



Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

2.20.21 Quaker Life Council Minutes

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE JOINT SESSION of the PYM Quaker Life, Administration, and Nominating Councils The session of 36 participants was clerked by PYM Co-Clerks Frank and Jean Marie P. Barch.

Second Month 20, 2021 (using Zoom format)

Christie Duncan-Tesmer gave the General Secretary's report. This month she focused in finances. The Yearly Meeting's revenues and expenses reflect relationships. The recent audit was "clean," no remedial changes were necessary. She analyzed the 8-year span between 2012 and 2020 -- assets have grown at an average annual rate of 3%; annual revenue from meetings has decreased 3% on average; many regular donors have passed away; new revenue streams include fundraising events, deferred bequests (often to honor someone in a Legacy Fund), and fund-raising for specific projects; the number of individual donors is increasing; and expenses have been held almost level (staff make up about 40% total expenses). Automation and staff restructuring have helped streamline workloads. Employee health care is at the platinum level, and wages are periodically pegged to similar types of organizations. Often the "covenant relationships" determine how strongly monthly meetings feel connected to the Yearly Meeting.

Discussion addressed the important restructuring that occurred back in 2012, careful leadership and teamwork, the patient "refilling of the granaries" (reserve funds), BIPOC on the Finance Committee, and the strong possibility of investing in racial justice reparations.

Preparations for this spring's continuing business sessions on March 27 include time to deeply consider the topics of membership and belonging, climate change and eco-justice, and anti-racism work (including reparations). Each collaborative may have recommendations for the body of the Yearly meeting as a whole.



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QUAKER LIFE COUNCIL, by Zoom

Follow-up actions and decisions **are shown in bold.**

PARTICIPANTS – Kate Bregman, Marge Dawson, Sue Dietz, Melanie Douty-Snipes, Zachary Dutton (Associate Secretary for Program and Religious Life), Steve Elkinton (recording clerk), Robert Greene, Bryn Hammarstrom, Tom Hughes, Ayesha Imani, Guinevere Janes, Susan Kight, and Anthony Stover (clerk).

GUESTS AND EX-OFFICIO – Andrew Anderson (PYM Treasurer), Frank Barch (PYM Co-Presiding Clerk), Jean-Marie Prestwidge-Barch (PYM Co-Presiding Clerk and Clerk of the Ministry and Care Committee), Christie Duncan-Tessmer (PYM General Secretary), Linell McCurry (Assoc. Secretary for Business and Finance), and Melissa Rycroft (rising PYM clerk).

We started this session with centering worship.

WELCOME – Our clerk welcomed everyone – we have 100% participation this morning, Congratulations!

DONATION TO UJIMA FRIENDS – Ayesha and Anthony reported that the Ujima Friends Peace Center is doing well with food and free clothing distribution. Their recent Kwanza celebration was beautiful, and Friends from all over the country joined in via Zoom.

(Bryn H. clerked the rest of this discussion to avoid Anthony's possible conflict of interest as a member of the Ujima community.) Christie and Andrew reported on the recent gift of \$15,000 to Ujima Friends Peace Center that was approved by QLC last year from the Strategic Project Reserve Fund. It was mailed in May, 2020, but never received, so payment on the check was stopped in August. Meanwhile PYM staff discovered that Ujima's tax-exempt status had just been revoked by IRS, preventing the transfer of funds according to current policies.

This delay, seen as an internal and confidential matter, was not shared with QLC or the QLC clerk until December. Andrew Anderson, the PYM Treasurer, added that we sincerely want to be in supportive relationship with Ujima, but he felt that "it is not good order" to make a gift to a group without active 501c(3) status. This could create an unclean audit and have other consequences. He explained that the decision to delay payment included protecting Ujima's reputation as a worthy nonprofit organization, not violating PYM's internal policies and financial controls, and avoiding compliance problems with both the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. . Yet, as a religious community, we need to be accountable to each other, hence today's discussion.

Andrew also reiterated his view from last fall that PYM acted to safeguard the peace and reputation of Ujima by respecting their privacy and confidentiality. He felt that PYM had a responsibility, even an affirmative duty, to safeguard Ujima's reputation. He took responsibility for giving Christie the strong advice in the fall, as Treasurer, to hold the entire matter in the strictest confidence.



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One Friend noted that when Ujima Friends heard that their tax-exempt status had been revoked, it was a shock to them. (They had regularly filed as a tax-exempt nonprofit with IRS over the past two years). Other members of the PYM community also got the news, so confidentiality was not an issue after all. Ujima is now working with IRS to get their status resolved by contesting that decision and also re-applying. (However, IRS is months late in responding to the re-application for tax-exempt status.)

This issue could have been addressed months ago for full discussion here in the QLC, “wrestling together as a community.” It offers an opportunity to learn to do better. Was the sentiment to protect Ujima’s reputation the correct one? The hardest thing to hear for some was “protecting Ujima” in the context of our yearly meeting community. It was uncomfortable how this issue was handled in the hoped-for framework of genuine anti-racism work. One Friend suggested that we should “trust this community in dealing with the hard stuff.” How are we living into our ministries? What are we trying to do in the world? Keeping it off the agenda misses the opportunity.

Anthony added that right now he is offended and frustrated. Ujima had not asked for this donation. Sure, complications do happen. However, he feels that people of color were not involved in the decision. As part of the Ujima Center, he also felt -- as QLC clerk -- that he was excluded from the decision for months -- and was shocked when he heard about it. The lack of sensitivity is appalling, especially in this pandemic era. Much as he would like to withdrawal from this struggle, however, Spirit is prompting him to keep involved.

Then, in worship sharing, we spoke about trust, anti-racism, and confidentiality. This gift to Ujima was not a grant, but an unsolicited gift. How can we do better? This a prime example of actions perceived as racist: well-meaning, sheltering, protecting -- and enraging. We are not others’ parents, but faith-based actors seeking to remove our own and each others’ blinders. As a faith-based community, perhaps we should take more risks and not be daunted by bureaucratic glitches. At our best, we can be radical.

One Friend suggested we go ahead and make the gift anyway to Ujima, whatever their current IRS status. The decision process should be reviewed and not repeated, especially when others were disregarded and disrespected. What should our proper process be? We need each other and shouldn’t be hurting one another like this. The PYM treasurer then admitted that in retrospect, different outreach could have occurred last September when the issue arose to better involve the Ujima community, and he apologized for any misunderstandings. Another Friend, a lawyer, talked about how tax-exempt status happens. Open communication is essential among the key parties. He is happy to help Ujima untangle their IRS status if asked.

Anthony movingly pointed out that the problem here is not the money, but his role as QLC clerk and how others seemed to make Council-related decisions behind his back. He feels ignored and disrespected on this issue. He is proud of his role here as an African-American and seeks to be as fully included as possible. Several then spoke to offer him their loving support.



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One Friend does not have high expectation on issues of race as the Yearly Meeting wrestles with it. The Ujima Friends Peace Center has the capacity to engage with IRS, so that's not the issue. How can we move forward from this seeming "wandering in the wilderness?" QLC should have been informed of the September decision back then, even if some issues were to remain confidential. We are in community with one another and should trust one another – especially Council and committee clerks. We need to anticipate who might be hurt and reach out to them. We are all Quakers – Black and white. We are all "we," there is no "them." Let's stop anti-racism -- and be for-community. What do we support, what are we for?

The YM co-clerks reiterated their roles as listeners today, seeking to discern where our faith is calling us to act.

At this point, Anthony resumed his role as Clerk and continued with the time-dependent items on the rest of the agenda. He proposed a small working group to sort out the Ujima gift. He also thanked Bryn for stepping up to serve as clerk today for this sensitive discussion.

LETTER OF CONDOLENCE TO ABINGTON MEETING – This was written and sent in response to two recent deaths by suicide in that Meeting's community.

CHANGES TO PROGRAM COMMITTEE – **Kate Bregman has resigned and we accepted this decision. In addition, we approved Guinevere Janes to the Program Committee.**

NOMINEES FOR FRIENDS COUNSELING SERVICE ADVISORY PANEL – Zachary named the new slate of members including Robert Greene, Daniel Haviland, Jean-Marie P. Barch, and Sally Jones. **These were approved.**

AGENDA COMMITTEE – **We added Sue Dietz to this committee.**

CLOSING – The Clerk thanked Andrew Anderson and Christie Duncan-Tesmer for their attentive participation with us today. "The biggest room in my life is the room for improvement." Another commented that it is a privilege to share such difficult discussions together.

These QLC minutes were approved, as revised, on April 17, 2021.