

October 2, 2016

ORAL REPORT: AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE

The charge from the Clerks to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Library Committee was to “[help] the Meeting discern the best way forward in structuring the Library Committee so as to protect and develop the resources of the Library and to maximize its usefulness to the [Meeting] community.” The committee members were Barbara James, Rick Morgan, Leslie Sussan, and myself [Dean Pruitt].

Our first step was to facilitate the appointment of an Acting Librarian to replace the Meeting’s Librarian who had resigned. The Clerks asked a previous Meeting Librarian, Barbara James who was a member of our committee, to fill this temporary role. Barbara has worked hard all summer, reorganizing and relabeling the shelves for easier access, adding shelves for newcomers and the writings of Meeting members, conducting a thorough inventory, and identifying missing books. She is now updating the Library’s online database and further developing our collection of online materials.

We met eight times between June 12 and September 25 and performed the following activities: we reviewed the Library Committee’s annual report and minutes of recent meetings; solicited input from the outgoing Librarian and the Library Committee’s clerk; reached out to the Quaker Librarians’ Collective and to other Friends meetings for information about library practices elsewhere; and consulted with several members of the Meeting about the Library’s history, its website, and possible alternatives to the current database.

We have prepared a 6-page report which will be available on the Library website that can be reached from the Meeting website. http://www.bethesdafriends.org/officers_committees.aspx#adhoc Also I can send you a copy if you write me an e-mail message. Our report is advisory to the Library Committee, providing possible guidelines for activities and pointing out areas that need policy development. We recognize that not everything we recommend can be done at once; indeed, what we propose will require a multi-year effort.

Here are some highlights from the full report. We recommend that the Library Committee continue to exist and that 4 active new members be appointed as well as a new Librarian, who is drawn from the Meeting. We envision a working Library Committee that has a division of labor among its members and with the Librarian, such that individuals and subcommittees are responsible for its various activities. We have drafted a possible mission statement, which emphasizes four main directions for Committee activities, which I will now excerpt:

1. Maintaining, growing and pruning the collection to keep it dynamic and accessible.

In the realm of maintenance, we note that 300 of the 1300 books and other materials have been checked out and not returned. Retrieving these items, where possible, should be an immediate task for the new committee, as well as developing procedures for avoiding this problem in the future. This would be an opportune time for all of us to look through our bookshelves for forgotten books that were borrowed from the Library.

In the realm of growing and pruning the Library’s collection, another major activity should be to develop policy about what sorts of books and other materials to emphasize, and how to get recommendations that meet the Meeting’s needs. We are hoping that the Library Committee can draw upon the insights

and skills of other Meeting members to help with these decisions. Books are sometimes donated to the Library, and that is always welcome if they fit the Library's needs. But the committee will need to develop policies and procedures for processing these donations, which can sometimes involve overwhelming numbers of items.

2. Establishing close contact with the Meeting so as to acquaint people with the Library's holdings and choose appropriate materials to add to these holdings.

The Library contains an excellent collection of books and other materials on Quaker history and beliefs, other spiritual matters, and various Quaker concerns. The children's and youth's sections are also quite rich. But we have a sense that the collection is not well known and is underused. Furthermore, close contact is needed to provide guidance for new acquisitions. The Library should add items that fit the Meeting's needs and get rid of those that don't.

3. Supporting educational activities in concert with other Meeting committees.

Part of this close contact should involve Meeting committees that can use books and other written material, such as our committees on Religious Education, Adult Religious Education, and Peace and Social Justice...and of course the Book Table for suggestions of good acquisitions.

4. Keeping up with new technology and digital resources so that we remain a 21st Century library.

We need to keep up with the times...with new developments in library technology and the explosion of new digital resources that grace the modern world.

One more recommendation and I'll be done. We suggest that the Library Committee develop a handbook outlining its policies and practices so as to maintain institutional memory and orient new members. Our report provides a possible outline for such a handbook, but the details need to be filled in. Other Meeting committees might also consider this proposal.