

WOMEN'S RETREAT 2020, FINAL REPORT

Registrar's Report

The planners from Friends Meeting of Washington reserved Pearlstone Center for the 2020 retreat as we left the 2019 retreat. The traditional last weekend in January was already reserved, so we opted for the first weekend in February. This moved the bulk of work for the registrar from December to January, which this registrar experienced as a plus.

All we needed to set up online registration was a theme, a price structure, and technical assistance from Wayne Finegar in the BYM office. We finalized our theme in June.

To determine our pricing, I took the contract cost for 125 attenders. Then I added 3% because most registrants pay by credit card, ten dollars per attender to cover costs of work time in the BYM office, \$250 to cover the cost of our plenary speaker (good to know before pricing, as some years have hired ensembles at much higher cost). Some retreats have lost money. Since our goal was to break even or run a surplus of up to \$3000, I added \$3000 to the above total expenses.

Many women love the motel option and are willing to pay more for it. The motel can house 72 women in doubles (more if women ask for triples) and these beds always fill first. So I assumed that I would fill 72 motel beds as doubles and 53 beds in the garden lodge and cabins for 125 attenders. I also decided that a motel bed would be worth an extra \$60 to most attenders. Thus: total costs= (53 x price) + (72x [price + \$60]). This gave me an overly picky number which I rounded slightly to get \$240 for a cabin or garden lodge bed and \$300 for a motel double. The former two had to have different numbers for the

online registration, so I made them 240 for the cabin and 245 for the lodge. I set the price for a triple in the motel at \$270.

Pearlstone had several times when they needed to know things—90 days out I had to tell them if we were going to lower our number by more than 10%. Thirty days out I had to guarantee (to pay for) a minimum number of overnight attenders that would be at least 90% of our contract number. Fourteen days out I had to submit a final number of attenders, guest list, and dietary list. Pearlstone would bill us at 110% for anyone added after that although I could put in new names if registrants dropped out.

Our cost for the final contract rose with attenders over the 125 (not more space, but more meals and bed linens). So I ran the numbers for expected income from 125, 135, 145, and 155 attenders to make sure our costs were covered at all levels of attendance. And they were. Profits rose slightly at each increased level of attendance.

We opened online registration in September. Note that at that point we did not need to post information on workshops or worship sharing but only the theme and prices. We should have kept the form simpler, as women got side-tracked by the links to offering workshops or leading worship sharing. Next year we may include links for those opportunities in the confirmation of registration email rather than on the registration form itself.

In hopes of meeting our minimum by 30 days out, we made December 27 our cutoff date for early registration. We were also explicit that we would not be refunding registration fees after 12/27. On Jan 28 prices rose by 10%, but to even dollar amounts. We made paying online in full the default option. We also emailed out a few reminders to pay online to registrants who had not paid in full. Only five registrants still owed money as the retreat opened. And two of them did not show up. In the past payment on site was a major option which resulted in many who didn't show up.

On the registration form we asked for donations so women who needed financial aid could attend. We suggested donation amounts—including a one for the full amount for one attendant. We received donations of about \$3700. Registrants were referred to the registrar to discuss financial aid, and I was blessed with the means to be generous. I telephoned each woman who asked for aid and asked how much she could afford to spend. I gave full scholarships to a few who said they could afford nothing—which seems to have been a bad idea as three of them didn't come. In the future I would ask everyone for some financial commitment to attending.

The committee felt that 170 was the maximum number we could accommodate with our programming. I registered 159 women for overnight stays, 3 for 3 days of commuting, and 9 for Saturday-only registration for a total of 171. I still had two beds left without needing anyone to sleep in an upper bunk. Incidentally, commuters are problematic in that they take up space for workshops and worship sharing, but are not helpful in meeting our financial contractual minimum. As registration progressed I kept looking at our projected income vs the contract. Based on financial considerations, the committee and I decided to close registration for commuters when we had twelve.

We intended to close registration on January 15 when Pearlstone needed our final numbers, but all options were filled a few days before that. (Motel registration had closed Dec 29 when all rooms were full.) We then took registrations for a waiting list. We should have had wait-listed women fill out the full form as I was able to accommodate most of them due to cancellations.

In fact, we had enough cancellations that our final number was 154 overnights, two 3 day commuters, and 7 Saturday only attenders.

We did very well financially. After subtracting 3% for credit card fees, we netted about \$8000. I credit this success to opening registration very early, housing three women in several of the motel rooms, having a clear cancellation policy, and having higher fees for later registration

(which was described as a discount for early registration). While we did not issue refunds after 12/27, we did credit them as a charitable donation to Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

One of the committee’s intentions was to host a retreat more colorful and younger than ones past. To that end I made about 60 phone calls to women who would help us realize that intention. And we did. In addition, according to the Survey Monkey evaluation responses, 25% of our attendants were there for the first time.

From the survey:

Answer Choices	Responses
-	-
- This is my first time	24.49% 24
- 2 - 5 times	36.73% 36
- 6 or more	38.78% 38
TOTAL	98

- Age range

From the survey:

Under 18	0.00% 0
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- 18-24	1.02%	1
- 25-34	2.04%	2
- 35-44	5.10%	5
- 45-54	13.27%	13
- 55-64	30.61%	30
- 65+	47.96%	47
TOTAL		98

Planners: included Mary Campbell, Martha Solt, J.E. McNeil, Debby Churchman, Zoe Plaucher, Robin Appleberry and Pam Lebeaux from Friends Meeting of Washington, Yuri Plowden from Harrisburg FM, and Sam Milford from, um, is it Pittsburgh FM

What kinds of outreach/advertising you did

Early on, we identified “ambassadors” in each of the BYM meetings and asked them to help us spread the word. We also contacted all F/friends who had attended during the last (5?) years. Mary Campbell personally called 60 people to see if they were planning to come. As much as possible, we reached out to Friends of color to give an especially warm invitation.

Any standout results from the survey

Overall very positive evaluations, with the workshops getting either 4s or 5s (on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest). Attenders gave more 5s to the motel rooms than the cabins. Opinions about the plenary speaker were generally positive, but a few friends found her hard to follow.

How women liked the different worship sharing options

The short answer is that they loved them, especially the walking one. All of the group leaders found them especially fulfilling. So many people signed up for the groups, that the walkers split into 2 groups.

The Healing Center

The Healing Center was placed in the Vineyard room. Almost 40 friends visited the center and received massage or energy work. Going forward, we may want to make their location/hours clearer.

Lessons going forward

- Send a Save the Date as soon as possible
- Consider checking dates with Pearlstone much earlier and finding a way to reserve further in advance, so that we're not boxed out of the January date that we've had in the past. This year might be a good one for this, since Annapolis will be involved in the process for two years in a row.
- Bring copies of the schedule and the queries
- Simplify registration form, and put links to Workshops and Worship sharing on the follow-up email instead of the form

- Set up two information stations for friends to check the schedule and location
- Make room assignments in advance, where possible (Martha took photos of the meeting rooms, which should really help), knowing that we need to first see how many people are showing up for which workshops before an appropriate assignment can be made.
- To the extent possible, decide in advance what announcements need to be made, when to make them, and who will do the announcing
- Strive for fewer of the traditional worship sharing groups, include the same worship+ groups, but book about the same number of workshops
- Figure out a better system for encouraging overnigheters and handling commuters and Saturday only people
- Ask Pearlstone for more coffee served at once! (This is a pain point every year and seems avoidable.)
- Continue practice of using Ambassadors in each meeting as our liaisons; help Mary with her phone calls so she doesn't have to make all 60 of them by herself
- Consider doing more targeted outreach to Young Friends and Young Adult Friends, talking with them about what the retreat offers, what they would be interested in doing, what might steer them away from participating, etc.
- Make it clear in the Know Before You Go email that we will not be open until 4:00 pm
- Think through exactly how we'd like to end the retreat

Respectfully submitted,

The 2020 Planners