

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Continuing Sessions
Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business
Held at the Jewish Federation of Greater Harrisburg
Saturday, March 24, 2018

The Spring 2018 Continuing Sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends convened Saturday, March 24, at 9 A.M., at the Jewish Federation of Greater Harrisburg, PA, to conduct the business before the Yearly Meeting.

After an opening period of worship, Clerk, Penny Colgan-Davis (Germantown MM) greeted us and introduced the officers: Alternate Clerk: Tom Hoopes (Valley MM); Recording Clerks: John Lavin (Birmingham MM), Jane Keller (Lancaster MM); and General Secretary, Christie Duncan-Tessmer (Chestnut Hill MM); Sessions Coordinating Committee Clerk, Wade Wright (Lancaster MM). Voice to text captioning was provided by Becky Tallarico.

1. Clerk of Admin. Council Minutes Sprint Report

Terri Whiteford (Downingtown MM) Clerk of the Sprint, read the attached report from the Sprint on PYM Sessions' Minutes. Included in the report was a proposal to change the process for minutes for the Yearly Meeting.

After discernment, the Meeting approved the proposed changes for the Yearly Meeting's minutes process. The Yearly Meeting will return to the practice of reading minutes aloud at the end of each session with the body approving the minutes at that time. Before approval of an action minute, the recording clerk will read the action minute to the body and the body will approve the action minute. After closing a session of meeting for business, the Clerk will ask the body to settle into worship as the recording clerks finish preparing the minutes of the session. Out of the silence, the recording clerks will read the minutes for discernment. After suggestions and changes have been completed the Clerk will ask for approval of the revised minutes, and if in unity, the body will approve the minutes for the session.

Friends approved making these changes effective immediately.

Terri noted that the next step in the process is to ask the Admin Council to lay down this sprint and form a new sprint to assist in helping all parties better know and understand their role to contributing to a successful session and its minutes, whether they are the Recording Clerks, the presiding Clerk and Facing Bench, the presenters to the Yearly Meeting, and the body of the Meeting. The responses of the body were noted and will be shared with the Admin Council and the Implementation Sprint.

2. Nominating Council Report

Melissa Rycroft (Pennsdale MM) Clerk of Nominating Council presented the attached report on the council's changes since their last report to sessions both in membership and how they meet to perform their work. Councils now meet at the same time and place to help with carpooling.

Melissa then presented the attached slate of nominations for Friends' consideration. Friends approved the slate of nominations as presented. She then presented the attached slate of

Friends requesting release from service to the Yearly Meeting. Friends accepted the releases with regret and gratitude for their service.

3. Report of the Discernment Team of the Quaker Life Council

Melanie Douty-Snipes (Fallsington MM) presented the attached report from the Discernment Team of the Quaker Life Council on their ongoing work to try to address the conflict between Avis Wanda McClinton and Upper Dublin Monthly Meeting and prevent a similar conflict from occurring again in the future. Melanie expressed her gratitude to everyone who agreed to sit down and share their perspective with the Discernment Team and in particular to Avis and Upper Dublin for allowing for the team to work on this concern.

The report also includes their next steps on this concern. The report is attached but it was noted that many things that were shared with the Discernment Team were shared in confidence and are not part of their report. Melanie expressed the team's hope that body keeps our attention to the divine, and we lean on our spiritual practices to help keep us grounded in the Spirit.

The Clerk asked for questions and comments from the body. A Friend noted that the report said the conflict existed for five years, but that there were also three years before that Avis experienced hurt that the Friend believed made her angry before the conflict. Because of that anger the Friend asked that the body understand that her message may have been diluted because of the anger, but that doesn't mean that there isn't a message there.

Melanie noted that Avis was contacted multiple times during the process. Avis reported that she has withdrawn her request for censure of Upper Dublin, is attending another meeting. Melanie noted that Avis was not active in this process, though they did receive email from her and Melanie believed the Discernment Team received Avis' love and support for their work.

A Friend wished that he may go to Upper Dublin Meeting and listen but has not done so. He asked if that is allowed. The response was that anyone may sit and worship with Upper Dublin, but to the best of the Discernment Team's knowledge, the concerned parties are trying to move forward from this.

A Friend warned the Discernment Team to strongly avoid any diagnoses of mental health should be left to professionals. All Friends have agency, but their actions are affected by the system in which they are a part of which can affect a diagnosis.

A Friend asked the Discernment Team to explain why they did not work on further conflict resolution between Avis and Upper Dublin. The response was that they felt that this was not their charge. Instead, they felt that they were charged to prevent future conflicts. The Discernment Team has received constructive, helpful, caring and thoughtful communications but they also recognize that their work is a tiny drop compared to the work that came before.

The Clerk charged everyone to recognize that we are all responsible. We need to look to change parts of our structure and how we work with each other if we are to work on ways address future conflicts within the Yearly Meeting.

A Friend related that they don't speak with Avis on this concern because of the pain it brings, and it will be a long time before she will return to the Yearly Meeting. The Friend asked the body to sit with this.

A Friend asked what insights the Discernment Team can share after going through this process. It helped the team discern together with our community. It is a continual process to learn discernment, the role of love and faith in the presence of the Spirit as one wrestles with an issue. The Spirit will critique your ideologies to understand what Truth is being revealed. It is hard is to listen when you've already had your mind made up.

Friends accepted the report with gratitude for their work.

4. Undoing Racism Group (URG) Report

The Undoing Racism Co-clerks were invited to come forward and share their report: Marille Thomas (Green Street MM and Quaker X), Gabrielle James (Green Street MM and Quaker X), and Kody Hersch (Miami MM, Southeastern YM and Young Friends co-facilitator for PYM). The co-clerks emphasized that URG is always open to everyone. Undoing racism is something all Friends should be doing each day, like our response to global climate change; together we can make a difference if each one of us takes action. They invited everyone to help. The group's internal focus is to hold a brave, transformative, healing space for those who choose to join them. Their focus is to hold the Yearly Meeting body and administration accountable. If URG feels that incorrect or misleading information is presented in a report or a process favors and centers on the status quo of whiteness and invalidates people of color, they will hold the Meeting accountable. The Undoing Racism Group has a new website where meetings can sign up for training and much more additional information: (<https://urginpym.wordpress.com/>).

The Co-clerks clarified for Friends that Quaker X's goal is social justice within or without PYM.

Friends agreed to open this report to questions and comments from the body after our lunch break.

Report from Young Friends

The Young Friends rejoined the body and shared what is important to them about gun law reform: safety, stricter gun laws, background checks, gun training; guns locked away, so young children cannot access them; safe storage/keep kids of gun owners informed about how to use guns; stop politicians from taking money from the NRA (government for the people, not money, NRA, and other organizations; innocent people need to stop being killed.

What do Young Friends unite with from the platform of March for Our Lives: being safe in my school; finally talking about gun laws, safety.

5. Approval of the morning session's minutes

After revisions, Friends approved the morning session minutes and adjourned for lunch, resolving to return in the afternoon, God willing.

4a. Questions on the Undoing Racism Group Report

The URG Co-clerks returned to take questions. A Friend thanked URG folks for requesting a return, noting we had marginalized them by not giving them time previously. Clerks told us the URG website offers learning activities, workshops for Meetings. At their meetings, they take time to get to know each other, to debrief from Sessions. They form alliances and manage to get things done where they see a need; they raise up needs that have not been heard, figuring out how to support each other. URG is a space for honest conversations about race and oppression. They are presently doing some reassessment since they have recently reorganized. They have been talking about how the new PYM structure is top-heavy. Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association has accepted the type of structural change that URG requested two years ago. BYM has multi-racial summer camps. We can do those things at PYM. URG Friends feel there is information coming down but not enough listening and feedback going up. Their work is about every way we come together as Friends. Someone asked about what accountability looks like to URG. They are trying to be transparent in their process of co-clerking and how they are doing their discernment. They reminded us that they are not part of PYM structure, so if they make mistakes, folks need to go to a meeting and talk to them. Everyone is welcome to be in communication with them. A Friend asked co-clerks if they had observed incidences of racism in the proceedings thus far. Racism is still apparent here: there is a use of “we/us” that is marginalizing, the language in the discernment report centered on white folks’ feelings, esp. without Avis Wanda being involved; the issue at Upper Dublin did not become a focus until white folks became uncomfortable. Friends need to see what happens in our process that marginalizes others. We need to hear and learn about what mistakes we are making. The clerks affirmed that we are all in this together.

6. Report from the Steering Committee of the Multicultural Audit

Tonya Thames-Taylor (Fallowfield MM) Clerk of the Steering Committee of the Multicultural Audit reported on the committee’s progress. She asked all Friends on the committee to come up and share reflections on why they joined the committee. There are currently 21 people from 10 different quarters and 17 different monthly meetings represented. Their goal is threefold: reconciliation, reconfiguration and transfiguration but to date, the committee has focused on transfiguration to a more beautiful, spiritual state. The committee has published a schedule on their area of the PYM website and she asked Friends to refer to that site for the latest information as the committee is continuously making updates. Their first goal is to have a request for proposal (RFP) created for consultants to bid on by April 3rd. Their schedule includes some buffer time but is not set in stone if flexibility is required. It is the committee’s goal to make sure the process and information they are gathering is transparent and available to all of PYM so that by the time a proposal for a consultant is made, Friends will already have all the information required for a decision.

Friends accepted the report with tremendous gratitude for the Steering Committee’s work.

<http://www.pym.org/multicultural-audit-committee/2018/03/24/march-24-continuing-sessions-working-report/>

7. Administrative Council Report

Bruce Haines (Providence MM) Clerk of Administrative Council presented excerpts of the council’s attached report on the work of the council. He encouraged Friends to read the full report if they have not already. Bruce expressed the Council’s deep gratitude to Linnell McCurry

the Associate Secretary for Business and Finance, Andrew Anderson the Treasurer, and Cliessa Nagle the Controller for the clean unqualified audit of the Yearly Meeting's finances. A great deal of hard work by them made this possible.

Bruce introduced Susan Kight (Camden MM). Susan is the Administrative Council's nomination for an "at large" member of the Nominating Committee. Friends approved the nomination to the nominating council.

A Friend asked that the updated Faith and Practice be published in printed form. A printed copy is expected to be available in either June or July of this year. Also, a request for an updated member directory was made. The Yearly Meeting office is not giving directory information to inquiring Friends therefore it is important to have a current directory. The directory has not been addressed by the council and Bruce will take the request back.

Friends accepted Bruce's report with gratitude for the council's work.

8. Quaker Life Council Report

Amy Taylor Brooks (Birmingham MM) Interim Clerk of Quaker Life Council presented excerpts of the council's attached report. Friends are encouraged to read the full report if they have not already.

A Friend asked if in the changes for Monthly Meeting Minutes included changes on how Minutes of Travel or of Religious Service are handled. The answer was that no, it was not the council's intention to change the process for those minutes. A Minute of Religious Service will be addressed by the council at a different time. The process for Minutes of Travel is the same: a monthly meeting handles minutes of travel. Optionally, if the Yearly Meeting's endorsement would be helpful, the Monthly Meeting may send the minute of travel on to the Yearly Meeting, but this is not required.

Friends accepted the council's report with gratitude.

9. Youth Programs Sprint Three Proposal

Kri Burkander (Princeton MM), Clerk of the Youth Programs Sprint presented excerpts from the attached report. The Sprint is proposing a new committee under the Quaker Life Council called Youth Programs Advisory Committee or "Y-PAC" and asked that Friends review the proposal that was included in the advance documents and provide feedback after sessions to Kri for their consideration. They will request approval of the proposal at a later time.

Friends accepted the Sprint's report with gratitude.

10. General Secretary's Report

Christie Duncan-Tessmer (Chestnut Hill MM), General Secretary presented excerpts from her attached report. She said that she is working with her staff for patterns of diversity and racism and she is working with an anti-racism coach. Christie shared her self-reflection on what occurred earlier in today's session. She noted that while she recognized one of the patterns of racism in what a Friend said, she didn't go up to the person who made the statement and let

them know how the statement was exclusionary. Christie asked Friends to read her full report if they have not yet done so.

A Friend raised a concern with Christie's speaking at a National Council of Churches rally but that the concern was not addressed by the Clerk. The body asked the Clerk to go back and address the concern. After further discernment, the response was that Christie was invited to speak, and that she will make it clear that she does not speak for Quakers or for all of PYM and she will be collaborating and co-presenting with a Friend of color on this speech. Friends recognized that this concern must be threshed further and were uneasy with continuing to have Friends speaking in public without first settling this concern in a manner that is acceptable to the Yearly Meeting.

Friends thanked Christie for her service as Secretary and accepted her report.

11. Approval of minutes from the afternoon session

After corrections, Friends approved the afternoon sessions minutes.

The meeting adjourned, resolving to meet again at Summer Sessions at the College of New Jersey in July.

Faithfully Submitted by:

John Lavin

Jane Keller