

History Of Intermountain Yearly Meeting

As a young yearly meeting, we sense the adventure of the journey, sometimes unsure of our destination, but always committed to the searching steps.

Norma Adams Price, in Epistle from IMYM, June 1978

In 1974 at Ghost Ranch New Mexico, a gathering known as Intermountain Friends' Fellowship declared itself to be Intermountain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. The individuals present were members and attenders of monthly meetings in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. Before creating Intermountain Yearly Meeting, some of the monthly meetings had been members of Pacific Yearly Meeting, an independent yearly meeting; others had been associated with the Missouri Valley Yearly Meeting, a conservative yearly meeting; and still others were from unaffiliated monthly meetings and worship groups. Many of the monthly meetings were founded by people who moved to the area and were unable to find existing unprogrammed meetings to attend. Although some were birthright Friends, others had come to Quakerism through conscientious objection, work camps, and even independent study. Yet in creating this new thing—the yearly meeting connected only loosely with meetings that had come before—these Friends claimed the history and experience of all Quakers as part of their own spiritual story.

Although meetings in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah had been part of Pacific Yearly Meeting and some meetings in Colorado participated in the annual gatherings of Missouri Valley Friends, the great distances prevented all but a few Friends from attending gatherings, serving on committees, or knowing and being known by the larger groups. Because western Friends recognized these drawbacks, local retreats were held in 1951, 1952, and 1953, attended by Friends from Arizona and New Mexico. Although the 1955 annual gathering of Pacific Yearly Meeting was held in Prescott, Arizona, further efforts to create a regional group faltered. In 1969, as newcomers spoke with older Friends who desired closer contact with other Quakers, the value of a retreat was reaffirmed. Sixty Friends met at the home of Clarissa and Samuel Cooper in Camp Verde, Arizona, for fellowship and worship. Discussions led to a gathering the following year at Ghost Ranch near Abiquiu, New Mexico. Friends from Utah and Colorado were also invited to attend, and over 150 Friends came together, choosing to name themselves the Intermountain Friends' Fellowship. Responsibility for the gathering, held each year at Ghost Ranch, began to be rotated among regional meetings in the area. Five years later, as members of the Fellowship recognized among themselves a desire to become a yearly meeting, the following minute was adopted:

Following several years of prayerful search, it is the present sense of the meeting that the Intermountain Friends' Fellowship now constitutes itself a yearly meeting to be known as the Intermountain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, emphasis to be on fellowship, community, and spiritual renewal. The organizational structure is to be minimal. The monthly meeting is the primary place for business and caring for members and attenders. (June 8, 1974)

Monthly meetings and worship groups that became members of the new organization included Flagstaff, Pima, Tempe, Phoenix, (Arizona); Paradise Valley (Las Vegas, Nevada); Albuquerque, Santa Fe, El Paso, Gallup, Taos, Los Alamos, Las Cruces, (New Mexico); Lubbock, High Plains (Amarillo), (Texas); Mountain View, Boulder, Durango, Fort Collins (Colorado); and Logan (Utah).

Despite a continuing desire to minimize the formal structure of IMYM, between 1976 and 1979 Friends felt it necessary to create a *Guide to Clerks and Monthly Meetings*, which later became *The Guide to Operations of Intermountain Yearly Meeting*. Then as the yearly meeting matured, some called for development of a statement of faith and practice that would reflect the unique aspects of our understanding of Truth and serve as a descriptive guide to the practices of our members and meetings. This led to the adoption of the *Faith and Practice of North Pacific Yearly Meeting, 1993*, in 1998. The *Faith and Practice* that you are reading is adapted from that volume.

Since its formation in 1974, Intermountain Yearly Meeting has doubled in size. Friends have been active in a number of social issues, including opposition to the deployment of the MX Missile system; antinuclear activities at the Nevada Test Site and Rocky Flats Nuclear Arsenal; aid for those fleeing oppression, concern for violence and unjust conditions in Central America, including working within the sanctuary movement; treatment of native peoples; action against the death penalty; and respectful consideration for all people regardless of sexual orientation. Recently, members of the yearly meeting have actively opposed military action in response to worldwide terrorist threats and the war in Iraq. A Committee on Sufferings was set up to support Friends arrested, fined, or imprisoned for acts of conscience. This committee was particularly

active during the sanctuary movement, in which many IMYM Friends were involved. Because of our location near the border with Mexico, Friends in the yearly meeting have had particular concerns for the plight of refugees, originally those from El Salvador and more recently those from Mexico. An informal Committee on Migrant and Border Concerns struggles against the inequities existing for Latin Americans across our border and within the United States.

In the late 1980s, several Intermountain Yearly Meeting Friends at the annual sessions expressed deep concern about the changes in focus of the American Friends Service Committee, especially the laying down of work camps and other opportunities for Friends to participate in service projects. There was a feeling that the AFSC was losing touch with the Quaker spirit. Staff members, fewer and fewer of whom were Quakers, seemed to be unfamiliar with Friends' principles. This concern led to a dialogue that culminated in the development of the AFSC/IMYM Joint Service Project, a program that now provides an increasing number of intergenerational one- to two-week service projects in Mexico, on Indian reservations, and throughout the intermountain region. The JSP has become a model now being used in various forms by other yearly meetings, both on the West Coast and in the East.

Intermountain Yearly Meeting, an independent yearly meeting, currently consists of 17 monthly meetings and one associated monthly meeting in Mexico City. There are more than 1,000 members spread over approximately half a million square miles. Regional meetings have been organized in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah. Numerous worship groups exist throughout the area. The yearly meeting is independent of any umbrella organization such as Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, or Evangelical Friends International. Intermountain Yearly Meeting is a member of the Friends' World Committee for Consultation and is actively affiliated with the Friends Committee on National Legislation and the American Friends Service Committee. *Friends Bulletin*, a monthly publication of Pacific, North Pacific, and IMYM Yearly Meetings, serves as a voice for the yearly meeting and its constituent monthly meetings.