

Great Plains Yearly Meeting Handbook:

How We Work Together

First Edition 2009, Revised 2012, 2014

Overview

Great Plains Yearly Meeting is made up of five monthly meetings: Hominy Friends and Council House Friends in northeastern Oklahoma, Heartland Friends and University Friends in Wichita, Kansas, and Central City Friends in south central Nebraska.

Great Plains Yearly Meeting has a rich history, having celebrated its centennial in 2008. Known as Nebraska Yearly Meeting until 2001, GPYM is part of Friends United Meeting (FUM). GPYM is theologically diverse, as demonstrated by each congregation's relationships with other Friends networks. Heartland and Central City are directly affiliated with Friends General Conference. University Friends belongs to Evangelical Friends Church Mid-America, as did Council House Friends for many years. Hominy Friends are in regular communication with Ohio Yearly Meeting (Conservative) and Kickapoo Friends Center. Some Friends from Heartland and University Friends attend gatherings of the Missouri Valley Friends Conference.

University Friends Church has graciously agreed to be a consistent point of contact with GPYM for individuals and groups outside the yearly meeting.

Committees

Continuing Committee

This committee is the official and legal voice of GPYM between annual sessions, making decisions that cannot wait to be considered by the entire body during the first weekend in June. GPYM's presiding and recording clerks, the treasurer, and the clerks of Ministry and Counsel, Nominating Committee, Home Missions Committee and Finance Committee are ex-officio members. One or two other members may be recommended by the Nominating Committee to create better gender and geographic balance. Typically the presiding clerk asks the Continuing Committee to meet during the fall at the site of the next yearly meeting sessions to settle on a theme, an invited speaker, and leaders for children's and youth programs for those sessions. One or more additional meetings are also held by conference call.

Ministry and Counsel

Ministry and Counsel is concerned with worship, outreach, visitation among monthly meetings, pastoral care, and general spiritual health of the monthly meetings and GPYM as a whole. The group meets before the opening yearly meeting session and at least once during the sessions, presenting a report of its work and recommendations to the entire body. Ministry and Counsel helps identify the theme for GPYM sessions, provides leadership for the annual GPYM memorial meeting for worship, and may prepare queries for monthly meetings to use as they write their annual State of Society reports.

It is the responsibility of Ministry and Counsel to nurture those of all ages who are tender in the Spirit, recognize gifts in public ministry, and recommend that members exhibiting these gifts be recorded by GPYM as recommendations are brought forward by local meetings. Ministry and Counsel considers requests by local meetings to join GPYM and offers counsel if laying down an existing meeting is contemplated.

Each local meeting appoints two members by January 31 each year for two 12-month terms of service beginning February 1 and sends those names to the Presiding Clerk. Terms of the two appointees are staggered to promote continuity. Recorded ministers and the GPYM Presiding Clerk are ex-officio members. Ministry and Counsel names its own clerk during yearly meeting sessions to serve from the end of that session to the end of next year's annual gathering.

Nominating Committee

This committee is charged with prayerfully discerning gifts within the body and asking individuals who are members of GPYM meetings if they are willing to serve for one year as presiding and assistant presiding clerks, recording clerk(s), treasurer and assistant treasurer, minutes publisher, statistician, resident agent/custodian, and trustees.

It recommends representatives to other Quaker bodies for 3-year terms: American Friends Service Committee Corporation (4), Friends Committee on National Legislation (5), Friends United Meeting General Board (2 + alternate), Friends World Committee for Consultation (4) Quaker Earthcare Witness (1 + alternate) Wichita Friends School Board (2), and William Penn House (1).

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the Finance Committee or Home Missions Committee and to consider service opportunities for younger Friends. The Nominating Committee names its own clerk during yearly meeting sessions to serve from the end of that session to the end of next year's annual gathering, and meets before the opening yearly meeting session to begin its work.

Finance Committee

Members work with the treasurer to prepare an annual budget and present it for approval to GPYM. The Finance Committee considers requests for un-budgeted expenditures, usually by distance communication, and makes recommendations to the Continuing Committee. It also provides for an annual review of GPYM's financial accounting.

Each local meeting appoints two members by January 31 each year for two 12-month terms of service beginning February 1 and sends those names to the Presiding Clerk. Terms of the two appointees are staggered to promote continuity. Local meetings are asked to name people who are not members of the Nominating Committee or Home Missions Committee and to consider service opportunities for younger Friends. The Finance Committee names its own clerk during yearly meeting sessions to serve from the end of that session to the end of next year's annual gathering, and meets before the opening yearly meeting session each year to begin its work.

Home Missions Committee

During the 2014 GPYM sessions, the existing Anchor Committee created in 2012 was laid down in favor of a more permanent committee that will give energy to the new Leadership and Revitalization Initiative, using funds generated from the GPYM farm property and additional gifts from meetings and individuals. The Continuing Committee initially named the Home Missions Committee's members, acting on behalf of GPYM.

Each local meeting appoints two members by January 31 each year for two 12-month terms of service beginning February 1 and sends those names to the Presiding Clerk. Terms of the two appointees are staggered to promote continuity. Local meetings are asked to name people who are not members of the Nominating Committee or Finance Committee and to consider service opportunities for younger Friends. The Home Missions Committee names its own clerk during yearly meeting sessions to serve from the end of that session to the end of next year's annual gathering, and meets before the opening yearly meeting session each year to begin its work.

Trustees

Trustees are stewards of GPYM's physical assets and have legal responsibility for them. The six trustees are proposed by the GPYM Nominating Committee and serve three year terms. Trustees work closely with a manager to see that GPYM's farm property is rented and yields a fair income each year.

Business and Program Committee

The local meeting scheduled to host the next annual gathering of GPYM appoints three to five people who work with Continuing Committee to prepare an agenda for the sessions, arrange for resource people, and oversee local arrangements. Names are presented before the close of GPYM sessions.

Extracts and Epistle

During the opening session the presiding clerk asks Friends assembled who would serve GPYM by writing a general epistle (letter) to other Friends yearly meetings around the world, a message God would have our yearly meeting share. Two or three people are appointed to write the epistle, which is read and approved before the close of the sessions.

Two other Friends are asked to collect extracts, singular sayings both edifying and humorous, spoken during the course of the sessions. These sayings are included as part of the published minutes.

Website/communications working group

Great Plains Yearly Meeting has created a website to improve internal and external communications. An ad-hoc working group has been overseeing this project.

Yearly Meeting Leadership

Presiding Clerk and Assistant Presiding Clerk

During GPYM sessions the presiding clerk creates the agenda for business sessions, introduces each item, and listens as various Friends speak to it. When the clerk senses that there is unity, he or she voices the "sense of the meeting" for the body's consideration. If there is unity, the decision is written by the recording clerk for inclusion in the official minutes. If there is not unity and those who are not satisfied with the proposed minute do not feel able to "stand

aside,” there is further consideration of the matter. Sometimes the clerk may call for a time of worship before inviting further comment and/or carry the item of business over to be considered at a later meeting.

During the months between sessions, the presiding clerk prepares an agenda for Continuing Committee meetings and receives items of concern from the yearly meeting’s leaders, from Friends agencies, and from others, referring items to others as appropriate. The clerk manifests a deep concern for the yearly meeting’s faithfulness and health, and communicates with GPYM leaders to encourage them in their Christian service, seeking to understand their joys and struggles.

The assistant presiding clerk assists the clerk during the sessions and between sessions, and presides in the absence of the clerk.

Recording Clerk(s)

The recording clerk creates a written record of all decisions and other pertinent information during sessions and Continuing Committee meetings, and works with the GPYM minutes publisher to see that minutes of annual sessions are distributed.

Minutes Publisher

Working closely with the recording clerk(s), the minutes publisher will see that a final version of the minutes, with reports, epistle, and contact information for local meetings and session attendees is made available electronically and in print to GPYM members and Friends organizations who request a copy.

Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer

The treasurer receives funds and disburses them in accordance with the GPYM budget, consulting with the clerk of the Finance Committee, the presiding clerk, and the Continuing Committee as appropriate. The treasurer will keep accurate records and prepare an annual report that reflects the status of each budget category and the overall assets and liabilities of GPYM.

The treasurer, consulting with the clerk of the Finance Committee, will invest income greater than budgeted spending with Friends fiduciary agencies or other socially responsible managers. The treasurer will also work with the person who reviews GPYM’s financial records as directed by the Finance Committee.

Statistician

The statistician shall collect calendar year statistics from local meetings, including a report of additions and losses to the rolls of members and attendees, the average number of people who gather for worship, names of those deceased since the GPYM sessions, recorded ministers, and number of copies of the annual minutes requested.

Resident Agent and Custodian

GPYM's incorporation as a nonprofit group is with the State of Nebraska. All official communication from Nebraska officials and some other legal correspondence is received by the resident agent and custodian, who responds after consulting with the appropriate GPYM leadership.

Location of Yearly Meeting Sessions

The ordinary rotation of annual sessions is, Hominy Friends (2015), University Friends (2016), and Heartland Friends (2017). Friends United Meeting Triennial Sessions will be held at Friends University, Wichita Kansas, in 2017.

Monthly Meeting Responsibilities

- Appoint two members to serve on the Nominating, Home Missions, and Finance Committees and Ministry and Counsel by January 31 each year for two 12-month terms of service beginning February 1 and send those names to the GPYM Presiding Clerk. Ideally, terms of each pair of appointees are staggered to promote continuity.
- Bring a State of Society report reflecting the meeting's spiritual condition to be shared with the rest of GPYM at the beginning of each annual assembly.
- Submit a calendar year statistical report, including names of Friends departed since last sessions to be remembered during the memorial service. A memorial minute is encouraged for those who attended yearly meeting sessions or played key roles in the life of the local meeting.
- Include Great Plains Yearly Meeting in the monthly meeting budget.
- Host yearly meeting sessions periodically, if able.
- Recommend members for recording as ministers of the Gospel.

Budget and Special Funds

Great Plains Yearly Meeting has three separate financial accounts: an operating account, a home missions account, and a student loan fund.

Operating Account

Income for this account comes from contributions from local meetings and individuals, plus registration for yearly meeting sessions. Expenses include yearly meeting sessions/printing minutes, travel funds that help send GPYM representatives to meetings of Friends agencies, and an enabling fund.

Home Missions Account

GPYM was given farmland by the Stevens family from 1922-32, with the stipulation that income from the property be used for mission work "within the limits of the Yearly Meeting," with "special attention given to gathering the scattered membership and to the establishment of meetings". Most income to the home missions account comes from renting the land, with additional money coming from local meetings, individuals, and the GPYM operating account.

Since 2013, most of the expenditures of farm income have been dedicated to a new Leadership and Revitalization Project/Initiative focused within GPYM and facilitated by a released Friend. It was initially overseen by a temporary Anchor Committee. In 2014 GPYM created a new standing Home Missions Committee in its place to continue the initiative.

In the past, GPYM has used farm income to make financial contributions to Quaker agencies to support their work within the central plains states. Recently, despite the personal support of many GPYM Friends for those agencies, GPYM made a decision to reduce or eliminate those gifts in order to invest in the encouragement of new life and growth in GPYM's local meetings, including our young adult leaders. These funds have also been used to invite unaffiliated meetings and worship groups to join GPYM, all with the intention of revitalizing GPYM and honoring the wishes of the Stevens family.

Student Loan Fund

This revolving loan account established by designated contributions offers low interest loans to Friends pursuing higher education. Loans are approved by an ad hoc committee that includes the treasurer(s), clerk of the finance committee, and the presiding clerk. Loans paid back to the fund, with interest, become available to new borrowers.

Recording of Ministers

Great Plains Yearly Meeting has not recorded many ministers in recent years. When it has, the procedure has varied. More discussion is needed by GPYM Ministry and Counsel to clarify the process. Until there is more clarity, local meetings that recognize a member who has experienced a call by God to public ministry and demonstrated ministry gifts that build up the congregation are asked to talk with the Clerk of GPYM Ministry and Counsel.