

**Philadelphia Yearly Meeting  
Interim Meeting Minutes (Approved)  
January 10, 2015 9:30 a.m.  
Arch Street Meeting House**

Friends gathered at the appointed hour for Interim Meeting and settled into worship.

**1. Opening**

Introductions and recognitions: Clerk Jada Jackson (Trenton MM, Burlington Meetinghouse Worship Group) introduced herself. Rising Clerk Penny Colgan-Davis (Germantown MM), Alternate Clerks Alison Anderson (Central Philadelphia MM) and Becca Bubb with baby Cora (Abington MM), and Recording Clerk David Rose (Lehigh Valley MM) introduced themselves.

New Interim Meeting Members rose and introduced themselves. Recognition of PYM staff present. Visitors present rose and were recognized as a group. Standing Committee Clerks rose for recognition. Elders present were identified.

**2. General Secretary's Report**

Christie Duncan-Tessmer (Chestnut Hill MM) gave her report. GenSec Tour has logged 650 miles, met with over 300 friends in five regions with 65 different meetings represented. Many persons met were people she had not met before, or whom had never met a General Secretary before. People were excited about the message that "We Are Us". She shared a message from Millville Meeting, the farthest meeting from Central Philadelphia, about how it feels to be so far away. If "We Are Us", we need to remember those who are at the edges. She reminded us of three tools to help us pay attention to message, "We Are Us": 1. Visit two meetings, 2. Ask another about their spiritual condition, and 3. Share two stories a year about what is vital in their meeting with other meetings through the PYM website. A visual display of the PYM website pages was displayed where information about other meetings is located, where Friends can enter their visits to other meeting, and where meetings can share their stories. She spoke of the work around racism that is being done within PYM. Seeing the movement of Spirit within our community in paying attention to this work has been awesome and we are all being invited to come together and share in the work, both individually and corporately. Noting the work going on this afternoon on this issue, she noted that over three-hundred people have pre-registered for this afternoon's Called Session, more than any recorded Business Meeting in the last eight years. A PYM staff committee on racism has also been formed to work on the issues that arise at the PYM workspace. A Friend asked about her experience in Ferguson, Missouri, an issue raised at last

monthly meeting with a Minute of Support for the General Secretary traveling there for the National Council of Churches meeting. Her report about Ferguson had been placed on the PYM website which was displayed. She described the role that she found herself in as one of listening and noted that the importance of developing relationships, especially with youth, was a constant theme expressed. The Clerk used the presentation of the report which had been posted on the website very shortly after the return of the General Secretary to demonstrate how we are trying to communicate in a timely manner to the entire PYM community by using the website. In recognition that minutes are our official records, [the report as presented on the website is attached](#).

### **3. PYM Childcare Policies**

Tricia Coscia, PYM Volunteer Coordinator (Yardley MM), gave the report that largely referred to the Monthly Meeting Resource booklet created by PYM called “Developing a Child Abuse Prevention Policy”. A recent change in Pennsylvania law is mandating reporting by any person who provides child care. [The current handbook will be on the website](#) with all changes reflected on the website. Friends were asked to keep themselves updated on the latest changes in the policy by visiting the website regularly. Current handbook content was reviewed. Clerk suggested that staff consider offering a repeat of a session on Child Care policies.

### **Break**

### **5. Nominating Committee**

Clerk announced that scheduled Nominating Report will be given at next Interim Meeting as there are no appointments pending approval.

### **6. Program and Religious Life**

Zachary T. Dutton, Associate Secretary for Program and Religious Life (Wilmington MM), gave a report. [\(Complete report attached.\)](#) Staff is creating a way to visualize through a data baseline, the number of and connections between the relationships they are developing. Question was asked about what is being done to provide for children who are not able to attend program. Response was that there is a need to adapt programs so that they can involve more people with the goal of involving all people and create a relationship.

### **6. Minutes**

Minutes approved with grammatical corrections noted and the addition under Nomination Committee report: “Friends approved the Worship and Care Standing Committee appointments”.

### **7. Eco-Justice Working Group, Peace and Concerns SC**

Hollister Knowlton (Frankford MM) shared the program the Eco-Justice Working Group is having at the Arch Street Meeting House on Saturday, February 21: "We're All in This Together" which will be on Eco-Justice and Equality. Registration is required and a revised flyer will be sent out with registration information. An interfaith conference, "Creating the Common Good", on economic equality to be held in New York January 22-24, will provide the information that will be used for the February 21 program. Crosslands Community, Kennett Square, PA will show a webcast of the New York conference.

### **8. Reading of Minutes of Action**

Action taken was reviewed.

**Meeting closed with a period of worship at 11:45 a.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
David Rose, Recording Clerk  
Jada S. Jackson, Clerk PYM

If you have any questions about this report, please contact David Rose at [davidrose52@hotmail.com](mailto:davidrose52@hotmail.com).

## **PYM and Ferguson**

[by Christie Duncan-Tessmer, General Secretary]

Posted [[online](#)] November 21st, 2014

Prior to my travelling to St. Louis November 17-19, our Yearly Meeting [approved a minute releasing me to speak](#) on our behalf in the event that the decision about an indictment of the officer who shot Michael Brown was released while I was there. As it happened, that decision came a week later, after I returned. Today I'm hearing rage, sadness, confusion, fear and more from Friends in our community as we see those same feelings expressed in Ferguson and the media. This story shares what I experienced in PYM and in St. Louis last week and then asks for your stories from your meeting and your life.

The minute from Interim Meeting released me to speak. What I found was that the opportunities that were present were not about my speaking for us. They were about my listening for us. I stepped onto the plane, into the National Council of Churches meetings, across the street from where Michael Brown was shot, feeling that I was doing so on behalf of PYM and with Divine guidance. I wrote this report on my return as an account of the ministry I received in a community that is on fire with the pain of living in a racist culture and with the desire for justice and a just world.

### **The Experience of Local Faith Communities in Ferguson**

On Monday afternoon at the National Council of Churches meeting I was attending, pastors and lay persons from Ferguson spoke of their experience. Again and again the pastors spoke of the need for churches to be present in the community. They urged everyone present to "get outside your walls and know the people in your urban core". They gave the message that if we are there before bad things happen, the community will know they can look to us for care and leadership.

Many of their stories were about their experience since Michael Brown was killed: meeting young people who felt abandoned by the church; being awestruck by the 800+ young adults who demonstrated at St Louis University resulting in a dialogue with the school's president who has since made significant changes; finding themselves on the "front lines" of representing the community; living with a sense of challenge for living up to the call to be leaders in building a just world.

There were also conflicting expressions about what is possible in the future. One pastor spoke of the power that young adults and youth were striving to live into and her dream

of buying a house in the neighborhood that would be used as a base for organizing and training. On the other hand another person said, in anticipation of the decision from the grand jury on indicting Officer Darren Wilson, "It's going to fly off the chain in Ferguson, regardless of the decision. Doors will close because the looting will be so bad."

Through a friend in the meeting, I reached out to St. Louis Friends Meeting. Within a day I'd heard from five or six local Friends who have held a concern for their neighboring city of Ferguson. It was like connecting with distant cousins I'd never met. They gave me their cell phone numbers, reports about what was happening in Ferguson and updates about what was happening in their lives during the week. They were all watching and waiting for the decision about indictment while also working, caring for children, preparing for imminent retirement, volunteering (the meeting opens its doors to homeless people 2 nights a week when the temp drops below 20), coping with illness. The communications were a clear illustration that while I was in St. Louis the events of Ferguson were the primary concern for me; for people who live there the events unfolding in the region are part of the experience of their lives.

St. Louis Meeting, after some hard work in meeting for worship for business, decided to serve as a location for providing support to people who go to jail as a result of nonviolent action and at least one Friend is trained to staff the Jail Support Hotline when the decision is released. The decision to open the meeting in this way was a hard one as a nearby coffee house had received serious threats of violence after they offered their space as a safe house for protesters. One Friend wrote to me "the tension here is palpable if one does not hide one's head in the sand."

I wasn't able to connect with the American Friends Service Committee staff person who is working in St. Louis, but Friends can [read his story on the AFSC website](#). AFSC has also [posted a statement](#) in response to the decision not to indict.

### **The Role Distant Faith Communities Play in Ferguson**

Throughout the few days I was in St. Louis I held the question of what is the role that our meetings have to play. I listened to the St. Louis Friends and to the pastors and to the National Council of Churches board for answers.

"Make your church a valuable place in the neighborhood." The pastors who serve in the Ferguson region spoke over and over again about the importance of knowing the people in the neighborhood. They said, "We need to go into our neighborhoods deeper than we have before. Directly into living rooms and schools." By being a known and valued place in the area and by knowing the people who live there, faith communities can be leaders and places of refuge when something like this happens. In reaction to the crisis they have come into closer relationship with their neighborhoods but they also

learned that they want to proactively reach out now so that they remain relevant to those who live around them. One of them noted that it's not the neighborhoods that keep people out of church, it's the church itself which doesn't reach out or doesn't welcome people when they come. One person asked the panel what it would hope for from suburban faith communities and in particular white, suburban faith communities. The response was an invitation to go into the urban neighborhoods. Whether in partnership with a local congregation or not, we were told to get into the streets and get into relationship. We who don't live near the specific troubles of Ferguson and the killing of Michael Brown do live where there is racism, where there is violence and where there are people in need. Summing up their message of service and blessed community, one pastor said: Instead of talking about it and singing about it, be about it. We can address racism and injustice, we can be in relationship with our neighbors, we can be blessed community here where we live.

Another role for distant faith communities that I took away from my time in St. Louis with the National Council of Churches is one of accompaniment. Following the panel of pastors, another NCC board member commented to me that she was surprised by the hopelessness that one person in particular had shared (see the comment above that things are "going to fly off the chain"). As I talked with her about it, I saw that this pointed to one of the things that we who are far away might offer those in Ferguson: hope. We who have a more remote picture here in the mid-Atlantic region might share a perspective of hope, of faithfulness and of gratitude to help sustain those who are on streets, cold, talking with angry youth and suffering families in Ferguson.

When asked directly "what can we do for you?" Pastor Traci Blackmon had a concrete answer: Send hats, scarves and blankets. She said the protesters, mostly young adults, many from the neighborhood, were cold and they needed warm clothing. She then added, "since you are asking", that she had a dream of a \$20-30,000 house that could serve as a space for youth to live and train and learn more about how to effectively make change.

### **We Are Ferguson the Day Before the Shooting**

"We are Ferguson the day before the shooting in Ferguson," a Friend said in vocal ministry at Interim Meeting. The conditions that led to Michael Brown's death are not unique to Ferguson Missouri. And the responses of the congregations of faith in Ferguson are not needed uniquely in their region. As the images of a city on fire and the reports of the people who live in Ferguson reach us, we can look at our own cities and neighborhoods. We can deepen our relationships with our neighbors. We can address the racism in our culture and in our lives. As I listened to the experience of Friends and

pastors in St. Louis I heard the challenge to commit to transforming our neighborhoods, cities and world to being a place where the events of Ferguson won't happen.

The PYM clerks and the Undoing Racism group in PYM are laying groundwork to support our community in this work. As those efforts come into focus we will share it widely. How is your own meeting and your own household engaged? Does your meeting know its neighbors? Is your meeting involved in work to address racism?

Let us know about what you are doing so that others may learn, be inspired and be challenged. Share your stories and experience so that we know how Friends are responding and we know how Spirit is moving. The Yearly Meeting is in the position of connecting and magnifying the work within our community – let us know what that work is.

## **Program and Religious Life Update Report to Interim Meeting**

The Program and Religious Life (PRL) team has been working on ways to integrate our General Secretary's three asks into our messaging and into the programs we make come alive. Living from the center, getting more connected, and sharing in a collective ministry are some essential aims that we hear from within our General Secretary's three asks.

The PRL team is beginning to monitor what we do on a regular basis, and to develop a baseline in data regarding the nature and impact of each of our programs. This will benefit our thinking about efficiency and effectiveness moving forward. More importantly, it will help us to get a sense of the many relationships that different members of the PRL team cultivate on a regular basis. We want to know about all the people with whom we come into contact—their geographical, demographic and spiritual diversity. We can begin to leverage the many relationships we have, to form new relationships among Friends. We can therefore more easily connect those concerned about a particular issue to others who share the same concern in another part of our yearly meeting. We end up with a much more vibrant and continually active religious life that extends much beyond the city limits of Philadelphia, traditional committee structure, and the fifty-and-up age range.

This work has just begun, and I look forward to continuing it with our General Secretary and the Implementation Committee as we broaden engagement with our yearly meeting and deepen relationship among Friends.

Sincerely,

Zachary T. Dutton

*Associate Secretary for Program and Religious Life*

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