings or worshipping groups, where one or two older or more experienced Friends can set the tone of the entire meeting, and newer members get a very limited idea of Quakerism.

Local Meetings differ in the degree to which they are involved in the activities of the Regional Meeting, and these differences are not entirely explained by distance. Some Friends in Local Meetings have been very active in their Regional Meetings, and described the Regional Meetings as strong, supportive, and responsive to their concerns. Others reported feeling marginalized, despite the best intentions of Friends in the Regional Meeting. An article in *The Australian Friend* (Sandy Parker, The Meeting Community, March 2007) takes the view that the current structure of Regional and Local Meetings is an impediment to effective community, to individual nurture, and to Quaker witness in the world. The author recommends a review of current

structures, with a goal (among others) of strengthening local communities. Other Friends (including some from small meetings) feel that the structure of Local and Regional Meetings has served them well.

Regional Meetings were described as coordinating Local Meetings, considering broader issues (usually at the instigation of a Local Meeting), and linking Local Meetings to the national body. Some Regional Meetings rotate the locations of business meetings to include the sites of Local Meetings as well the regional meetinghouse. As well as doing business, Regional Meetings organize residential weekends (usually annually) that include children and Young Friends and focus on fellowship, religious education, and spiritual nourishment rather than business. These gatherings are often well-liked and well-attended.

As in Canada, the number of Friends who regularly attend Meeting for Worship for Business is much smaller than the number who attend Meeting for Worship. Some Friends who are active in Meeting for Worship for Business expressed puzzlement at the low level of involvement of other Friends. One said, “Our way of making decisions is the one thing that Quakers have in common. There are huge differences in the ways we worship, but the process of corporate discernment is similar among all Quakers. It is at the core of who we are.” Another said that it is the responsibility of those who are active in Friends’ business to do a better job of educating members about how corporate discernment works and how valuable it is.

In one meeting, we were told that despite the usual low level of involvement, additional people turned up for Regional Meeting to participate in decision-making when there was a contentious issue. It seemed that most of the time, the Friends who did not attend were satisfied with the decisions that were made without them. Some Friends felt that there were competing demands between Local, Regional, and Yearly Meetings, and that there would be advantages to a two-tiered rather than a three-tiered structure. We heard that there were sometimes inefficiencies when business was prepared at the Local Meeting level and repeated in the Regional Meeting. We also heard a wish for more autonomy in making decisions about

property at the Local Meeting level. (Some meetinghouses and property are used primarily by Local Meetings. However, only Regional Meetings own property.)

Many Friends spoke warmly of their Yearly Meeting experiences, and it was clear to us that Australian Friends value Yearly Meeting sessions for the same variety of reasons that Canadian Friends do, including: experiences of worship and of worshipful corporate discernment in a large group, learning opportunities, participation of children and Young Friends, fellowship, and opportunities to make new friendships and maintain old ones.

The criticism of Yearly Meeting sessions that we heard most often was the emphasis on business. One Friend said, "My first experience of YM was one where various people seemed frantic to finish reports for various sessions. I had trouble finding the calm that I felt was important to the Quaker way." We heard that business sessions were crammed and rushed. We heard that AYM was trying to do too much, and that business was sometimes slowed down because people who spoke out in the sessions had not come prepared by reading Documents in Advance or by attending the Preparatory Sessions.

In fact, AYM does seem to have a bit more time in its schedule for business sessions than CYM, but not much. The proposed schedule for CYM 2008 allocates 21.7 hours for Meeting for Worship for Business. The proposed schedule for AYM 2009 allocates 10.5 hours for Preparatory Sessions and 13 hours for Formal Session, a total of 23.5 hours. Preparatory Sessions are used to make Friends familiar with the issues behind a particular topic. The purpose of the Preparatory Session is to consider a report in Documents in Advance, offer further background information, and raise awareness of the work of the committee or working group. Preparatory Sessions are clerked by someone other than the Presiding Clerk of Yearly Meeting. Friends who wish to have significant input are encouraged to attend the Preparatory Session and provide input before the report of the session is produced. (See Appendix 1 for more information on Preparatory Sessions.)

3.2 Hosted committees

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the hosted committee system?

- *How are the Local Meetings, Recognised Meetings, Worshipping Groups, and isolated Friends involved in the work of hosted committees?*
- *How does the transfer of a hosted committee from one region to another come about? How is continuity maintained and background information transferred? How do you deal with unfinished projects when a hosted committee moves to another region?*
- *When a Friend has a leading to work in an area related to a committee that is hosted elsewhere, how is that Friend's leading supported?*

Many committees of Australia Yearly Meeting are hosted by a Regional Meeting. Often, membership of a hosted committee is drawn from a single Local Meeting that accepts responsibility for the committee, but sometimes members are drawn from several Local Meetings that are close enough that face-to-face meetings are possible. This structure permits a small or isolated Local Meeting or Worshipping Group to function as an AYM committee. Some hosted committees have corresponding members, but the way in which they participate in committee work is variable and sometimes problematic (see Section 3.6).

Quaker Service Australia is an incorporated non-government, not-for-profit organization that functions as a hybrid between hosted and representative committees. Currently, responsibility for Quaker Service Australia rotates from one Regional Meeting to another every six years. A recent review (in *AYM Documents in Advance 2008*) identified several major disadvantages to the current structure. It recommended that the office remain in Sydney permanently, and that the responsibility for the office be transferred from the Regional Meeting to an AYM Board. These recommendations are under consideration.

We heard repeatedly that the major advantages of hosted committees are that members can meet face-to-face, and that they can do so as often as is necessary to accomplish their tasks.

In principle, the Yearly Meeting reviews the work of a hosted committee every three years, and decides whether to extend its life for another term, transfer the responsibility to another Regional Meeting, or lay the committee down. Hosted committees are expected to give at least one year's notice and complete their tasks before handing the responsibility over to another region. We heard of cases in which the transfer of a committee from one region to another happened smoothly and properly. Sometimes the old and new committees were able to meet together at Yearly Meeting, and this facilitated the handover of responsibilities.

In practice, it seems that hosted committees often remain in a region until the committee runs out of steam and new members can no longer be found within the region. As a result, committee records are not always up-to-date and in order when they are transferred. Although there are sometimes problems with continuity, the transfer process was seen as a mixed blessing. In the absence of detailed records, the new committee might take a fresh approach that was beneficial.

There have been occasions when a Regional Meeting wished to lay down a committee, and no other Regional Meeting could be found to take on the work. In one case this resulted in a Regional Meeting continuing to host the committee long past the point of burnout. Eventually, the responsibilities of the committee were reduced so that another Regional Meeting was willing to accept the task.

The hosted committee structure limits the opportunities of Friends residing outside the region to serve on that committee. In most cases, this did not seem to be a big issue for Australian Friends. We were told that there were many opportunities for such Friends to carry on related work. These included informal liaison with the committee, corresponding membership, and committee work at the state rather than the national level. A Friend with a leading to work in an area within the mandate of an existing hosted committee might form the nucleus of a group that would offer to host the committee when it was time for a transfer of responsibilities. In some cases the leading of an individual might result in the formation of a new hosted committee with a different mandate. We speculated that this process might contribute to a proliferation of Yearly Meeting committees.

(Four of the 31 AYM committees on the 2008 list include the word "peace" in their titles.)

Although we heard general satisfaction with the hosted committee system, some Friends commented that committees whose mandates include political or social justice issues may tend to work on problems of the states in which the committees are hosted, rather than on national issues, and that corresponding members or interested Friends in other states may be "sidelined".

3.3 Environmental concerns

How well does the structure of AYM address environmental concerns?

- *How does the structure of AYM address concerns about climate change, air pollution, and other related environmental problems? Are any changes contemplated? How much is it possible and desirable to shrink our ecological footprint by reducing travel responsible for carbon emissions while maintaining or increasing communications?*
- *What are Australian Friends doing to "green" their meeting houses?*

Much of the discussion we heard around environmental concerns in Australia sounded very much like equivalent discussions in Canada. Comments included: "There are ways of traveling that are not environmentally costly. We tend to behave as though air travel was the only option." "Friends need to view doing business locally as a matter of sustainability." "In the future, we are not going to be able to travel as we do now. We need to have structures in place before that happens." "I love attending Yearly Meeting, but as a Quaker I feel that it's more important for me not to travel than to travel the distance to Yearly Meeting."

We had the impression that the sense of urgency about environment concerns at the Yearly Meeting level has increased recently. In January 2008, Friends attending Yearly Meeting heard a presentation by Barrie Pittock, an Australian Quaker and contributor to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which summarized the Panel's conclusions about global warming and its impacts, but pointed out that some of the risks identified by the Panel were understated. Also in January

2008, Australia Yearly Meeting approved a Quaker Earthcare Statement that includes a commitment to “radically changed ways of living”. (The Quaker Earthcare Statement is available at

<http://www.quakers.org.au/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=137>

At the same Yearly Meeting session, Friends agreed to adopt a carbon offset charge for energy efficiency or renewable energy for a trial period of 12 months, covering all air travel undertaken for AYM purposes. We heard mixed responses to this initiative in our discussion sessions. Many Friends saw this initiative as a big step toward taking responsibility for AYM's environmental footprint, while others felt that carbon offsets are not a good way to mitigate environmental impacts of air travel. Some Friends mentioned that most carbon offset organizations are in a conflict of interest position. Furthermore, there is a danger of adopting an attitude of paying for our transgressions, rather than changing the way we live.

Australian Friends, like Canadian Friends, have discussed whether Australia Yearly Meeting should meet every two years instead of annually. A model was suggested in which Standing Committee (equivalent to our Representative Meeting) would increase in size and meet an extra time during the off-years, so that necessary business could proceed. One Friend pointed out that a major purpose of the Yearly Meeting Session is to create intentions and resolutions to be implemented by committees or other groups, and that – since most of these take longer than one year to implement – there might not be much impact on business if AYM met less frequently. However, we did not get the impression that any changes in the frequency of AYM are imminent.

Some meetings are taking steps at the local level to reduce the environmental footprint of their activities. In Brisbane, for example, a group of Friends is looking into installation of solar panels at the meetinghouse. On an individual level, many Friends we visited make an effort to minimize their use of automobiles, air conditioning, clothes driers, and other energy-intensive appliances, much as many Friends do in Canada.

3.4 Children and Young Friends

How effectively do organizational structures involve children and Young Friends?

- *How are children and Young Friends included in worship and other activities in Local Meetings and Regional Meetings? How are Young Friends involved in the spiritual life and work of AYM?*
- *How do Australian Friends accommodate the special need of Young Friends for face-to-face gatherings? Where there are few Young Friends, how is “critical mass” achieved?*
- *How do Australian Friends facilitate the transition of young adults from primary involvement with Young Friends into involvement with AYM as a whole?*

We heard on several occasions that the ways in which Australian Friends involve children and youth in their activities have been inspired by the Backhouse Lecture (AYM's equivalent to CYM's Sunderland P. Gardiner lecture) given by Elise Boulding in 1996 and the resulting pamphlet, *Our children, our partners: a new vision for social action in the 21st century*. This pamphlet affirms the potential of children to contribute spiritual insights and leadership, describes examples of successful cross-generational partnerships in both secular and Quaker settings, and encourages the involvement of children and teenagers in the full range of Quaker activities.

As in Canada, some Local Meetings have enough children (infant through 11 years) and Junior Young Friends (ages 12 to 15) to have a regular program for them on Sundays, and some do not. One Friend noted that Children's Committee (at the Regional Meeting level) tends to be made up of parents, and wondered whether religious education should be the responsibility of Ministry and Oversight or of the Outreach Committee, so that more intergenerational activities and outreach would be planned. Programs for children at Yearly Meeting and, in some cases, Regional gatherings, seem to be well-regarded.

Children's programs in some Australian states are affected by government regulations regarding numbers of caregivers required for children, and the qualifications of these

caregivers. These regulations vary from state to state, and the certification documents issued to caregivers are not recognized outside the state that issued them.

AYM has a long-standing program called “Penn Friends”, in which an older Friend is paired with a Young Friend and maintains communication over the years. This program was not often mentioned in our sessions, but when it was, it was mentioned with satisfaction.

We were told that few if any Local Meetings have enough Young Friends (16 years and older) to achieve the critical mass necessary for a vibrant, supportive group. As in Canada, most Young Friends depend on gatherings that draw from a larger area than a Local Meeting. Young Friends from across Australia have the opportunity to meet twice a year – once before Yearly Meeting in January, and once around Easter. The week-long January gathering rotates from one state to another with Yearly Meeting, so it is accessible to most Young Friends at least every couple of years. The 4-day Easter camps are often held simultaneously in eastern and western Australia. These gatherings include business meetings, but mostly provide opportunities for fellowship.

Some Young Friends try to minimize the environmental impact of their travel by car-pooling or using trains, busses, or bicycles for transport. Funding to assist Young Friends with travel expenses is provided in part by AYM and in part through fund-raising activities undertaken by the Young Friends. These have included a CD, a bush-dance, a recipe book, and a newly-released book of creative writing and art entitled *Footprints and Echoes*.

The Young Friends we heard from expressed appreciation for the support available for their participation in gatherings. Australia Yearly Meeting has an ongoing agreement with Aotearoa Yearly Meeting in New Zealand allowing an Australian Young Friend to attend Easter camp in New Zealand, and a New Zealand Young Friend to attend January camp and Yearly Meeting in Australia. There is also financial support for Young Friends to take advantage of opportunities offered by the FWCC Asia West Pacific Section, Pendle Hill in the United States, and the Quaker UN Office in Geneva. One young adult commented that Young Friends are given a lot of financial

support, but would benefit from more accompanying guidance and accountability.

Young Friends have the opportunity of appointing two Young Friends to each AYM committee, including Standing Committee. As well, some Young Friends sit on committees as regularly-appointed members, rather than as Young Friends. The participation of Young Friends on committees was seen as important in facilitating their transition into AYM as a whole.

The practice of involving Young Friends in committee work is similar in Australia and Canada, except for the practice of appointing two Young Friends to committees rather than one, when two can be found. We heard that it was important to appoint two Young Friends, partly because Quakers traditionally travel or act in pairs, and partly because it creates a more supportive environment for their full participation.

One young adult described interesting differences between the type of involvement of young adults who have grown up in Quaker families, and those who have come to Quakerism on their own. The first group, many of whom have known one another since early childhood, tend to feel strong connections with one another. Their connections with their Local Meetings or with AYM tend to be less strong, and they are often slow to become active in adult business. Often, they are not very good at drawing in other young adults. In contrast, young adults who have come to Quakerism on their own initiative are likely to become involved sooner in adult Quaker business at both local and Yearly Meeting levels.

3.5 Remote Worshipping Groups and Isolated Friends

How effectively do organizational structures involve remote Worshipping Groups and isolated Friends?

- *How is contact and pastoral care maintained with the more remote Worshipping Groups and with isolated Friends? How do those in remote places learn about Friends' practices (including corporate discernment)?*
- *How do isolated Friends participate in Regional and Yearly Meeting business?*

- *How do remote meetings foster community? How are aging members cared for?*
- *Where do small meetings or worshipping groups meet? E.g., private homes, community buildings, other churches?*

The Ministry and Oversight Committees of the nearest Local Meeting are responsible for the care of inquirers, isolated Friends, and Worshipping Groups, as well as aged members and others who are unable to attend Meeting for Worship regularly.

The effectiveness of this system has been variable. In one region, we heard that remote Worshipping Groups wanted regular visits, but that it was difficult to get Friends to travel to the Worshipping Groups. In another, we were told of an individual member of Ministry and Oversight who travels regularly to remote Worshipping Groups. One remote group expressed grateful appreciation for the level of support they receive from their Regional Meeting. For Worshipping Groups, Recognised Meetings, and isolated Friends in very remote places, access to Regional Meeting funds to attend Yearly Meeting, Regional gatherings, Quaker education programs, and other events can be important. Opportunities to participate as corresponding members in Regional or AYM committees, or even to host an AYM committee, can also help to involve distant individuals and groups.

Some meetings have instituted a buddy system, in which local Friends and remote Friends are paired up and maintain regular communication. We met Friends who had lived in isolated circumstances and who were grateful for the letters and phone calls they had received during those periods. One Friend reported very little contact with the closest Local Meeting, but ongoing contact with individuals whom she had met at Yearly Meeting. We also heard that some Friends who have tried to provide pastoral care to isolated Friends found that their contacts were not particularly welcome. The pastoral care providers in this meeting agreed that asking what sort of connection isolated Friends wanted would be a good way to move forward, and would be more respectful to the isolated Friends.

3.6 Electronic communication

What are your experiences of the potentials and the pitfalls of using electronic communication?

- *What is the role of electronic communication (e-mail, conference calls, websites, electronic mailing lists) in doing the work of AYM? In furthering the spiritual life of AYM?*
- *How are the needs of Friends without internet access accommodated?*

We had the impression that more business is done by e-mail and teleconferencing in AYM than in CYM, probably because there is less travel to committee meetings. However, comments we heard about the benefits and shortcomings of electronic communication were similar to those we hear within CYM. Many Friends feel that it is important to use technology to avoid travel, but some warned that we must not compromise human relationships to save carbon credits. We heard little or no dissension around the value of e-mail in disseminating information. Meetings send minutes by e-mail to those with internet access, and by post to those without. One Friend commented, "It took me five minutes to remind fifty people about tonight's meeting. To me, this is simplicity."

In Australia, as in Canada, a few Friends have strong negative feelings about the use of electronic communication. "How do we love electronically?" "The missing element is soul." Other Friends believe there is a place for electronic communication, but caution that we must be careful to maintain right ordering, especially when using e-mail. E-mail can prompt people to respond too quickly, without proper reflection. Some Friends feel that e-mail is appropriate for sending minutes and for making straightforward decisions, but not for sensitive situations. The sensitivity of Australian Friends to the pitfalls of remote decision-making have been heightened by a recent incident in which a high-profile miscommunication occurred in a Yearly Meeting committee that used teleconferencing and e-mail to communicate with corresponding members.

Like CYM, AYM has no general protocol for the use of e-mail or conference calls in Friends' communications and decision-making. However, the need for such a protocol is recognized.

We heard more positive comments about the potential of teleconferencing for decision-making than the use of e-mail. It is important to some Friends to get to know the members of a committee face-to-face before attempting to make decisions by conference call. Other Friends described successful decision-making by conference calls, even in groups that had never met face-to-face. Friends who have used videoconferencing in the business world commented that teleconferences tend to be more focused than face-to-face meetings, and that there are computer systems for internet meetings that include features such as a chatroom, a transcript of the proceedings, and the ability to post documents to a window on the monitors of participants during a meeting.

The internet has other potential benefits to Friends. There is currently a proposal to use AYM's existing sound system to produce live broadcasts of AYM business sessions on the internet. Friends in remote locations could listen to business meetings and e-mail or telephone their contributions to a person on site who would read them or broadcast them to the meeting.

Australian Friends are also aware that it is possible to log onto an on-line Meeting for Worship. Some have tried it and found it meaningful, as have some Canadian Friends.

3.7 Funding

What is the relationship between the structures within AYM and the funds available to do the work?

- *How do individuals fund the work of Local Meetings, Regional Meetings, and AYM?*
- *Is there enough money?*
- *Is there any sense that some individuals do not feel enough connection with AYM to support its work?*

As a result of AYM's procedures for fundraising (described in Section 2), an individual Friend receives a letter each year from his or her Regional or Local Meeting requesting a contribution to Quaker operating expenses. The sample we saw included a brief explanation of what the contributions to the Yearly, Regional, and Local Meetings cover. It included the statement:

Every member and attender is encouraged to make a contribution towards these operating costs. Your individual financial circumstances are of course respected, and if you are unable to meet the amounts suggested in the schedule, even a small amount is appreciated. Whether your contribution is small, in line with the quota, or exceeds it, it will be gratefully received in confidence by the treasurer concerned.

The letter is accompanied by a contribution schedule that indicates the per capita operational amount requested for the Yearly, Regional, and Local Meetings. It provides the opportunity to contribute to various other bodies and funds (such as Quaker Service Australia) at the Yearly Meeting and Regional levels. Suggested amounts are not provided for these discretionary contributions.

It is up to the Regional Meeting whether to request contributions from members and attenders, or only from members. As some members and attenders do not contribute, the Regional Meeting may request a donation that exceeds the per capita amount required. We heard some resentment about this.

Overall, however, the system seems to work well, and ensures that the Yearly Meeting has the funds it needs to meet its operating expenses. The per capita quota for Yearly Meeting costs in 2007/08 was \$124 Australian (about \$136 Canadian). We were told that there have been times when Australian Friends have found it difficult to find the money to support the Yearly Meeting, but that that is not the case at present. However, the Yearly Meeting Treasurer commented that the per capita level of support for the Yearly Meeting in Britain is about double that in Australia.

Unlike CYM, AYM has a comfortable surplus of money. In July 2007, the Treasurer reported to Standing Committee that there was sufficient funding held in reserve for three and one half times the average annual expenditure of the Yearly Meeting. Standing Committee agreed to ask the Treasurer to convene a working group to bring recommendations to Yearly Meeting about how to use the surplus money.

3.8 The big picture

What is the big picture?

- *What do Australian Friends see as the big issues facing AYM?*
- *Are there any aspects of AYM structure that some Friends are dissatisfied with and would like to see changed?*

Responses to these queries were diverse, and included:

- The need for more spiritual grounding and less busyness in everyday life and in Quaker affairs
- Dwindling numbers
- The environmental cost of holding Yearly Meetings
- The need for more Quaker education
- The need for more flexibility in forms of worship (within the broad Quaker tradition) to involve inquirers and youth
- Lack of diversity among Quakers (mostly middle-aged and middle-class)

The perception of dwindling numbers is not actually borne out by membership statistics, which show a modest increase over the last five years. However, the demographics of the Australian Quaker population, like the Canadian Quaker population, suggest that numbers may dwindle in the future.

AYM is currently participating in a project entitled **Quaker Voices in the 21st Century**, initiated by a couple of Canberra Friends with a concern to re-examine the faith and practice of Quakers, what it can offer today, and opportunities for deepening our spiritual practice. Input and discussion questions coming out of the first year of this project are summarized in a document available at the Quaker Voices website, <http://voices.quakers.org.au/index.php/about/>.

3.9 Other good ideas

We heard and saw many other things that we appreciated. Here are a few:

Australian Friends regularly acknowledge the traditional aboriginal custodians of the land they use. Yearly Meeting sessions open with an “aboriginal welcome to country”. Many Friends’ buildings have a notice acknowledging the

indigenous group on whose traditional land the building is located.



Friends have begun the creation of an Australian Quaker Tapestry, which will depict events in Australian Quaker history. This project involves Friends in local historical research and helps to draw people together, including some elderly Friends who do not often attend meeting. In some areas the project is a form of outreach, involving non-Quaker community members.

In South Australia, the regional Quaker Service committee runs an “op shop” (thrift store) staffed by both Quaker and non-Quaker volunteers. We were told that the shop earned \$87,000 for Quaker Service Australia last year.

AYM supports the “Thanksgiving Fund”, to which Friends and others may make donations to mark their thankfulness for a special occasion, such as a birth or anniversary, or for the life of a much-loved person. The fund is used for grants to support the participation of individual Friends in activities related to Quaker aims.

At some meetings, newcomers and visitors are invited to use specially-coloured mugs for their tea or coffee during social times. The use of one of these mugs is a signal that the new person would like to be approached for conversation.

4 Recommendations for Canadian Yearly Meeting

4.1 Regionalization of CYM activities

One of our central aims was to look at how the regionalization of AYM responsibilities works, and to consider what lessons there might be for CYM in AYM’s organizational structures.

AYM's three-tiered structure of Local Meetings, Regional Meetings, and the Yearly Meeting is a product of its history, in which Monthly Meetings, under London Yearly Meeting, developed in the capital cities of the autonomous Australian colonies. The distribution of Australian Friends among states is much more even than the distribution of Canadian Friends among provinces. We do not think it is either feasible or desirable to import this model to Canada, which currently has a largely two-tiered structure, composed of Monthly Meetings and the Yearly Meeting.

However, we believe that in an age of increasing concern about the environmental cost of travel, there is much to be learned from Australia's experiences with the hosted committee system. Although in Australia the Regional Meeting is the body that is responsible for hosting an AYM committee, we think that in Canada a Monthly Meeting could take on that responsibility. CYM already has some models for that in place – Wooler Monthly Meeting has taken on responsibility for Canadian Friends' Foreign Missionary Board, and New Brunswick Monthly Meeting is responsible for the Editorial Board of the Canadian Quaker Pamphlet Series. Furthermore, we see from the Australian experience that the membership structure of an AYM committee can be flexible – members can be drawn from a single Local Meeting, or from several Local Meetings, and can include corresponding members. We suggest that use of a hosted committee system is an appropriate way for CYM to move toward regionalizing the work of Yearly Meeting committees.

We think that for accountability and support, regionalized CYM committees should be hosted by a single Monthly Meeting, but that membership need not be limited to that Monthly Meeting. The nominating committee of the hosting Monthly Meeting would be responsible for bringing names to their Monthly Meeting for approval. Final approval of hosted committees would take place at CYM. Usually, members will be drawn from the hosting Monthly Meeting and other Monthly Meetings in its broad geographic area. It would be up to the hosting meeting to make appropriate arrangements for committee meetings, including face-to-face meetings, teleconferencing and e-mail as appropriate. Monthly Meetings organizing such a committee should be mindful of the benefits of including

members of remote worship groups and isolated Friends within that geographic area.

We are aware that there is concern among Canadian Friends about excluding those who feel led to a particular form of service, but who could not be considered for the appropriate committee if it were regionalized. We think there should be some provision for Friends from across Canada to be considered for service on hosted committees. We suggest that CYM Nominating Committee include information about the hosted committees and the contact information for the clerk of the hosting nominating committee in its annual call for nominations. Other Monthly Meeting nominating committees may send nominations to the hosting nominating committee. This will be unusual, but it does create opportunities for Friends with a leading to work in a certain area to serve.

Hosted committees that include members outside a local area may incur some travel costs, but they will be far lower than the costs incurred by a committee with nation-wide membership. Expenses for travel and conference calls would be paid by CYM, according to a budget prepared by the hosted committee.

We recommend that a Monthly Meeting host a committee for a fixed term, such as 6 years, to reduce the likelihood of burnout, and to allow ample time to plan for transfer to another Monthly Meeting. Good documentation of committee procedures will facilitate handover. The planned development of a central, easily updated procedures manual for Yearly Meeting committees and activities will also help. Other practices that could ease the transfer process are including a member from the new hosting Monthly Meeting on a committee during the year before transfer, and arranging for the old and new committees to meet together at Yearly Meeting during the year of the handover.

We suggest that the new Publications and Communications Committee, Discipline Review Committee, and Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel are candidate committees for hosting. Once we gain more experience with the hosted committee system, we might consider whether committees that are currently regional, but not under the care of a Monthly Meeting, might become hosted committees.

These include Records Committee and Camp NeeKaunis Committee. Nominations for these committees would then become the responsibility of the hosting Monthly Meeting. In the past, CYM Nominating Committee has sometimes had trouble filling these committees, because its members lack knowledge of local Friends with suitable interests and skills.

If hosted CYM committees are to include members from Monthly Meetings other than the hosting Monthly Meeting, there will need to be increased communication among neighboring Monthly Meetings and, especially, their nominating committees. Although it will be a challenge to develop effective mechanisms for this, we see the potential to forge stronger links among neighboring Worship Groups and Monthly Meetings as a long-term benefit.

Recommendation 1: that CYM work toward increasing the number of regionalized Yearly Meeting committees by inviting Monthly Meetings to accept responsibility for hosting committees.

4.2 Other structural changes that would reduce travel

Although some regionalized committees may be able to meet face-to-face without any long-distance travel, we anticipate a continuing need for travel for committees that require representation, and for regionalized committees with some non-local members. Our discussions with Australian Friends reinforced the idea that decision-making in committees by teleconference or by e-mail works better when the members have also met face-to-face. AYM seems to piggyback more committee work onto larger gatherings than CYM does, probably because it does not routinely cover the costs of committee travel.

CYM includes a time for committee meetings on the first Saturday of Yearly Meeting, but we wonder whether all the committees that could make use of this time slot actually do. Faith and Practice Development Committee has often scheduled its meetings to occur immediately before or after Representative Meeting. Are there other committees that could do that? Perhaps the greatest potential for piggybacking is for hosted or regionalized committees that include non-local members to schedule their face-to-face meetings in conjunction with

regional gatherings. As an example, British Columbia Quaker Committee on Native Concerns has often met on the Friday afternoon before spring Western Half-Yearly Meeting. Organizers of gatherings could facilitate this by including time slots for committee meetings in the meeting timetable.

Members of our Monthly Meeting suggested that a potential advantage of embedding committee meetings within other gatherings is that some committee meetings could be opened to any Friends who wish to attend. Although some committee meetings need to be closed, most do not. This could be a useful way to involve interested Friends in committee work, including some who might become committee members in the future.

Recommendation 2: that CYM committees increase the use of Yearly Meeting sessions and of Half-Yearly Meetings and other regional gatherings for committee meetings.

AYM's Standing Committee – their equivalent to CYM's Representative Meeting – meets only once between Yearly Meeting sessions. Hearing this led us to wonder whether Representative Meeting needs to meet both spring and fall. Travel expenses for a single Representative Meeting are substantial – about \$7000 in the current budget. We suggest that Representative Meeting members – especially committee clerks – be asked to consider how their work would be affected if Representative Meeting met only once between Yearly Meeting sessions.

- Could committee timelines be adjusted to accommodate a single meeting?
- When should that meeting occur?
- Would it need to be longer than current meetings?
- How would a change in the frequency of Representative Meeting affect Friends' ability to make timely responses to issues that need to be dealt with quickly?

CYM has yet to consider Recommendation O-1 of the C'nR report (p. 35) – that CYM empower a committee to make decisions that need timely implementation between sessions of CYM or Representative Meetings to keep CYM functioning. If this recommendation is approved,

reducing the frequency of Representative Meeting might be more feasible.

Recommendation 3: that CYM consider holding Representative Meeting once a year rather than twice a year.

4.3 Electronic communications

Australian Friends and Canadian Friends struggle with the same issues around electronic communications. We have no specific recommendations that go beyond Recommendation H-1 in the C'nR report (that CYM thoroughly thresh the subject of electronic communication and agree on written guidelines or protocols regarding the use of email, websites, web-based learning and teleconferencing). We endorse that recommendation and also encourage greater use of teleconferencing, rather than e-mail, when decisions are made without face-to-face meetings.

We hope that Publications and Communications Committee, which is asked to develop our understanding and use of emerging technologies as they may meet Friends' needs for communication and Quaker education, will thoroughly examine telecommunication technology (including Skype and similar systems, specialized equipment for conference calls, and videoconferencing) and their potential applications to decision-making in CYM committees.

We also suggest that this committee examine the feasibility of broadcasting CYM in session over the internet for the benefit of Friends that are not able to be at the session, as well as the possibility of distant Friends participating in CYM sessions by email, teleconferencing, or by phoning an individual person at the CYM in session to provide input.

4.4 Use of Preparatory Sessions at Yearly Meeting

Sometimes matters come to Yearly Meeting sessions that have been properly prepared by a committee or Monthly Meeting, but that would benefit from seasoning by a broader group before coming to the floor of Yearly Meeting. It seemed to us that Preparatory Sessions, such as those used by AYM in session, could help to clarify such matters so that Yearly Meeting could

act on them. An experienced clerk and recording clerk are needed for Preparatory Sessions. The Preparatory Session may result in a draft minute or other material for the consideration of Yearly Meeting. Alternatively, the Preparatory Session may recommend further and wider consultation before the matter goes to the floor of Yearly Meeting.

Members of our Monthly Meeting suggested that Preparatory sessions might also happen at the Monthly Meeting level, in preparation for decisions to be made at Yearly Meeting.

We have included in Appendix 1 a description of Preparatory Sessions, taken from Documents in Advance of AYM (2008).

Recommendation 4: that CYM experiment with the use of preparatory sessions during Yearly Meeting prior to the consideration of complex or potentially contentious items.

4.5 Environmental concerns

We believe that the best way to address the environmental cost of travel is to progressively make structural changes that will reduce the amount of travel required to carry out CYM business, without compromising the well-being of our society. However, it is likely that whatever structural changes are made, some long-distance travel will continue. Should CYM recognize the environmental impacts of that travel by incorporating carbon offsets into our budget?

In January 2008, AYM minuted their decision to do that for a one-year trial period. Many Friends we spoke with considered this decision to be a significant achievement. Others do not consider carbon offset plans to be good ways to mitigate environmental impacts.

In the Special Interest Group we held at Western Half-Yearly Meeting in May 2008, this was the recommendation that resulted in the most substantial negative feedback. Our Monthly Meeting also has reservations about the idea of paying for carbon offsets, and does not favor putting a great deal of energy into investigating carbon offset plans. Some comments focused on the poor credibility and tokenism of many of the carbon offset plans. Some Friends likened paying for carbon offsets to purchasing indulgences for sins. Others were concerned

that instituting carbon offsets would reduce our motivation to make changes that would reduce travel. To some extent, the latter concern was supported by comments we heard in Australia – we got the impression that some Friends felt that the problem had been dealt with by the decision to pay for carbon offsets.

We are ourselves unsure of whether incorporating carbon offsets into the budget is a good idea, but we think the idea should be considered. We also think that if we identify the carbon costs of our way of doing business and monitor how it changes over time, it will help Friends remember that our goal is to reduce our carbon footprint, not to compensate for it. We are aware the Canadian Friends Service Committee is currently calculating its own carbon footprint, including travel and other activities. We hope that a small group, perhaps under the care of Canadian Friends Service Committee or of Quaker Ecology Action Network, would look into the merits of various carbon offset options and bring recommendations to CYM for discernment.

Recommendation 5: that CYM determine and monitor the carbon costs of our way of doing business, investigate carbon offsets, report the findings, and consider incorporating carbon offsets for CYM business travel into the budget.

4.6 Funding of Yearly Meeting activities

AYM's system of requesting donations from Friends seems to work better than CYM's system. Australian Friends receive a single request for donations each year covering all levels of AYM. They receive clear information about the per capita cost of running AYM, their Regional Meeting, and their Local Meeting. They have the opportunity to contribute to various optional funds. They understand that the suggested amount is a request for a contribution, not a membership fee, and that a contribution of any amount is welcome.

In contrast, CYM establishes a list of suggested contributions and gifts from Monthly Meetings that covers about half the annual operating budgets, and obtains additional funds through individual donations, interest, and sometimes through fund transfers. Friends receive an annual letter from CYM requesting a donation. However, they do not know the per capita cost

of operating CYM – an important bit of baseline information for Friends to have when they decide what to contribute. Furthermore, they may believe that they have already made their donation, because they have contributed to their Monthly Meeting, and their Monthly Meeting has contributed to CYM.

We suggest that CYM adopt an approach to requesting donations similar to that of AYM. Friends would receive a single letter each year from their Monthly Meeting requesting a single contribution to be paid to the Monthly Meeting, which would then be disbursed by the Monthly Meeting to CYM and to other funds. The Monthly Meeting could handle donations to funds and special projects in either of two ways. They could include in their letters a list of funds to which Friends might wish to contribute, as is done in AYM. Alternatively, they might wish to discern as a meeting how they would like to support these funds, and include the agreed-upon amounts in the amount requested for the Monthly Meeting. (See "*Friends and Appeals*" in the March 2007 issue of *The Canadian Friend* for a rationale for this approach.)

We are unsure how Canadian Friends Service Committee appeals would best be handled using this approach. The committee's financial situation is more complex, in that it receives grants and donations from non-Quaker sources, as well as contributions from Canadian Friends. It seems to us that Friends (and Canadian Friends Service Committee) would benefit from knowing what each Canadian Friend would need to pay to maintain Canadian Friends Service Committee's remaining operating costs. It would require consultation with the committee to determine how to handle requests for donations to Canadian Friends Service Committee, if the Australian model is adopted by CYM.

We are aware that the system we propose will mean new annual responsibilities for Monthly Meetings, as they would need to determine how many active adult members and attenders they have, send out requests for contributions, keep track of how the contributions are allocated to the various funds, and send a cheque to each fund. We hope Monthly Meetings will consider whether they have the capacity to do this work. We expect that if CYM decides to move to the proposed system, CYM's new Contributions Committee will be able to help Monthly Meetings with the transition.

Recommendation 6: that CYM set a budget for its operating costs and establish a quota for Monthly Meetings (based on number of active adult members and attenders) that covers the entire cost of operating CYM.

Recommendation 7: that Monthly Meetings accept responsibility for collecting and disbursing their share of the funds needed to operate CYM as well as the Monthly Meeting. This could be done by determining a budget that includes the CYM quota and Monthly Meeting costs and notifying members of the average amount needed per active adult member/attender, recognizing that some Friends will donate more and some less than the average amount.

Recommendation 8: that the contribution notice received annually by Friends include a mechanism for contributing to other funds or projects (e.g., Canadian Friends Service Committee, the new Youth Secretary position, the Friends Education Program).

5 Conclusion

CYM and AYM have many similar concerns. Some of the discussions we heard in Australia – about using electronic communication, about involving Young Friends in the life of our meetings, about “the tyranny of distance” – could just as easily have been heard at a Canadian Friends’ gathering. Both Yearly Meetings are experiencing a period of change and renewal. In Canada, many of the recommendations of the Consultation and Renewal Working Group are currently being implemented. In Australia, the Quaker Voices in the 21st Century project is gathering a sense of the concerns, struggles, and longings that are felt by Friends throughout Australia, and an impetus toward spiritual renewal seems to be developing. We think that each Yearly Meeting has much to learn from the other, and we hope that this initial report will stimulate an ongoing dialogue.

Appendix 1: Conduct of Preparatory Sessions

'matters for consideration' and there is nothing to prevent this.

(from Documents in Advance, Australia Yearly Meeting, 2008)

The Yearly Meeting is primarily a Meeting for Business. Many reports come first to a Preparatory Session, and from there are brought to a Formal Session.

The purpose of the Preparatory Session is to consider a report in Documents in Advance, offer further background information, and raise awareness of the work of the committee or working group. Friends who wish to have significant input are encouraged to attend the Preparatory Session and provide input before the report of the session is produced.

The Committee or Working Group will ask experienced Friends to Clerk and scribe their Preparatory Session. The Clerk will ensure that the Preparatory Session includes:

- worship
- presentation of the report
- the hearing of Regional Meeting responses
- clarification of issues; questions; open discussion and
- preparation of any matters for consideration of Yearly Meeting.

The Clerk of the Session will prepare a report, if possible on the same day as the Preparatory Session. The report will include any 'matters for consideration of Yearly Meeting' arising from the Preparatory Session. These 'matters for consideration' will then be used by the Presiding Clerk in guiding the Formal Session, and in the drafting of the Minute.

The Clerk of the Session will be responsible for handing a copy of the report to the Yearly Meeting Secretary and posting a copy on the designated notice boards, to allow Friends to add any comments, and to brief the Presiding Clerk so that he can guide the Formal Session.

The Friend appointed to present the report at the Formal Session will briefly summarise the first part of the report and present any 'matters for consideration of Yearly Meeting'. The Presiding Clerk will then guide the Meeting forward.

This process enables the Formal Session to proceed more smoothly and efficiently and there may be no need for further contributions.

Nevertheless, you may find yourself moved to contribute during the Formal Session on the