



**Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Monthly Joint Council Meeting
Saturday, May 9, 2026
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM**

Attending: Carol Alpern, Jean-Marie Prestwidge Barch (Clerk, Quaker Life Council), Meg Barney (Recording Clerk), Kate Bregman, Burt Dallas, Chuck Devers, Jeanne Elberfeld (Clerk, Administrative Council), Cecilia Filauro (Staff, Executive Administrator), Lisa Stewart Garrison, Robert Greene, Bryn Hammarstrom, Kruskal Hewitt, John Marquette, Chris Mohr (Staff, General Secretary), Nikki Mosgrove (Presiding Clerk), Michael Moulton, F. Salvador Orellana (Staff, Deputy General Secretary), David Park (Staff, Chief Financial Officer), Kathryn Pettus, George Schaefer (Clerk, Nominating Council), Selden Smith (Rising Clerk), Cathy Toner, Deb Wood, Tom Zematis (Treasurer), Terry Cooke, Jessy Eaby, Bethann Morgan, Debbie Murray-Sheppard, Serita Spadoni, Frank Barch (Clerk, Governance Advisory Committee), Bruce Haines (Governance Advisory Committee), Sally McQuail (Recording Clerk).

Regrets: Emily Blanck (Recording Clerk), Susan Claggett, Terry Christensen, Carleton Crispin, Andrew Anderson

I. WORSHIP

Jeanne Elberfeld led Friends in gathering worship at 9:04 a.m. Jeanne shared a quote from Mother Theresa that provided guidance in how to stay grounded in the work.

II. CONSENT AGENDA

Friends considered the minutes brought forward for the Consent Agenda. A Friend asked if the topic of charging a fee to attend Annual Sessions had been discussed recently. **Friends approved the Consent Agenda (items listed below)**

- A. Approved Minutes from Committees:** 2026-02-09 MINUTES Program Support Committee, PYM Ministry and Care January 2026, 2026-04-26 Annual Session Planning Minutes, and 2026-4-2 PYM Finance Committee Minutes.

The Joint Council accepted the minutes with gratitude.

III. GENERAL SECRETARY REPORT

Chris Mohr shared his report with the Joint Council. The DHS lawsuit has the injunction remaining in place. PYM staff have been available to answer questions of Friends by being zoom hosts. This is an experiment that has already yielded early benefits.

- A. **Child Safety Policy Review - First Reading:** Chris shared the document which will be reviewed by the Personnel Committee next week. Once it is updated and approved, the recommendation will come to Meetings to consider updating or creating their own policies in alignment with the PYM policy.
- B. **Leadership Team & Directors Discussion:** The work is ongoing. Ashanta Washington has resigned after being with PYM for eight years. Council wishes her well in her new endeavors.
- C. **Addressing Racism:** Work in this area is ongoing.
- D. **Lilly Endowment Proposal Update:** Staff is actively working on actions related to this item.
- E. **Committee/Sprint Meetings Attended:** During the past month, Chris attended many meetings, both online and in person.
- F. **Intervisitation Update:** Chris shared highlights of his visits in May, including the summary responses from the Abington Quarterly Meeting Survey completed prior to the Listening Session. The Listening Session was very productive with folks engaged that represented both established and newer Friends.
- G. **Article of Note:** Chris included in his report the link to an opinion piece by Holly Berkley Fletcher written in April 2026 entitled "Have the Quakers Completed Their Work? Rethinking Religious Success". Retrieved from <https://goodfaithmedia.org/have-the-quakers-completed-their-work-rethinking-religious-success>

Friends noted that some Friends know of the available PYM grants and others do not, resulting in an uneven distribution of information and access. Jeanne noted that she and

others can provide some information based upon a workshop given at Camp Swatara that was useful to Friends.

Friends accepted Chris's report with gratitude and thanked him for his service.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

- A. **National Religious Campaign Against Torture Membership: Reaffirm "Endorsing Membership" (NRCAT):** (Full transparency: Selden Smith shared that his daughter works for the group.) Selden shared that many years ago, the PYM Peace & Social Concerns committee, which is no longer in existence, was a member of NRCAT. The organization's focus is to end the use of torture, especially solitary confinement. Friends were asked to consider if PYM should become a member. There are various levels of membership with a range of costs and actions that can be taken. Is this a question to be answered by the council or the corporate body? Jean-Marie noted the level of financial contribution is self-determined. Nikki shared that Annual Sessions will have space to address the Peace Testimony, which relates to this topic. Several yearly meetings are members, including the New England Yearly Meeting. Friends were asked to note the difference between unity and unanimity. A Friend noted that an Annual Sessions statement could include the fact that the Joint Council was in support of joining but wanted the corporate body to be included in the discernment and decision. Jean-Marie summarized that Friends could be given a positive suggestion at Annual Sessions for joining the group. Possible levels for consideration could include being at the endorsing level or a participating member. A Friend noted that we have time to seek unity before Annual Sessions. It will be brought to the body in July with the support of the Joint Council.
- B. **Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting Minute for Peace in the Middle East:** Jean-Marie shared the history of how the Council addresses Minutes of Concern. Minutes of Concern can come from individuals or Meetings, can go through the Quarter, and can then go to PYM for endorsement. Minutes of Concern can also go directly to the Council Clerks. The Council reviewed the Minute of Concern from the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting Minute for Peace in the Middle East from April 26, 2026. Friends found the document to be well written. Friends approved the Minute or Concern to move forward to PYM Annual Sessions in July.

Three Minutes of Concern came to the Council, all approved by Western Quarterly Meeting. The first is a Minute of Concern about the current status of the Legislative and Judicial branches of government. Friends approved the PYM Presiding Clerk to offer the minute to the body in July at Annual Sessions. The second Minute of Concern started in Chester Quarter and addresses ending unjust immigration reform practices and laws. The third Minute of Concern addresses similar topics related to immigration practices. A friend noted that Minutes of Concern are useful documents for Friends to use when contacting legislators. A Friend noted that in the past when Minutes of Concern have come to the body, confusion sometimes developed when Friends did not know if they were to endorse, change, or develop their own Minutes of Concern in response. It was noted that the Presiding Clerk at Annual Sessions will sense where the body is being led in that moment. A Friend reminds us that the Council is to be led by Spirit and not by efficiency. Friends approved to offer the second Minute of Concern to the body in July. Friends considered the third Minute of Concern and approved it to also move forward to Annual Sessions in July to be guided by the Presiding Clerk.

V. **BREAK AND APPROVE MINUTES**

Friends approved the Minutes to this point with the understanding that Chris will work with the Recording Clerks to edit the minutes for clarity for the areas of the DHS lawsuit and the zoom sessions being offered by staff for Friends.

VI. **COMMITTEES**

- A. **Finance:** Tom Zematis presented the results of the review of the current pension plan. Amendments to the plan will come to the council next month. Monies have gone out in the past, and now the Pension plan owes PYM over \$123,000. A review of the past six months of the fiscal year reveals that expenses are below budget at this time. Our PYM operating reserve is currently more than 150% above projected operating costs for the next six months. Chris noted the staff is working hard to claim locate areas where monies are owed to PYM and to claim them. Chris thanked PYM staff for their hard work in managing the finances.

- B. **Personnel:** Chris thanked Salvador and David for their work to address the Human Resources function at this moment. David is currently handling payroll and benefits while Salvador is the contact person for issues related to staff.

- C. **Governance Advisory Committee:** Jeanne shared that the Governance Advisory Committee was bringing forward its recommendations concerning the Joint Council Experiment. Frank Barch, clerk of the Governance Advisory Committee, led Friends to remember that at the last Annual Sessions, the body gave approval for the Joint Council model to continue for one year. The committee recommends forming one council, noting there are benefits and challenges to doing so. If the Joint Council and the body at Annual Sessions approve the change, they will need to be translated into the Governance Handbook. The Governance Advisory Committee is willing to guide this work, yet welcomes additional Friends to join in this work. A Friend asked how the Standing Committees will submit their reports. The proposal says all Standing Committees will come under the care of the single council. Currently, each Standing Committee sends their minutes to the Joint Council. Chris noted that the single council will still have three clerks which will help distribute the workload. George Schaefer notes that some Friends see the three councils providing the 'checks and balances'. Some see this as a reason for keeping the three councils. Frank noted that in reality the three councils did not interact in that way. A Friend noted that in past years, Friends saw the previous structure as being populated by the same people moving in and out of positions. Bruce offered that there was a proposal to have the three areas each be Committees that would report to the Council. A Friend noted that in the current Joint Council model, there is a more effective 'checks and balances' effect in place as topics benefit from being reviewed by many different folks at one time. Currently, Nominating is to be populated by 13 members from each Quarter. The Joint Council requirement for Nominating is a barrier for some folks to join Nominating at this point in time. A Friend noted that when the three council model was set up, there were 10,000 active members. Now, twelve years later, the body may have older members or fewer members, resulting in the model now not being as sustainable. George Schaefer suggested that there could be a Naming Committee to appoint Friends to the open seats on the Joint Council. Frank noted that this is a practice in place in FGC and invited Friends to hold on to this thought. Frank also shared a suggestion that Quarterly Meeting clerks, or their proxy, could be ex-officio members of the Council, extending the invitation and/or expectation to participate as they are led. They could bring forward their Quarterly concerns and also to share the PYM concerns back to them. Frank has surveyed the Quarterly clerks about serving on the Council and received a **small number** of positive responses (4 of 6). George noted that for the past few years, Nominating Council has considered the challenge of engaging Friends to serve on the Council

and Committee. Frank thanked Friends for their contributions and found it to be very useful. The Governance Advisory Committee will continue in this work. Jeanne suggested that Listening Sessions could be held in the next few weeks and months prior to Annual Sessions. Chris offered that PYM Staff can assist in this work. Frank noted that including Friends who have served on the Council in the presentations to the body would be beneficial. Friends can send suggestions to Frank. Friends expressed deep gratitude to the Governance Advisory Committee for its work.

VII. BREAKOUT: Joint Council Responsibility to Appoint Future At-Large Nominating Seats

- A. **Query:** How can we explain the Joint Council to the body of Friends? What will help Friends understand what the Council does and how? What feels important for you to share from your work on the Council? Friends met in small groups online and in the room.
- B. **Report back:** A group shared that an opening statement could be offered at the beginning of each session as a learning experience because folks may not be familiar with the topic. Also, ask the body what they think the Joint Council is and does. The change to streamline the work of PYM caused disruption and resulted in Friends focusing on their local meetings instead of PYM. Friends could be asked if they consider themselves to be a member of the Yearly Meeting. Perhaps there could be more religious education offerings. Another group suggested finding out how many Friends are reading *Friends Journal* articles or which topics are of most interest. We must always offer a way for Friends to reconnect. Maybe the Bridge Contact structure and engagement could be strengthened.

We understand the limitations of the new media, as access is unevenly distributed. Perhaps *Quaker Speak* videos may reach more folks. What do other non-centralized religions do? What are their best practices and why are they so strongly effective? Another group shared their recognition that some Friends struggle to identify with their own monthly meetings, which can result in a loss of connection to PYM. Yet the situation can be seen as an opportunity. Perhaps if Quarters could be revitalized and seen to be helpful to the life of their monthly meetings, that would be helpful to the body as a whole. A group shared that the Administrative Council has sometimes been seen as not easily approachable. Prior to the Joint Council model, there was repetition of topics between the three groups. Another yearly meeting uses short videos to provide context and learning opportunities for folks to know what a

committee or council does. A Friend noted the word 'governance' is a helpful and important word. A Friend noted that prior to the Joint Council model, Administrative work was very efficient. Now, in the Joint Council model, the Administrative work is still effective, but more grounded and seasoned in the work.

- C. **Query:** Imagine we are members of the Nominating Council, and offer names of folks who we think would be interested in this work.

- D. **Report Back:** Friends provided names for consideration to Chris and the Clerks. Friends noted that several folks are active at the monthly meeting level that could be encouraged to join in Yearly Meeting work when their monthly meeting work has ended.

VIII. SPRINTS

- A. **MM/QM Roles in Governance: Sprint Final Report; Next Steps:** Selden Smith reported the work of the Sprint was completed. Debbie Murray-Shephard noted the DHS lawsuit decision was not included in the report because of the time sensitive nature of the topic and the work. The Sprint's time together was focused deeply upon leadership, clearness, discernment, process, structure, and being in community. Friends must be in unity together, and we are called to practice trust in each other and in the process. Spirit calls us all to do the work. The Sprint looked at how Friends currently engage in the structure of how PYM and the meetings engage with each other. George thanked Selden and Debbie for their work. Debbie noted the Sprint members found they appreciated being faithful to following Spirit. Debbie also lifted up that Friends are to be cautious about corporate efficiency in decision making. Deep discernment at the monthly and quarterly meeting levels is important to strengthen Friends engagement at the Yearly Meeting level. A Friend noted that Friends are decentralized yet centralized; this was highlighted in the recent Swarthmore Lecture by Stuart Masters at Britain Yearly Meeting, which frames the creative tension between structure and Spirit, centralization and decentralization. Friends received the report with tremendous gratitude. **Friends approved laying down the Sprint.**

- B. **Sessions Strategic Planning Sprint - Update on Recruitment:** Chris noted that recruitment is ongoing to gather Friends to serve in this work.

- C. **Friends Counseling Service Sprint - Update on Recruitment:** Chris noted that recruitment is ongoing to gather Friends to serve in this work.

Friends noted the Covenant Sprint is continuing in its work. The June Finance Committee will review this work.

- IX. **NEWS FROM AROUND THE YEARLY MEETING:** Nikki shared PYM will meet together for the 346th time, this summer at Cheyney University. Exactly 250 years ago, PYM minuted the disownment of members who were enslavers, and 339 people were manumitted. Selden noted he is assisting in determining a way forward to have the historical event be recognized at Annual Sessions. Related to this history, a film about Benjamin Lay will be shown at Abington Meeting. Tom noted that a recent John Woolman event at Woolman's home in Mt. Holly was highly successful. Arch Street Meeting House opened its new exhibit on April 30th with a large crowd, garnering much energy and appreciation. The Concord and Western Quarters will meet jointly in July with a John Woolman presentation. Buckingham Meeting in Bucks Quarter thanked Chris in guiding friends to consider how their Meeting can move forward on the corporate witness to address racism. Debbie has two new grandchildren. Radnor Meeting is resurrecting its conscientious objector program and reaching out to colleges and students in the area. State College Meeting participated in the AFSC program for meetings to be active in public witness for peace. Plymouth Meeting had a community table at the Whitemarsh community day. They expect to have a table entitled "Are You A Quaker?" at other events.

- X. **RECAP PUBLIC COMMUNICATION:** Jeanne asked Friends to consider what should be lifted up in the next PYM public communication. Chris offered the topic of how the Joint Council is currently holding how to do its work in alignment with the body and in alignment with Spirit. We are honoring our processes while being mindful of the larger Yearly Meeting, and also looking at our structure along with Friends' concerns. A Friend noted that the word *covenant* can be used not just for addressing the financial amount to donate. The relationships between Friends, meetings, Quarters and the Yearly Meeting are part of a full covenant. An example of this is today's work of the Joint Council accepting the reports, recognizing the concerns that were brought forward, and how the Council is moving forward to the body the three Minutes of Concern brought to it.

XI. **APPROVE MINUTES**

Friends approved the minutes.