

Discernment Process Information

What does NFC need to decide?

Because of the yearly meeting decision to restructure, all churches have decisions to make. (See background documents at the end of this document for more information.) NFC could remain a part of NWYM, which will be organized around the current Faith and Practice statement regarding human sexuality. Or NFC could leave NWYM. In this restructuring period, churches that leave keep ownership of buildings and property.

If NFC leaves NWYM, we could choose to join a yet-to-be-formed new yearly meeting, which will be organized around a new Faith and Practice that affirms full participation of [LGBTQ people](#) and likely would affirm same-sex marriage. Or NFC could choose to be an independent Friends congregation, choosing non-official relationships and partnerships with camps, global outreach ministries, and Friends churches in both NWYM and the newly formed yearly meeting.

What will not change?

NFC will remain a Christ-centered community that believes the Bible to be authoritative in our individual and corporate lives. NFC will keep the [same statements of mission, vision, and values](#) we have held.

What are the central issues at stake?

- Some see the central issue as God's guidance for marriage; that the decision of affiliation should primarily be about whether one believes marriage is for a man and a woman, or whether it is something faithful Christians of the same gender can experience.
- Some see the central issue as the criteria for membership and participation in the church. For some, this means the church must align membership with core agreements; for others, this means a commitment to Jesus is the defining issue for membership, and other disagreements can exist within the community.
- Some see the division of the last few years as distracting the church from our mission, and a reorganization as a way to get unstuck; others see the issues involved in the division as central to the mission of the church.

What may be reasons to support the various options?

NFC staying in NWYM:

For those convinced that scripture teaches that God's intention is for marriage to be between a man and a woman, and who believe that people with same-sex attraction are called to celibacy, staying in NWYM may make the most sense. For those who believe NFC and NWYM should confront what the NWYM Faith and Practice sees as sinful and hold firmly to what Faith and Practice sees as truth, staying in NWYM may make the most sense.

NFC joining the newly formed YM:

For those convinced that scripture and God's leading affirm full inclusion of LGBTQ people in all aspects of church life, including leadership and pastoral positions for people who are in a same-sex relationship, joining the new YM may make the most sense. For those who believe justice calls us to confront ways we have excluded LGBTQ people, and who believe acceptance and belonging in spiritual community are the best ways for the Holy Spirit to lead each person to holiness, joining the new YM may make the most sense.

NFC leaving the YM to become an independent Friends church:

For those who do not desire that our differences about human sexuality be dividing lines for participation in spiritual community, becoming independent may make the most sense. For those who believe our divided world needs people who accept the challenge of living in a community with differences and are willing to seek God together, becoming independent may make the most sense. For those who believe acceptance and belonging in spiritual community are the best ways for the Holy Spirit to lead each person to holiness, becoming independent may make the most sense.

Planning process: Prayer Teams, Meetings, Surveys, Listening Forums

Gatherings and survey are intended for regular attenders and members only.

Prayer Team: A call for prayer focused specifically on this time of discussion and discernment will be initiated by our Monday morning prayer group and open to all who attend NFC. Group gatherings for prayer will be held in various locations and at various times as designed by the team.

March 5

6:30 p.m.

Informational Gathering

April 9

6:30 p.m.

Survey Report

April 24 – May 5

Leadership team discernment meetings
(clerks of the meeting, elders, pastors)

March 5 (8:30pm) -19

Survey Open

(available [online](#) and hard copy)

April 23

Listening Forums:

2 p.m.

Sharing reasons for staying in NWYM

6:30 p.m.

Sharing reasons for leaving NWYM

May 7

6:30 p.m.

Business Meeting with a minute of recommendation from the leadership team

What are the thoughts of the pastors?

As your pastors, we love the NFC community and desire to serve and lead with open hands and hearts. Throughout the difficulties over the last couple of years, we've had to walk a careful road. We desire to be open and transparent and to share our perspective of God's leading; and we also want to honor and submit to the community's right to make decisions about how we will act as a united church community.

We now face a difficult decision as a church: remain in NWYM or choose to leave, either to become an independent Friends church or to join a new yearly meeting, which has yet to be formed.

Some have asked our opinion or perspective on this decision, which we offer to the community as one part of the discernment process. As pastors, we believe the actions taken by the Administrative Council demonstrate a change in leadership style, in identity of who can be members in NWYM and a change in tenor and tone. It is not the same yearly meeting it has been. As individuals, we do not feel called to continue as pastors with NWYM.

In addition, the breadth of perspectives held by our pastors is more inclusive than a strict application of Faith and Practice would allow.

Our desire is to be in a faith community that is not defined in the way the restructure defines NWYM. We believe that a move to an independent Friends church allows us to prioritize our local commitment to each other at NFC and to pursue non-official relationships and partnership with camps, global outreach ministries, and Friends churches in NWYM and the newly formed yearly meeting.

We want to clearly state that we respect the right of the business meeting to decide NFC's affiliation. We want NFC to thrive with whatever affiliation our community makes.

The tone of our decision making:

There is within us, collectively and individually, a tendency to criticize both the people and the process that have led us to this place of restructuring. Venting our feelings is helpful to a degree, but now is the time to delve deeper into what it means to be Friends of Jesus as well as friends and family to one another. May we continue to pray that we can move beyond blame toward hope and beyond woundedness to healing. May we choose to trust that others are acting with good intent. May we share our convictions with honesty and respect, and submit to each other as we seek God's direction.

Community guidelines for this discernment process:

Let us prepare as we enter into business together as a respectful, worshipful Quaker community:

I enter this space with gratitude for God's presence and love.

I recognize the Light of Christ's presence in us all, even in those with whom I disagree.

If led to speak, I will do so with humility and respect as I ask questions or seek to share my perspective.

I will seek to create a safe place for all to be heard and to listen.

Background documents available:

- [NWYM elders' letter](#) releasing West Hills (Jul. 2015)
- NFC document from Phil Smith, elders, and pastors [describing process of appeal](#) (Nov. 2015)
- Study Resources: [Book List](#) (Nov. 2015), [videos](#) from discussion groups (Apr. 2016)
- [NFC elders' statement](#) on diversity (Jan. 2017)
- Administrative Council [announcement of YM restructuring](#) (Jan. 2017)
- The current Faith and Practice [statements on human sexuality](#)
- The current [Mission, Vision, and Values](#) statements of NFC
- [Definitions and Acronyms](#)