

## **Philadelphia Yearly Meeting**

### **Joint Councils**

**Saturday, April 12, 2025**

**9:00 AM - 12:00 PM EDT**

**In Attendance:** Jean-Marie Prestwidge Barch (Clerk, Quaker Life Council), Meg Barney (Recording Clerk), Emily Blanck (Recording Clerk), Kate Bregman, Terry Christensen, Susan Claggett, Terry Cooke, Chuck Devers, Sue Dietz, Christie Duncan-Tessmer (Staff, General Secretary), Jeanne Elberfeld (Clerk, Administrative Council), Cecilia Filauro (Staff, Executive Administrator), Max Forrester (Elder), Robert Greene, Kruskal Hewitt, Neil Holzman, John Marquette, Linell McCurry (Staff, CFO), Bethann Morgan, Nikki Mosgrove (Presiding Clerk), Cathleen Marion (Elder), Michael Moulton, Debbie Murray-Sheppard, Carter Nash, Salvador Orellana (Staff, Deputy General Secretary), David Park (Staff, Incoming CFO), Nancy Robbins, George Schaefer (Clerk, Nominating Council), Selden Smith (Rising Clerk), Serita Spadoni, Cathy Toner, Deb Wood, Tom Zemaitis (Treasurer)

**Regrets:** Andrew Anderson, Carleton Crispin, Jessy Eaby, Ron Inskeep, Kathryn Pettus, Chloe Rosenthal

#### **I. Worship & Welcome**

George Schaefer welcomed Friends and invited everyone into silent worship.

#### **II. Meeting for Learning**

Jeanne Elberfeld led us in a meeting for learning. She reminded Friends of the February discussion about accountability and now invited Friends to revisit it. Accountability is noted as an important part of governance as seen in our handbook. What does accountability look like in a Quaker community? We were guided by two queries.

First, “How do Friends understand the word “accountable” in reference to our stewardship through PYM governance?” In a worship sharing format, we shared our insights about our responsibility to God and each other, like accompanying each other, showing up to do the work, being open to possibilities, and listening to each other.

Second, “Describe the relationship between the Body of Friends, councils, and committees as if it was “under the care of” as a married couple is under the care of their MM?” We shared that this metaphor brings out tenderness in the relationship, doing

hard work together, confident in our commitment together, the duty that we have to our roles, and the responsibility to our bigger community. We shared how the need to work together symbiotically will make the sum greater than the parts. As always, Spirit brings us together so that all things are possible.

### III. **Implementation Plan**

Christie Duncan-Tessmer explained why it is important to lean into our implementation plan, as we should every month. We are taking this time to look at our strategic directions because it is important work that guides us as an interdependent, relevant body that helps us take risks and strengthens us to “wade into the water” even when they are “troubled waters.” The directions help Christie to see God move within us, as we move into the spirit that discernment revealed to our community. This will also help guide the next General Secretary, and we can have the capacity to accompany them. The council members will be ‘tested’ on the strategic directions next Fall.

She reminded us about the five directions. She focused on *Connecting* and its two destinations: Building up the connections toolbox and Increasing meetings’ interactions with one another. She also looked at the direction *Communicating* and its two destinations: Explaining PYM and Practicing worship and discernment.

We discussed what implementation means since the strategic directions have been around for a few years, in an ongoing way we are thoughtfully considering how we are living into the plan. We realized also that sometimes God is keeping us faithful toward these directions in the work we are doing even when we don’t realize it.

A Friend asked Friends for feedback about how to address the non-response of Friends to the sending of information. Friends discussed the variety of ways that communication can be effective, including the use of emails, letters, phone calls, and visits. Being in relationship is an important part of healthy ongoing communication.

### IV. **General Secretary Report and Update on Lawsuit**

Christie shared her report. In the lawsuit not a lot has happened. It is in a holding pattern. The case is waiting to see if the government will appeal. The case that FGC and two dozen other faith communities brought forward, was not successful in a preliminary judgement. They are going to their congresspeople who shared that they need faith communities to speak up loudly and that our voice matters and helps lawmakers.

A number of Executive Directors of immigration groups reached out to PYM and Friends Center because of the lawsuit. They are losing support from government, private

sector, and corporate funding. Our lawsuit was a message of support and also Friends Center is a safe place to meet because of the lawsuit. There was a meeting of Philadelphia government, religious, and non-profit leaders as well as the public. The Government officials described Philadelphia as a Constitutional City. It was also noted that immigrant businesses are struggling, so a group of people from those who attended the meeting are collectively working to organize visits and purchase things from these immigrant businesses.

A member reminded us that we were involved in similar work with immigrants in the 1870s.

Transition in staffing to the new CFO David Park is going smoothly. The staff is working on building their work plans in alignment with the directions to keep stability through the transition to a new General Secretary.

After COVID's disruption, the youth programs are thriving by focusing on one group at a time: first children and families, with approximately 50 attending now. The Young Friends focused on a small dedicated group and let it grow from there. They have almost tripled in numbers.

## V. New Business

### A. LGBTQIA+ statement

Jeanne Elberfeld led a discussion on the LGBTQIA+ minute from Germantown Monthly Meeting that was approved by Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting. PYM had endorsed the minute of solidarity that was presented by Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting. Friends at Spring Continuing Sessions were in support to have a PYM sprint write a minute of solidarity. **We approved the charge for a sprint to write a minute of support for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex and Asexual Community from PYM.** They will report progress next month with present a draft for us to approve in June. One Friend has agreed to serve.

## VI. Old Business

### A. Climate Benchmark Update

Salvador Orellana provided an update about our collaboration with the Stone House Group, the consultant assisting PYM in measuring our carbon footprint.

Salvador met with Climate Witness Seward, where John Hayden, an engineer and member of the CWS Ad Hoc group, Harrisburg Meeting, and Sustainability Resource Friends, was present. John has agreed to support the project by helping Salvador and the consultants gather, verify, and prepare the data.

Salvador expects to collect and submit the data by the end of May. The data won't cover every aspect of energy use across all PYM operations, gatherings, and facilities. Instead, staff will work with John and the consultants to identify the most important data, so that the consultant's recommendations focus on areas where we can take meaningful action.

VII. **Minutes were read, improved, and approved.**

VIII. **Ongoing Business (60 min)**

A. **Nominating**

George Schaefer shared that he, Jeanne Elberfeld, and Debbie Murray-Sheppard have begun to examine the staggered terms and considered how to sustain a strong core group on committees and Councils. Nominating Council will meet before the next Joint Council meeting to discuss bringing names forward and the onboarding of new members to the committees and councils. All members of Joint Councils should feel responsible to recommend people to do the work.

B. **Safe Space Exploration at Sessions**

Jean-Marie Barch noted that there was no time to discuss safe spaces at Continuing Sessions. The plan had been to use queries to guide discussions on how Monthly Meetings could build safe spaces and take up this work locally. These conversations were also meant to spark ongoing sharing across the Yearly Meeting. Since the topic wasn't addressed at Sessions and some time has passed since the lawsuit, is this still the right approach? What activity would best help Monthly Meetings share and support safe space work across the Yearly Meeting?

Friends expressed disappointment that the energy sparked by the lawsuit was not more fully engaged. Many ideas were shared, and there remains a strong desire to continue this discussion soon, along with concern for ensuring everyone's safety. Several options were discussed for moving forward in an informed way. Friends emphasized that the safe space effort extends beyond the undocumented community to include all who feel unsafe, aligning with our strategic direction, *Belonging*, and our tradition of radical hospitality. This moment offers an opportunity to engage the wider community. Friends were

reminded of the importance of recognizing that there is that of God in everyone. In summary, there was unity around the need to share information soon, while also ensuring a sense of relative safety. Using electronic formats may help broaden participation. **Friends approved that a small group will meet to finalize the plan.**

## C. Committees

### 1. Peopling Committees

George Schaefer reported changes in committees. **We approved adding Kate Bregman, Terry Cooke, and Mitchell Ross to Property Advisory Committee. We approved the request by Laura Boyce to be released from the Personnel Committee and the request of Susan Claggett to be released from the Ministry & Care Committee. We approved adding Eric Evans and Rory Cohen to Ministry & Care. Lucas Ritchie was approved to be on the Granting Committee.**

### 2. Committee Reporting Plan

Jeanne reviewed the format committees have used in the past to share information with the Council. In December, committees responded to the four substantial queries and included a list of members as a way of reporting. This format was tested by the Council as one possible model.

For our next round of committee reports we reflected on simplifying the report. Can we have a better set of questions that would inform us? It was suggested that we ask: Where are you finding joy in your work? And where are you finding challenges in your committee? What is the work of your committee? These committee reports not only tell us about the committees -but also allow us to come together. There is some tension in trying to do it all at once. **Immediately, the Councils will focus on understanding their work through reporting but later will strengthen how to get committees to work together more closely.** The form of the report will be brought in May for approval. Committee reports are due in June.

### 3. General Secretary Search Committee Status Update

Nikki Mosgrove reminded Friends that in Fall 2024, the Council discerned the makeup of the Search Committee, and those members were approved at Fall Continuing Sessions. The committee has been meeting for six months and has worked with a consultant for the past two months. Resumes will be accepted through mid-May. The committee is

proceeding thoughtfully, not rushing the process. Christie has agreed to continue serving until October 31, 2025, allowing the new individual to be brought forward for approval at Fall Continuing Sessions.

#### D. Sprints

##### 1. Listening & Lobbying

Friends were not in unity at Continuing Sessions regarding the Listening and Lobbying Guidance decision. A Friend noted that finding unity on a challenging decision may be more difficult in a hybrid meeting format.

**The Council decided that the sprint has completed its assigned duties and tasks, expressed much gratitude for the group's work, and approved laying down the sprint.**

**The Councils also approved inviting the collaboratives to voluntarily "beta test" the Guidance recommended by the sprint for six months.**

This time-limited test is intended to show how the Guidance functions in practice.

#### IX. News from around the Yearly Meeting

- A. Caln Quarter will be hosting a Gathering and shared a recommendation of a book, *This Sweet Earth* by Lydia Willie-Kellerman.
- B. Schuylkill Meeting has been energized and attenders and members are expanding.
- C. Third Haven Meetinghouse has improved their fire safety and ADA ramps that will open up more space for more people.
- D. Westtown Monthly Meeting has two Friends who will be key speakers for FCNL. Western Quarter may be doing a Juneteenth discussion on a book about Bayard Rustin.
- E. Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting has changed their name to Central Philadelphia Friends Meeting hoping that it makes the name more accessible and shared that they have more attenders.
- F. George Schaeffer will speak on the 'Evolution of Modern Quakerism' at Merion Meeting.
- G. Arch St. Meeting led a conversation on Christ and the Rebel that was attended by a lot of non-Quakers. Andrew Anderson provided an excellent description of Quakerism.
- H. Nikki will be doing Quakerism 101 at Trenton because there are a lot of new attenders.
- I. There is a concern of the whitewashing of history by the Federal Government.

X. **Minutes were read, improved, and approved.**

XI. **Recap Public Communication**

- A. The final benchmark update will be the focus on the Council Meeting to PYM news.