

## **Report to BYM Interim Meeting from Program Committee 6/9/18**

The Program Committee (PC), through the work of a sub-committee on Schedule, spent considerable time in the last few months examining the current schedule of events at Annual Session (AS). The sub-committee charge is to review the AS schedule, with an eye towards addressing comments from recent evaluation forms, as well as issues identified by PC members. We are concerned, in particular, with the decline in weekend attendance. We ended up looking at almost every aspect of the current AS schedule.

The principle underlying our work is how to strengthen AS (and hence BYM) through increasing attendance and possibly streamlining the program and business that takes place during AS.

Two ongoing concerns that we discussed at length, are 1) the low attendance at the Sunday Meetings for Worship and business, and the relationship of the weekend schedule preceding it (why do so many people leave on Saturday); and 2) expressions from some Friends that they would value more programmed activities (separate from business and worship); this also related to Friends' concerns that we spend more time than may be necessary in business sessions.

We made changes to the 2018 schedule to address some of these concerns (including adding a time for all-community meeting for worship and adding a 3<sup>rd</sup> time slot for interest groups).

We are now testing the idea of shortening AS by one full day, beginning in 2019. Possible benefits would be reducing the cost and the time commitment to attend. And that, we hope, might mean that more people would come. It might also mean that more of those who do come would stay to the end, so that we would all leave with a sense of being a gathered community that had accomplished our business for the year, rather than having so many people just sort of dribble away toward the end of the session.

### **Collecting information and ideas, we:**

- Reviewed AS schedules over the last 20+ years;
- Designed and promoted a short survey (online and paper) and began a wider conversation about the AS schedule at the March 2018 Interim Meeting; the survey asks people why they do or don't come to AS, why they leave before it's over (if they do), and what, if anything, they would like to see us do differently;
- Consulted with several individuals, including BYM staff;
- Began a review of past business meeting agendas to analyze how we spend our time (required decisions? Hearing reports and concerns? Celebrating our work together?);
- Devoted significant Program Committee time to a discussion of various proposals to shorten AS, including consideration of impact of changes on many aspects of AS program (the retreat, JYM, etc.).

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## **What we have learned**

1. from the survey: some people think AS lasts too long, which makes it expensive in both time and money. Some say reports at business sessions are too long, and we sometimes wrangle too much about small things. Some people feel a pull to be at their own meetings on Sunday morning, and there usually doesn't seem to be anything of much substance happening at AS on Sunday.

We also heard many positive comments about the value of AS. We heard, for instance, that AS provides opportunities that you can't have in a small meeting; that it deepens connections to people and the Divine; that the food is great, the location is good, and the dorms are clean and comfortable; and that being part of meeting for business at AS helps Friends to see how to help their own meetings proceed in a spirit-led manner.

2. from discussions with other individuals: most Friends consulted think shortening AS by one day would not detract from either our business or fellowship, although there would be somewhat less time for both. Individuals would save money by paying for one less night. This might allow more individuals to attend part or all of AS.

## **Proposal to shorten Annual Session**

Program Committee considered several proposals to shorten AS, including ending on Saturday, and shortening by 1.5 days. We propose shortening AS by one day, starting Wednesday afternoon, and ending after lunch on Sunday.

Roughly: Retreat Tuesday-Wednesday; Business Meeting starts Wednesday afternoon. First plenary Wednesday evening. This would eliminate the Wednesday afternoon all-age plenary and about 4 hours of time for business meeting.

Schedule for committee meetings/interest groups/Worship-sharing and bible study/all-age events to be determined. Keep 3 afternoons of workshops.

Additionally, we will look at ways to make the weekend events particularly inviting to Friends so as to encourage those who are already present to stay and to make it more attractive for those who can't come sooner to spend the weekend. Switch Coffee House to Friday, put Carey on Saturday. As feasible, retain some substantive business for Sunday morning.