

Quaker Life Council Minutes of the Meeting Held on
18 May 2019

Present: George Rubin, Melanie Douty-Snipes, Amy Taylor Brooks (Clerk), Julia Carrigan, Kate Bregman, Marge Dawson, Cathleen Marion, Bryn Hammarstrom, Sue Dietz, Ayesha Imani

Ex Oficio: Zachary T Dutton, Associate Secretary for Program and Religious Life; Jonathan Rhoads, Alternate Clerk

Regrets: Gray Goodman, Recording Clerk, Anthony Stover, Alternate Clerk, Andrew Anderson, Treasurer, Christie Duncan-Tessmer, General Secretary

We began our meeting in worship.

The following FWCC prayer was shared in the spirit of worship:

Spirit of transparent love, Grant us courageous attention

Help us accept the mystery of your will.

Teach us to be helpful, gentle and persistent, help us to awaken to your patience.

Keep Us open, honest and adjustable.

Help us to be flexible instruments, humbly altruistic.

Forgive our immodest pretensions.

Help us let go of harmful judgments.

With Christ Jesus as our guide, help us in our relationship to others.

Release us from desire to control.

Help us create Harmony as agents of your design.

You are the awe inspiring power of Good.

Help us work with selfless joy in a mirthful serenity.

Serving and always aware of your call for peace Among Us, help us listen to each other seeking your voice.

Before beginning, we reflected on the nature of the preceding joint council sessions, which felt rushed. Today the session could have been given a longer interval, and perhaps other aspects of the time could have been shifted as well to make it a more centered experience. We observe this experience as a pattern that frequently characterizes the joint sessions. We trust our clerk, Amy Taylor-Brooks, to convey this concern to the Clerks Group.

Agenda

We considered the agenda, and we approved it with one addition from the Program Committee regarding the Decarceration Collaborative.

1. Program Committee Recommendation to Lay Down Decarceration Collaborative
2. Clerking Sprint Report
3. Examine Multicultural Audit Report.
4. Examine FGC Executive Report recommendations.
5. Release and Lay Down Discernment Team.
6. Threshing Session Proposal
7. March Continuing Sessions Debrief: Any other issues?

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8. Ministry & Care Committee: Pass names to Governance Committee.
9. Examine queries for QLC annual report.
10. Examine statement from PYM Clerks on proper MFB behavior.
11. Appoint a State of the Meeting Reports Sprint
12. Holding PYM Young Friends in the Light. The Young Friends Program Facilitator has recently resigned, citing family health reasons.
13. Minute of Concern from Caln Quarter
14. Summer Sessions Update: Cathleen Marion
15. Program Committee: Annual Reports Update

Program Committee

Chris Lucca of Yardley Meeting (Bucks) and Jondhi Harrel of Germantown Meeting (Philadelphia), several years prior, founded a collaborative that focuses on the work of addressing prison reform. Due to health issues and other work taking them away, after an initial stage of activity, the collaborative was not able to do further work on its mission. After conversations with Chris and Jondhi, the Program Committee recommends laying down the Decarceration Collaborative.

The Quaker Life Council minutes with deep appreciation the devotion to service in prison reform, advocacy for returning citizens, and service to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in various capacities of Chris Lucca and Jondhi Harrel. The council approved laying down the Decarceration Collaborative at this time.

Clerking Sprint Report

Melanie Douty-Snipes, member of the Clerking Sprint, offered a framing for the work of the sprint. A few of the goals were to make the role less onerous and much better supported. Melanie reviewed the challenges of the Nominating Council to find someone willing to serve as Presiding Clerk. The sprint conducted interviews with various stake holders, past clerks, present leaders, and senior staff. The sprint reviewed the role and responsibilities of the clerk and the types of required support and accountability. The sprint also determined that the role and function of elders needs to be redefined.

Question and Answer for Reference:

Several questions and concerns (labeled "Q") were raised by various members of the council regarding the spiritual support to the clerk, the two-year non-renewable term, and the need for additional "alternate-clerk-like" support. Melanie proffered potential answers to them (labeled "A"):

- Q: Who sits with the clerk on the clerk's table, and who decides when the clerk needs support in the midst of clerking a session? A: The clerk's support group, the clerk's team, the elders, as well as former clerks might each potentially be called upon. The sprint did not address who sits with the clerk at the clerk's table or other seating arrangements.
- Q: How is the clerk's support group formed? A: This would likely be of the clerk's choosing.

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- Q: What is the relationship between the clerk's support group and the group of elders?
A: Perhaps at least one of the elders should also be part of the clerk's support group.
- Q: Knowing that we have limited qualified, available, and willing people, why make the terms non-renewable after two years? With the aim of lightening the load of the clerk, it seems more support and strength could be built in by not phasing out alternate clerks or some other method. A: In the course of its consultations with past clerks, the sprint observed that we need one clerk to avoid confusing the body regarding their authority within the decision-making process. Nominating Council also felt this would make it easier for people to accept the role.

Approved Recommendations:

- There is a need for further discernment regarding the paragraph that describes the General Secretary as our presumptive spokesperson. There does not seem to be unity in the yearly meeting regarding this, presently or historically. The council suggests changing it to remove mention of the role of the General Secretary. Under "Responsibilities", the second to last bullet point could function effectively without its first sentence.
- There is a need for someone with similar qualifications and willingness to serve as alternate clerk separate and apart from the role of the rising clerk.
- We fully support the need for further discernment regarding the role of our elders.
- We need more regularly established and systematic training of the role of clerk and other leadership roles in our spiritual community. We also need to conduct more training, discernment, and engagement concerning the role of the body in Friends decision making.

Multicultural Audit Report, FGC Executive Report

Our discussion centered upon the question of how the Quaker Life Council could support inclusive communication and dialogue about next steps across the yearly meeting.

We recognized that some work is already happening by many at various levels that corresponds to the recommendations from the Friends General Conference multicultural audit. Yet more work emanating from and responsive to our 2015 minute on addressing racism is required.

Minute Approved at the January 2015 Called Meeting of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting:
Friends in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting tested and affirmed the work of our clerks and our elders, since being tasked during Annual Sessions in July 2014, to help discern a way forward in addressing many -isms including-racism, sexism, genderism and classism. Friends also heartily affirmed that as a Yearly Meeting we:

- Commit to increase our consciousness as Friends about the intersection of privilege and race in our culture and spiritual community. We know our knowledge is often limited by our own experiences and that we have much to learn from each other and from outside resources.

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- Commit to move forward with our entire community. The yearly meeting is the community of all our individual Friends and monthly meetings and this work needs to be done with the involvement of all of us.
- Commit to integrate this work into what we do in an ongoing way at the yearly meeting level. We want this work to become part of the fabric of what we do whenever we get together as yearly meeting members and attenders.

We have a pattern of hearing and receiving the concerns of certain Friends of Color or certain Friends of African Descent in ways that assume that Friends of Color are monolithic. At the same time, to properly season concerns related to the multicultural audit and our 2015 minute, we deeply need the voices of Friends of Color. We are called to hold this important balance at the center of our discernment processes.

We need to build spaces within which the contributions of Friends of Color and the contributions of Friends of African Descent can be received, celebrated, and heard in their own right, wherein no one else is speaking for them.

We asked what resources in terms of funding and staff time might be necessary to support Friends of Color to gather together for discernment regarding next steps, work required at the local and regional level, and what the change that we seek could look like now and in the future.

The council approved the creation of an opportunity during Annual Sessions or as a pre-retreat for interested Friends of Color and Friends of African Descent to convene and seek the guidance of the Spirit around the FGC multicultural audit and the report from the PYM Multicultural Audit Steering Committee, as they relate to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. We charge the Sessions Coordinating Committee with working with the appropriate people on the specifics of implementing this plan.

Laying Down the QLC Discernment Team

As a result of its work, the QLC Discernment Team produced a report in the spring of 2018. Additionally, a sprint group for curating more resources on conflict resolution should be gathered, which can be under the care of the Ministry & Care Committee.

With great appreciation of the work of its members, the council approved laying down the QLC Discernment Team.

The Ministry & Care Committee is charged with raising up a “conflict resolution resources sprint group” and with developing any processes for addressing future conflicts that might arise among local meetings.

The next steps and the queries from the QLC Discernment Team report will be forwarded to the committee, and they are attached to these minutes. The queries, especially, can be made available as a resource for the work that comes next.

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Threshing Session Proposal

There is a need for additional opportunities for discernment in ways that bring in more people beyond the councils. There is also a need to include actively the spiritual insights of monthly meetings and quarterly meetings. The proposal seeks to create structures and processes that address these needs.

The proposal should include a paragraph that reminds us what a threshing session is. We also wondered whether the new structures and processes being proposed should be under the care of the Ministry & Care Committee.

We will consider the proposal again for approval at the June Quaker Life Council meeting. Further comments can go to Amy or Christie.

State of the Meeting Reports Sprint

George Rubin, Julia Carrigan, and Gray Goodman will serve on this sprint. The sprint is charged with reviewing all the state of the meeting reports that we have received and providing a recommendation to the Sessions Coordinating Committee as to how they will be presented.

March 2019 Continuing Sessions Debrief

There are many vantages from which those who were present at the March 2019 Continuing Sessions have spoken. Several members of the Quaker Life Council shared their own experiences. We recognized that some pain was experienced as a result of the proceedings during business at the 2019 Continuing Sessions. We open ourselves to queries such as: How do we learn from painful experiences? How do we ensure that the structures we create are set up for success? How do we live into the power of communal discernment and mutual accountability? When things fall apart and problems emerge, who do we go to for support and accountability?

PYM Young Friends

We took a moment to hold the Young Friends community in the light, given the resignation of the Young Friends Program Facilitator. She cited family health reasons.

Ministry & Care Committee

Please send names to the Governance Committee as recommendations for service on this committee.

Minutes of Appreciation

The Quaker Life Council minutes its appreciation to our clerk Amy Taylor Brooks for excellent clerking that allowed us to accomplish a great deal of work. We also appreciate our PYM Associate Secretary for Program and Religious Life for stepping in to take our minutes in the absence of our Recording Clerk, Gray Goodman.

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Items Potentially Tabled for June 2019 Meeting

8. Examine queries for QLC annual report.
9. Examine statement from PYM Clerks on proper MFB behavior.
12. Minutes of Concern from Caln Quarterly Meeting, Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, and Haddonfield Quarterly Meeting, Eco-Justice Collaborative

Our meeting adjourned. We plan to meet again at Arch Street Meeting House on Saturday, June 15 at 10 AM.