

Suggested Procedure for Laying Down (Disbanding) Northern Yearly Meeting Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups

There has been a lack of clarity about the procedure for laying down Northern Yearly Meeting monthly meetings and worship groups. Ideally worship groups and preparative meetings would communicate with the monthly meetings with which they are associated. The monthly meeting would then communicate with the yearly meeting clerk. Worship groups that are not under the care of a monthly meeting would communicate directly with the NYM Clerk and the Advancement and Outreach Clerk. A monthly meeting that wishes to be laid down would communicate its intention with the yearly meeting clerk. The NYM Advancement and Outreach Committee and the NYM Ministry and Nurture Committee can provide assistance as needed. Decisions regarding the laying down of a monthly meeting or worship group will be included in the A&O Committee report to NYM. A celebration of a meeting or worship group that is being laid down is important and may be initiated by either the group itself or the Advancement and Outreach Committee. This process may vary from group to group.

If a monthly meeting or worship group lays itself down, it should take care that, after paying any outstanding debts, any remaining property and financial resources owned by the meeting should be given to another charitable organization with a similar mission and not distributed to individual members. This might include another monthly meeting, NYM, a Quaker nonprofit organization, or any other nonprofit tax exempt organization that has a purpose similar to that of the dissolved monthly meeting. There could be serious tax consequences to both members of the meeting and any individual to whom the meeting's funds are distributed and the meeting should consult with a lawyer licensed in the state in which the meeting is situated if it has any question about whether the distribution of the property and financial resources is appropriate.

Furthermore, if the meeting is legally incorporated, it should follow its articles of incorporation or bylaws in winding up the meeting's financial affairs, and seek legal guidance if needed.

Friends are advised to take care of these issues promptly and diligently and in a spirit of love and equity.

There is no clear answer regarding a situation where one or two Friends want to continue being a monthly meeting and others are ready to lay it down. The Advancement and Outreach Committee will continue to be in contact with all NYM groups and handle these situations with care, perhaps offering a Clearness Committee to help the group go forward. If a group sends a State of Society stating that they have disbanded, this is definitive, but the group should still be contacted by the Advancement and Outreach Committee or other NYM committee to understand the circumstances and act on them appropriately.

Three examples of laying down a Friends group:

1. If a worship group is under the care of a monthly meeting and wishes to be laid down, the monthly meeting should visit them and/or have Friends from the group come to a meeting for business of the monthly meeting to report on the circumstances. If all are clear to go ahead, this should be reported to the Clerk of NYM and the A&O Committee Clerk by the worship group and the monthly meeting in whose care it is.

2. If a monthly meeting wishes to be laid down and has come to unity on this, the meeting would send a minute specific to this action to the Clerk of NYM and the A&O Committee Clerk as well as including it in their State of Society.

3. If a monthly meeting is languishing but is not clear on whether to continue, the A&O representative(s) should visit and help the group come to a decision as possible or suggest that a Clearness Committee consisting of Ministry and Nurture and A&O Committee members could meet with the group if appropriate. Contact should be made by the A&O Committee Clerk with the Ministry and Nurture Committee Clerk to inform them of the situation.

In all these cases, NYM Friends may wish to recognize this significant change in some way at the next yearly meeting session and honor the group, for instance a celebration of life for the group or whatever is appropriate.

Submitted by A&O Committee May 16, 2021

Approved by Northern Yearly Meeting during Annual Session Meeting for Business May 28-30, 2021