

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Continuing Sessions
Saturday, November 4, 2017
Arch Street Meetinghouse

The Fall 2017 Continuing Sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends convened Seventh-day morning, Eleventh-month 4, 2017 at 9:30 A.M. in the Arch Street Meetinghouse.

At the appointed hour, we settled into worship. Then, at 10:05, Clerk Penny Colgan-Davis (Germantown MM) greeted us. She apologized for the lack of a transcriber, explaining the company had sent a court stenographer, which is not the same. There is hope a replacement can be found. The clerk's bench introduced themselves: Alternate Clerks, Tom Hoopes (Valley MM) and Amy Kietzman (Central Philadelphia MM and West Philadelphia FM); Rising Clerk of Sessions Planning, Wade Wright (Lancaster MM); General Secretary, Christie Duncan-Tessmer (Chestnut Hill MM), and Interim Recording Clerk, Jim Herr (Lancaster MM). Also at the table a little later was Assistant Recording Clerk Jane Keller (Lancaster MM).

We had a few visitors from outside our Yearly Meeting: Sharon Smith from Ashville MM, Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association; Dan Hewitt from Purchase MM, New York YM; Madeleine Prager from Rugby Meeting, Britain Yearly Meeting; and Zachary Moon from Strawberry Creek MM, Pacific Yearly Meeting. We also had a number of Friends who are attenders, and Friends who told us they were attending their first Sessions.

Penny introduced Wade Wright clerk of the Sessions Coordinating Committee, the group that plans our Continuing and Annual Sessions. Wade outlined the agenda for the day.

Nominating Council

Clerk Melissa Rycroft (Pennsdale MM) asked everyone to consider serving the yearly meeting. Although she allowed that those attenders and new participants in Sessions may want to learn more about ways to be involved, she pointed out that there are some people who are easily recognized because they are very active and committed to every committee we now have. However, her main message was to the large "middle group" who are not currently active at the yearly meeting level but might consider service. She invited them to let her, or others on the Council, know of their interest. Melissa expressed great sadness that Lane Taylor has decided to leave her position as clerk of Quaker Life Council. Her refreshing perspective, wit, knowledge, and great clearness will be missed. Melissa said her council will be looking for a replacement.

Administrative Council

Clerk Bruce Haines (Providence MM) reminded the body that, at Annual Sessions, the Administrative Council had come to us with a request for transfer of ownership of Burlington Meeting House from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to Burlington Quarter. This has been done! Also, after eight years in the making, *Faith and Practice* was approved at Annual Sessions. Bruce named members of the Sprint for publishing this, and they are confident that we will have printed copies before the Annual Sessions 2018. The Council has named a group for reviewing and evaluating the work of the General Secretary. The chief diversity officer of AFSC is serving as a consultant to ensure consideration of issues of racial equality in the workplace. Although work has been done to formalize procedures for consideration of minutes of concern, the final draft is not quite ready to be presented to the body as a whole.

A Friend brought to us a concern that the minutes from Annual Sessions had not yet been posted. Bruce acknowledged that the process for approving them, and then posting minutes from Sessions is too cumbersome. He announced that the Administrative Council considered the situation at its last meeting and has created a sprint to develop a more efficient way to process the minutes so such a delay does not recur.

A Friend said there is a question about dealing with grievances of staff. Bruce told us that the whole PYM Personnel Manual is undergoing a serious revision, including the grievance process, and that it will be shown to the staff sometime next week and will come back to the Administrative Council with staff recommendations.

Quaker Life Council Discernment Team

Clerk Melanie Douty-Snipes (Fallsington MM) reported that, at its June Quaker Life Council (QLC) meeting, Penny had shared a brief history of the situation with Avis Wanda McClinton and Upper Dublin MM and that her efforts to effect reconciliation had not been successful. She therefore asked QLC for help. QLC decided to come under the weight of this concern and drafted a minute explaining the approach it hopes to take. Melanie read the minute (*attached*), which had been presented at Annual Sessions in July. Quaker Life Council has established a Discernment Team with Melanie as its clerk. The team has taken time to listen to the Spirit and find ways forward and have reached out to find support from consultants. Within the past week, they have met with Friends who were directly involved during the conflict and with members of Upper Dublin. Melanie has reached out several times to Avis Wanda McClinton before Continuing Sessions, but a meeting has not yet been scheduled. Melanie told us that this situation has brought many things to the forefront, including the enormous challenges of open and clear communication, and that the Team is committed to listening to all who have been directly involved in the situation.

Avis Wanda McClinton had prepared a statement, which was read by Bob Dockhorn (*attached*).

Multicultural Institutional Audit Update

Steering Committee clerk tonya thames taylor (Fallowfield MM) began by leading us in a song, "Walk In The Light." We are the light of the world. Divinity is in all people, love rules, and there is a peace testimony. tonya reminded us of the instruction of the burning bush to Moses that he take off his shoes because he was on holy ground. We may not all agree all the time, but this Steering Committee will help steer us to recognize that we are sacred and wherever we are is holy ground. The "four t's," testimony, time, talent, and treasure, will be brought to bear. This ministry of the Steering Committee emerged from all in the Yearly Meeting in response to an email sent to everyone asking for recommendations of names of Friends to serve. Already, at stage one, we have proven we want, relish, and appreciate community. The names of the twenty-four members of the Steering Committee were read. Those present stood and were appreciated.

Members of the Multicultural Audit:

Allan Austin
Matthew Bradley
Howard Van Breeman
Lauren Buckalew
Oskar Castro
Laura Pickering Ford
Jondhi Harrell
Ayesha Imani
Jada Jackson
Gabbreell James
Sam Lemon
Nikki Mosgrove
Sandra Boone Murphy
Ed Nakawatase
Carter Nash
Arla Patch
Delia Pitts
Jeff Rosenthal
Anthony Stover
tonya thames taylor (Clerk)
Noah White
Deb Will
Sarah Willie-LeBreton
Wanda Wyffels.

Clerk tonya gave us a preview of the plans for the activity of the Steering Committee. They have no pre-set expectations except that love rules. In response to a question, tonya said the major task is to select a consultant from outside the Yearly Meeting to help us assess how we are as a community. The

committee will meet in December and will post updates on the PYM website. A Friend offered that she would hold tonya and the committee in prayer. And tonya asked everyone to hold the steering committee and the process in the Light.

General Secretary's Report

PYM general Secretary Christie Duncan-Tessmer (Chestnut Hill MM) reported that, beginning in January, her reports presented monthly to the three governing Councils (Nominating, Quaker Life and Administrative) will be placed online a week after they are presented so that all Friends may know her activities. She brought to our attention the PYM Scavenger Hunt. Newtown Monthly Meeting went to the hunt together as a team and presented a 13-page report with photos, which is online at pym.org. Christie suggested this could be a curriculum for First-day School or multi-generational activity. Christie also told us that, at the end of the fiscal year, our annual fund came in higher than the previous year for the first time since 2012, despite the loss of a Friend who gave \$20,000 every year prior to this one.

PYM is a founding member of the National Council of Churches (NCC), and Christie represents PYM on the governing board. NCC brings together people from across the spectrum of Christian churches. In response to a question from the World Council of Churches, the NCC is looking to address racism in this country. They will host an event on the Mall in Washington to introduce this idea to all Christian Faith Communities. Christie would like to have more Quakers involved with this to set up a continuing activity. Christie then showed us some pictures from her trip to Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Palestine with the NCC. She told about a Palestinian who is convinced that non-violence is the way to make more changes than violent outbursts, a bishop in a church that had been bombed who was speaking from joy, and the challenges the group's interpreter/guide had going through check points. She told us that from the first night to the last day they kept seeing lines of history from what happened years ago to what is happening in our country today and evangelism through time. She sees the way Palestinians are treated is a direct outgrowth of the way people in this country have treated Africans and Native People.

Resource Friends Program

Christie then invited Zachary Dutton (Central Philadelphia MM), Associate Secretary of Program and Religious Life, to come forward to share news of an exciting new program that is part of the long-range plan—Resource Friends. Zachary explained that the PYM staff receives frequent questions from members of monthly meetings about everything from how to begin social justice work to creating a First-day School program. To develop a program that might provide deeper answers to these questions, the new structure of the yearly meeting includes “Resource Friends.” As currently conceived, Resource Friends will initially address four practice areas: social justice, worship and

care, young adult support and religious education. Social justice and worship and care will be the first to implement, and people are currently being trained to serve in these areas. At this time, there are no print materials, but information about the Resource Friends program will be available on line at pym.org.

At about noon the body settled into worship and several minutes later adjourned for lunch, with a program planned for the afternoon that includes a workshop led by Sarah Willie-LeBreton and Inspira Williams about how to be a truly welcoming meeting.

We intend to meet again at Continuing Sessions on March 24, 2018.

Jim Herr, Interim Recording Clerk

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Quaker Life Council Discernment Team Report**

Good Morning, Friends,

My name is Melanie Douty-Snipes and I am the clerk of a sprint that was formed after this past summer sessions that we named the Quaker Life Council Discernment Team. We made a commitment to Avis Wanda McClinton, Upper Dublin Monthly Meeting Friends and the yearly meeting through this minute:

PYM has struggled with several concerns over recent years. In particular, the tensions between Avis Wanda McClinton and Upper Dublin Monthly Meeting which culminated in heavy feelings and wounded hearts. Their relationship has suffered an unfortunate outcome. The experience has left a painful culpability despite many efforts by representatives of PYM and others to reconcile their differences. The failure of a peaceful resolve leaves us with many questions, challenges, and harrowing insights. We must accept the consequences as they stand presently. Therefore, out of deep concern for the health of our Yearly Meeting community, we will refrain from further discussion or agenda. Instead, we ask everyone to place this painful concern into the Light. And we will wait.

The Quaker Life Council has been called to discern further movement of the Spirit . We will live in faith that a healing path will open. We will wait. We will listen for leadings of transformation. Any vestiges of hope and further action will be tendered for our PYM community. Any wisdom or direction that comes from this labor will be presented at the Fall Continuing Sessions. We ask the body to hold the work of the Quaker Life Council, hold all who have been touched by this matter, and especially hold in love Avis Wanda McClinton and the Upper Dublin Monthly Meeting.

For now, let our strong emotions, words, thoughts, and behavior be carried with God. Be reminded that our work towards right living is never done. We are here to refresh ourselves and to love one another. In doing so, our faith is magnified and we are whole.

Since then we have been working towards a greater understanding of the situation. We have determined which members of Quaker Life Council will serve on the discernment sprint. We have met together to better know each other, to ground ourselves in the mission, and to determine how best to carry it forward. We have gathered some background information and have reached out to several different organizations to research possible consulting support.

We are still discerning whether we need outside consulting support and what kind of support we might need. Hearing directly from Avis Wanda McClinton and UDMM is essential to helping us to make that decision.

It suddenly became November and it was just last week that we invited Avis Wanda and Upper Dublin Friends to meet with us separately. Friends from Upper Dublin were able to meet and Avis Wanda provided us written statements. We have an open invitation to meet with Avis Wanda and hope to do so soon. We will continue to take one step at a time being present to each person involved or impacted. We will continue to discern what lessons God is teaching us trusting that way will open to paths that will bring us closer together as a faith community.