

Is there a future for Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting?

On May 17, Friends from the Monthly Meetings that comprise Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting (GPQM) convened at Michigan Friends Center and on Zoom to discuss the future of this organization.

We considered whether there was a unique role for this Quarterly Meeting to play now and into the foreseeable future, and how we should go about either ensuring that future or laying down the Quarterly.

This report describes some of the history of GPQM, the current situation, and possible ways forward.

1. A capsule history of Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting.

The history of Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting hasn't been well-documented - some information is available online (particularly - [Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends – Lake Erie Yearly Meeting](#) but it may not be accurate and is not very current. According to these records and conversations with Friends, Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting was formed in 1957. In 1963, Friends School in Detroit opened. GPQM owned Friends School and was responsible for its administration. This weighty task was a major responsibility of GPQM. The school closed in 2015, and that decision and the work of laying down the school, fulfilling financial obligations and distributing remaining funds continued into the 2020s.

During the pandemic, the ease of meeting via Zoom led to mid-Winter Meetings being held on Zoom, as well as a number of Friends participating via Zoom for blended Meetings at other times.

2. Where things stand now.

With the closing of Detroit Friends School, GPQM lost an important mission that took up much time and concern. GPQM provides a conduit of funds from individual Meetings to groups such as AFSC, although it may be an inefficient way to do this. There have been programs that were seen as meaningful by Friends who participated, such as the recent visit to the Nathan Thomas House in Schoolcraft, commemorating the Underground Railroad. But attendance at Quarterly Meeting has been low, and much of our effort has been spent on filling roles to perpetuate the organization rather than to advance a clear mission.

With our current structure, we need a clerk, assistant clerk, and a recording clerk, as well as some members of core committees. But it may make sense to first see whether there is a meaningful mission for GPQM and as part of that process consider what structure is needed to support that.

3. A possible future mission

A number of Friends spoke of the importance of GPQM Meetings for them as children and young persons. There seems to be an influx of younger Friends and children into many of our Monthly Meetings, and this raises the question of whether this is a role that GPQM could again play. At a recent gathering in Ann Arbor celebrating the 50th wedding anniversary of two Friends, Friends spoke about their own marriages and someone noted how many of these relationships began at various Quaker gatherings that were for or included young Friends. Providing an opportunity for families, children, and younger Friends to get together beyond the scope of individual Meetings could be a positive thing that GPQM could facilitate. The opportunity to camp and to gather at Friends Lake is also a draw to those who can get there.

4. Two ways forward

If GPQM is to continue, it needs to develop clarity about a mission. The current clerk of the Quarterly, Kevin Miller, has stayed in this position an additional year beyond the planned two-year term, and we have not had a co-clerk for two years.

If there is interest in continuing Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting, this will require new people to take on the task of clarifying its purpose. Those who have benefited as children or young adults from the opportunity to get together that it has provided might consider whether they are called to provide this opportunity for a new generation.

Alternatively, we should consider working with LEYM to lay down this organization, with gratitude for the positive role it played in many lives and to those who carried on this work. We should plan to make this decision at the September Meeting, because we will otherwise need to fill a number of roles, including Clerk, at that time.