

## **Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Continuing Sessions**

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

Held at Arch Street Meeting House

Saturday, March 25, 2017

The Spring 2017 Continuing Sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends convened Saturday, March 25, at 3:15 P.M., at Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia, PA.

After an opening period of worship, Clerk, Penny Colgan-Davis (Germantown MM) greeted us and introduced the officers: Alternate Clerks: Alison Anderson (Central Philadelphia MM), Tom Hoopes (Valley MM), and Amy Kietzman (West Philadelphia MM and Central Philadelphia MM); Recording Clerks: Martha Smith (Moorestown MM), and John Lavin (Birmingham MM); PYM Treasurer, Andrew Anderson (MM of Friends of Philadelphia), and General Secretary, Christie Duncan-Tessmer (Chestnut Hill MM). Voice-to-text captioning was provided by Ashley Livits.

The Clerk then recognized five Elders in attendance.

### **1. Clerk of Administrative Council - Update about Burlington Center**

Bruce Haines (Providence MM) Clerk of Administrative Council gave an update on the Burlington Center. Beginning in the spring of 2013, three trustees took up responsibility to operate the Burlington property as a meetinghouse and a conference center for use by both Friends and non-Friends. The intention of the trust was a temporary experiment and that experiment is scheduled to end in June. The original plans for the Burlington Center do not seem feasible to the trustees at this time, and the council is exploring alternatives including an offer by Burlington Quarterly Meeting to take ownership of the meetinghouse and also the responsibility for the care and upkeep of the property. A recommendation will be prepared and presented during Summer Sessions by the Administrative Council.

Friends minuted their deep appreciation for the trustees of the Burlington Center who have served the Center faithfully since 2013. Their work and time dedicated to the Center has been substantial. It has been and continues to be a great contribution to our yearly meeting.

### **2. Discussion of staff changes**

Bruce Haines reminded us that the Yearly Meeting approved in 2015 a new governing structure with the Nominating, Quaker Life, and Administrative Councils. Responsibilities of the Administrative Council include managing the process for recruitment and hiring of the General Secretary, but does not include management and oversight of PYM staff. While the Administrative Council reviews annually the performance of the General Secretary, staffing requests and changes go to neither the Administrative Council nor the yearly meeting body for approval and instead are the responsibility of the General Secretary. In response to a Friend's question, Clerk Penny Colgan-Davis noted that an evaluation of how this new structure is working will occur in the near future, possibly the fall.

Christie Duncan-Tessmer then described the changes to the staffing at PYM. She asked Friends to share their Truth. Some Friends have shared on social media, but have not contacted her directly. Other Friends have expressed their approval of the changes directly to her but not shared their impressions with others. Christie described her intentions in the staffing changes:

1. Increase the capacity of the yearly meeting staff
2. Reduce the administrative work they do, particularly in development and communications
3. Implement hiring policies which are as inclusive (non-racist) as possible
4. Create a full time Religious Education position for all ages and transform three formerly part-time positions for children and youth into a single dedicated staff person. Christie added that, after conversations with Young Adult Friends, she has decided keep the Young Adult Friends staff position in the new staffing structure.

In addition, in her year-end assessment last year, the Evaluation Committee expressed the desire that the General Secretary position be more outwardly focused, and her changes in staff were also made with that goal in mind.

Friends observed that there were many avenues that the General Secretary was looking for input, yet some of those had not yet completed their work when the staffing changes were announced. They wanted to know why she did not wait for their completion. Christie believed that the feedback she had received at the time fit the new staffing structure, and she chose to not wait so that staff had as much time as possible to look for other positions if they chose to do so.

A Friend asked Christie to describe in more detail how the staffing decisions were determined. Christie researched many similar organizations' staffing structure, and she had an independent development assessment done. She spoke with Friends within the yearly meeting with regards to fundraising, met with other Quaker institutions, asking how they incorporate anti-racism work within their group. She consulted two different universities on anti-racism work and consulted with the Personnel Committee frequently. She also held a staff meeting to hear what change was important to the staff.

Another Friend asked why Christie felt that the General Secretary needed to be more outwardly focused. She noted that in her last annual review, the Evaluation Committee recommended she do so. Additionally, as part of the strategic directions the yearly meeting adopted, the body agreed that it was important to make our Quaker message known in the world, and the General Secretary needs more time to accomplish this. Christie shared one example where the National Council of Churches has requested that she be on their committee to take up and address racism in the country.

A Friend asked that an advisory committee be formed with people who are knowledgeable and sensitive to anti-racism concerns to make sure the process is not "whitewashed" however unintentional it may be. The Friend recognized how complicated any restructuring is and felt help was needed. There had been a similar request made by Christie to the Administrative Council, so this is in process.

In response to a Friend's question, Christie affirmed that support for Religious Education for children, youth, and parents in meetings would be a major part of the new full time position. A Friend asked that the body consider the lessons we might learn from our past decisions on our youth programs where the youth were not a part of the decisions that affected them. They observed that with tension, attendance in those programs has suffered. They noted the hurt feelings that came with the staffing decisions being made when their input was recently

gathered and appeared to be not used, feeling as though their time had been wasted. Young Friends shared their hope that no decisions be made without their input.

Many Friends were concerned with the haste in the process, as well as the limited warning that such changes were being contemplated. In addition, there was a concern of insufficient evidence that the new structure will accomplish the professed goals of the staffing changes. Two areas of concern were shared that the new structure: 1) exceeded the yearly meeting approved budget and 2) employs staff in ways that might not best advance the approved goals of the yearly meetings long-range plan.

Great concern was expressed for Marille Thomas (Green Street MM), a PYM staff member whose position was diminished by 40% in the new staffing structure. While she has been reassigned to a full-time position with her original salary and benefits, the initial decision appeared to some to be based on her outspokenness about racism within the yearly meeting workplace. Equal concern was expressed by Friends about the situation at Upper Dublin Monthly Meeting, which is considering releasing its only African American member from membership.

Having gone beyond the appointed time, the Clerk thanked Friends for their messages and truths and closed worship. Many Friends sensed that the body had not addressed the concern and pain felt during sessions and was not yet ready to end Meeting. The Clerk asked if Friends would be willing to stay and then called for worship to continue.

Friends expressed their deep sadness for the decision that Upper Dublin Monthly Meeting is considering and also that five years of Quaker process, undertaken by Friends from across the yearly meeting, was not successful in finding a solution rooted in God. Great care was expressed for Avis Wanda McClinton, knowing how painful this process has been for her and for the Friends close to her. Friends recognized that the transformation of Upper Dublin Monthly Meeting to be more inclusive cannot be accomplished by distancing the yearly meeting from the monthly meeting. The difficulties in Upper Dublin are within all of us and within all of our meetings. We know we must continue our learning about personal, systemic and structural racism and its impact on everyone. Friends resolved to continue in faith to seek healing and transformation and search for a way forward in the Light together in unity and to do so in a spiritually-grounded way.

Recognizing that the body has unfinished business, the Clerk will consider undertaking a called meeting so that the body may continue its work.

The meeting adjourned shortly after 5:00 PM, resolving to meet again at a called meeting or at Annual Sessions at the College of New Jersey in Trenton, New Jersey in July.

Submitted by

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