

## **Minutes from Meeting for Business 3-27-2021**

*The morning and afternoon sessions of Meeting for Business in Worship focused on the topics of Membership and Belonging, Climate Change and Addressing Racism. Minutes by recording clerk, Jim Herr, follow. Reports are hyperlinked, with the exception of those that still being collected. Once we have them all they will be added.*

### **2021 Spring Continuing Sessions**

#### **Philadelphia Yearly Meeting**

#### **Held by Zoom video conference**

**Saturday, March 27, 2021**

**Jean-Marie and Frank Barch, co-clerks**

## **Worship**

At 9:00 AM, we settled into worship.

Boone Murphy shared the land acknowledgement amid our worship, thanking Spirit for the spring, and asking for forgiveness. Kin acknowledged that we are all gathered on lands that have been homeland for thousands of years, and kin named the native people on whose land we each live.

After worship we took a break.

## **Introductions**

Frank Barch opened the session and asked Jane Cadwallader to introduce the elders. Frank then asked the pastoral care team members to introduce themselves. He asked visitors to introduce themselves and Lilia Fick from Ottawa, Canadian YM came forward. Carol Tegge from Mickleton MM as a first-time attender introduced herself.

The clerks group introduced themselves including Jim Waddington, Administrative Council Clerk; Anthony Stover, Quaker Life Council Clerk; Terri Whiteford, Interim Nominating Council Clerk; Jim Herr, Recording Clerk; Jean-Marie Prestwidge Barch, Co-Presiding Clerk; Frank Barch, Co-Presiding Clerk; Christie Duncan-Tessmer, General Secretary; and Melissa Rycroft, Rising Clerk.

Olivia Brangan, Community Engagement Coordinator for PYM, provided an overview of the technology we are using today.

## **Membership**

Co-clerk Frank Barch introduced co-clerk Jean-Marie to talk about our membership concern. She said we have wanted to see how our membership can reflect our oneness.

Melissa Rycroft, rising clerk, and clerk of the Membership and Belonging Sprint, explained her situation this morning and her wish that the sprint had made more progress than it has. She told us that she has learned a great deal from Peterson Toscano and, from his work, Melissa decided we would need to write notes, and would be joining small break-out groups.

She began with a short history of the concern within PYM. And she then shared the charge to the Sprint: consider the history and create answers without changing anything currently in effect. She showed a list of members of the Sprint and also told us there are many others who have challenging experiences with membership and belonging, who are all invited to provide input.

To give us grounding in the concern, she read a piece from Faith & Practice, which explains that membership is entirely defined by the Monthly Meetings. Attenders may move from Meetings to Meetings. Melissa then drew our attention to the concept of belonging and welcoming. We strive to be welcoming in our Meetings, but how do we help people feel they belong—this is their space? This is more of an engagement and interaction. In order to foster this sense, we must become very familiar with the individual. And then, from this sense of belonging, we can help individuals grow into the process of membership.

This work is very personal, which makes it hard. How do we care for each other as we engage in this work? How can we minimize hurting each other as we consider membership and belonging? Melissa asked us to be careful with our words.

With eldering support from J. T. Dorr-Bremme, Johanna Jackson told her story from State College MM, where she worships most often, though it is not always where her voice is welcome. However, she feels she belongs most to her Quarter—Upper Susquehanna. In her Meeting there are about 15 Young Adult Friends. Johanna talked of her relationship with the clerk of her Meeting, who shared a letter from PYM about the Membership & Belonging Sprint. She feels the Worship & Ministry Committee, where the issue landed, did not face it because there is no one there less than 50 years old and they are wearing many hats. They did not consult younger Friends.

In Johanna's experience, older Friends have patience when dealing with issues while younger Friends may have more fire in the belly. So, in this instance, she wanted to have an intergenerational discussion. Younger folks and older folks seem to speak in different languages. There is pain involved when younger people who want change are stifled by resistance by people who do not want to look at doing things in a new way. However, we all need to know that those other voices are important and valid. She wanted us to recognize there are people who fill rolls as seed bankers—those who make things happen; bridge builders—those who hear multiple truths; and change-makers—those who want to develop new ways forward.

Melissa then told us that other Meetings have not paid attention to this Membership and Belonging Sprint. There have been people who just don't understand what the needs are and what Young Adult Friends want. But they want to care for them.

We were asked to write down three things that are important to us about welcoming and belonging in a monthly meeting, three things about welcoming and belonging in a quarterly meeting, and three about welcoming and belonging in the yearly meeting. We then broke into small groups of 5 or 6 people to exchange with each other on these subjects.

Co-clerk Jean-Marie thanked everyone for participating and assured us all that we would continue to hear about this issue.

Minutes to this point were read, corrected, and approved.

We parted for lunch—either together on Zoom or by ourselves.

There was also a youth activity to consider planting hope, and actually plant seeds.

At 1:30 PM, we regathered with a period of worship

## **Eco-Justice Concern**

Co-clerk Jean-Marie recognized that many of us would recognize this conversation from the meeting that took place on Tuesday, March 23.

Frank and Jean-Marie then reviewed the history of this concern in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. In summary, the co-clerks said the Eco-Justice Collaborative asked to bring the issue to this Continuing Session after decades. They posed some questions to us about the proposal to name climate justice as a corporate witness.

We settled into worship to consider this issue. A Friend noted that we should not look for perfection in a minute. Another pointed out that we've been thinking and talking about this for fifty years, which seems like a long time. A Friend asked that we listen to younger people in this. Another expressed that, as individuals follow their own touch with Spirit, we can find a way forward.

We also heard that integrity demands that we follow our individual leadings, but that the crisis is so acute that personal steps are not enough. We need to build a powerful grass-roots organization to make radical changes in society for *everything* from agriculture to maintaining buildings, and many other things in between. At the same time, we need to compassionately consider what everyone in the society needs in order to survive.

Another Friend pointed out that meeting by Zoom has demonstrated a reduction of carbon footprint, and perhaps we should consider closing meetinghouses during the winter and other ways to reduce our contributions to carbon emissions. Jonathan Rhoads reminded us that last year he clerked sessions dealing with the issue of having this as a concern. There was a great deal of enthusiasm, but it gradually devolved into specifics. He expressed hope that today we could make a clear statement.

Another Friend asked us to make specific proposals. And another demonstrated that some organizations are already making moves. For instance, Friends Fiduciary has eliminated investment in fossil fuels. And FCNL offers possibilities to endorse governmental bills. He urged us to come back next year with specific things the Monthly Meetings have done.

A Friend gave us a historical review of a committee created in 2009 that dealt with government entities. They were asked what bills they supported, and felt they could not make decisions for the Yearly Meeting. He urged us to create a group that can make decisions about specific activities in government.

Patricia Finley told us that, as clerk of the Eco-Justice Collaborative, she has watched as the group has done enormous work. They are approaching this as a system problem, and we have to approach it as a unified body.

A Friend expressed that the question is not how we are to do this, but whether we are willing to spiritually orient ourselves in this direction.

A Friend expressed concern that infrastructure within the YM must be engaged to foster work throughout. Another asked that we use Quarterly Meetings as well as YAF groups to pay attention to details.

Co-clerk Jean-Marie tested whether we are willing to come under the weight of this as a yearly meeting and received a great round of approval. She then noted that we now need to look to specifics, not only with those here today, but with others who will help us with creatively finding strategies. This will be part of weaving this into a whole with support and collaboration.

Jean-Marie suggested that the co-clerks will take the enthusiasm and energy they feel here today to create a draft charge for a S print to give to the Quaker Life Council, with help from the Eco-Justice Collaborative, to make specific suggestions to bring to annual sessions. We hope and expect that there will be clearness for the YM to get fully engaged with specific activities and to see us under the weight of eco-justice as a corporate witness. There was clear sense of moving forward, and great enthusiasm for working out the details

Minutes for this part of the afternoon were read, corrected, and approved.

We took an unbelievably brief break.

## **Anti-Racism Concerns**

Co-clerks gave us some background on consideration of this issue, including a piece from Vanessa Julye, and a reading of the minute from 2015. They reviewed our labors yearly since then. It was noted that that it is easy to believe the work has stalled, but our objective today is to hear about activities actually moving forward.

Carla White (Chestnut Hill MM) reported on the anti-blackness thread gathering Oct. 23 with 126 people who attended. Chestnut Hill acted as co-host of the virtual event. Her report will be attached to these minutes.

Karen Lightner (Germantown MM) told us of a thread gathering, February 27, that considered ways in which truth and reconciliation was turned into truth and transformation. This would be a way to help individuals through deep listening and telling stories to interrupt racial hurt. It is heart work and difficult, but there is real hunger for doing this work. This was a first step and there will be more. (A Friend asked that Karen's report be placed on the website. It will be attached to these minutes.) A Friend noted that in the situation of racial wounding, people bring their previous experiences. Karen said this suggestion will be helpful in our future activities. Another Friend noted that deep listening is transforming.

Wanda Wyffels (Abington MM) reported on the Anti-Racism Collaborative, which seeks to help MMs on their anti-racism work. They have sought to reach out to all Meetings, and are in the process with 82 Meetings. Many have begun with education, which is an important beginning. There are activities of witness. While many have begun steps, they are just beginning. And some Meetings have not even started yet. There is a resource page on the website, and the details of this first project will be up there. This will show a chart of what education activities and what actions have been used in the Meetings. This will help all Meetings work together.

Zachary Dutton (Central Philadelphia MM) reported on the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Sprint, which was formed by Administrative Council in 2019 to consider the ways the Yearly Meeting is specifically acting on the minute from 2015. There were challenges getting the Sprint off the ground, so some changes were suggested to structure. And there is hope to have this group and the Anti-Racism Collaborative work together. Zachary told us of the many concerns and patterns expressed about reckoning with our structure and leadership.

At this point we moved into small groups to consider "what is the impact on my life of having an active anti-racism, pro-equity and inclusion witness in the Yearly Meeting?"

A Friend expressed hope that the YM will be able to be more inclusive to allow some individuals who have left to feel comfortable belonging.

A great many comments were made in the chat at this point and they will also be attached to these minutes.

Jean-Marie asked us to consider how all the work we do share in common a seeking of greater wholeness.

Minutes for this part of the afternoon were read and approved as read.

### **General Secretary's Report**

Christie Duncan-Tessmer expressed thankfulness that we are working with all three of these important considerations together. She showed us three circles: as a YM we speak to shared concerns; PYM connects Friends and Meetings; and PYM supports everyday Quaker life. Shared concerns include Climate Change, Anti-Racism, and Membership. We would work together on *Faith and Practice*, Sessions, support for admin work of our Meetings, support for spiritual work of our Meetings, grants, administrative needs for YM. When you are a member of a Meeting, you are part of the Yearly Meeting, even if you are only active at the Monthly Meeting level. People are connected through communications—including the weekly newsletter, based on common ministry.

[Christie's report](#) will be attached to these minutes.

This minute was read and approved as read.

At 4:25, the Co-clerks thanked the recording clerk for his work, and all of us who participated.

## Continuing Session – Eco-Justice Collaborative – March 23, 2021

Jean Marie Prestwidge Barch opened the session, reminding Friends that this is the beginning of our Continuing Sessions. Our Zoom interface allows us to connect across time and space in a different way. Our gathering tonight will allow us to season this work, which will also be on Saturday's agenda. We settled into worship, with some 50 Friends in attendance.

S. Boone Murphy shared the land acknowledgement amid our worship, calling us to recognize the resilience of the native people of this land. Friends expressed that this served as a reminder of how limited our time on earth truly is, and how important it is to be good stewards of this earth while we're here.

Pat Finley introduced the session by clarifying that the purpose of the Eco Justice collaborative is not to supplant the current YM wide witness on racism. Rather, the group believes that work toward eco-justice is aligned with antiracist work. Another concern Friends have raised is that there is a lack of specificity in the goals associated with the Collaborative; this is because the group feels that there are a multiplicity of concerns to work on.

Olivia Brangan, Community Outreach Coordinator for PYM, provided an overview of the technology we are using this evening.

Pat Finley then introduced the members of the Eco-Justice Collaborative. Bruce Birchard (Central Phila), Ruth Darlington (Medford), Ed Dreby (Providence), Pamela Haines (Central Phila), Paula Cline (Westtown), Steve Loughin (Haverford), Margaret Mansfield (Providence), Kathryn Metzker (Haverford), Liz Robinson (Central Phila), Rita Varley (Central Phila), Richard Whiteford (Downington)

Pat then opened the floor for questions. Friends asked to hear the minute that the Eco Justice Collaborative had brought to the YM. After hearing the minute read, a Friend raised a concern that there is no concrete action being asked of the body through this minute, and in absence of that, this minute may not attract widespread attention, which would be of significant value to the work. A member of the Collaborative clarified that the purpose of the minute is to identify what steps other Meetings are taking, since we don't currently know what actions are being undertaken throughout the Meeting. **The minute also gives authority to YM staff to speak publicly on the issue as a matter of religious conviction.**

Another Friend asked the Collaborative to share how they have responded to Friends expressing concerns about this minute displacing the YM wide witness on racism. This Friend feels that the minute articulates the intersectionality of these concerns. Collaborative Friends responded that there had not been a direct response.

Another Friend expressed gratitude for the way the minute articulates the urgency of this concern. This Friend inquired as to how the YM would be held accountable to this minute. A Collaborative member responded that the accountability is to Spirit, and one's relationship with Spirit. Another member shared that their monthly meeting added the requirement of a report to their own minute, to assist in holding themselves accountable.

Another Friend asked to hear more about how this minute supports our antiracism work. This Friend lifted up a concern about the cost of greener energies, which often makes these alternatives inaccessible. Might we be called as a YM to assist in making these alternative energies more affordable for our neighbors? A Collaborative member agreed that solving this issue requires addressing policy at a higher level, to make these resources available to lower income people.

**Another Collaborative member clarified that endorsing this minute would represent a commitment to engage in corporate discernment each year as a YM to determine what concrete action we might undertake. The minute implies that ongoing discernment at the YM and MM level.**

Another Collaborative member shared several examples of how climate change has historically and continues to disproportionately impact communities of color. This Friend also highlighted that addressing the climate crisis would create many good paying jobs for low-skilled workers.

Another Friend reiterated the concern about the lack of clear recommendations in the minute. This Friend asserted that Friends might benefit from suggestions about the kind of advocacy that would be useful, and the nature of individual actions that would be helpful, such as where to invest our money. Collaborative members responded that their monthly newsletter indicates requests for action, and agreed that they might be able to provide suggestions about where to invest. **We heard this commitment also puts the resources of the YM behind this work both at the YM and MM level.**

Another Collaborative member described the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and the legislative advocacy involved in trying to get Pennsylvania into the Initiative. This Initiative would generate significant funds through carbon capture that would support cleaner energy initiatives to promote clean air. There is more information about RGGI in the April Eco-Justice Collaborative newsletter. Senate Bill 119 and House Bill 637 are the bills that prevent the Department of Environmental Protection from introducing additional regulations; Pennsylvania Friends so moved should reach out to their representatives to encourage them to vote them down.

Eco Justice Collaborative members encouraged Friends to check out the webinars on their website, particularly for Friends who asked questions about investments this evening.

With gratitude, sending prayers to Fran Beer and her family, we closed with worship.

Respectfully, Kri Burkander, recording clerk