



Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

6.20.2020 Quaker Life Council Minutes

Seventh Day, Sixth Month 20, 2020 (using Zoom format)
Decisions and other follow-up actions **are shown in bold.**

Key points from the joint session of PYM Quaker Life, Administration, and Nominating Councils from 10-11 a.m.:

- We were welcomed by Terri Whiteford. Times have certainly changed from our last joint meeting. Spirit now has our attention; it is time to envision the world we want. After periods of activism (pivot moments), too easily amnesia and the status quo of oppression then set in.
- This session was clerked by Jonathan Rhoads. All 29 present introduced themselves.
- The workshops leading up to annual sessions are underway and proving to be excellent. Pending plenary sessions include June 27 (10 a.m.) extended meeting for worship with attention to racial justice and the pandemic, July 11 on climate change, July 19 on membership, July 21 (7:30 p.m.) Q+A with PYM treasurer, and July 25 a session on addressing racism. Our next joint meeting will be July 18.
- The Fellowship of Friends of African Descent have presented a 2016 minute recommending action on police violence and related issues (already posted on PYM website). It will be discussed during the July 25 plenary. These plenaries will not make decisions, but the councils may want to take up relevant actions that arise in them. Decisions about PYM's budget and nominations will occur at the Aug. 1 business session.
- PYM and AFSC are already involved in the current Poor Peoples' Campaign.
- See Rev. Barber's "We are Called to be a Movement." Just talk will not be enough.
- Ellen shared the deep spiritual sharing that has just been occurring during Quaker Spring. We white folks need to let ourselves be changed and shed our traces of white supremacy.
- Tonya talked about what it was like to study at the University of Mississippi, a "place that was not designed to have black people in it." She cherishes the breakthrough poetry of Langston Hughes, especially "I, Too." And she recommends using the term "black indigenous people of color" (BIPOC). This is a period when we can grow strong.



QUAKER LIFE COUNCIL, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Participants – Sue Dietz, Zachary Dutton (staff), Steve Elkinton (recording clerk), Susan Kight, Cathleen Marion, Meg Rose (staff), George Rubin, and Anthony Stover (clerk).
(Absent: Kate Bregman, Julia Carrigan, Margaret Dawson, Melanie Douty-Snipes, Bryn Hammarstrom, and Ayesha Imani)

We began and ended this session with centering worship.

Welcome – Anthony welcomed everyone. The agenda was sent out in advance. He mentioned that the issues suggested at the end of last month’s meeting (including adult religious education, social-distancing at meeting houses, self-evaluation of the council’s effectiveness, supporting small meetings, our annual report, and our role in moving forward with racial justice) will be considered as appropriate by this Council in the future.

Report from Meg Rose, Young Adult Engagement Coordinator – She recently joined Central Philadelphia MM. Young adults Friends (YAFs) are aged 18-35, including both folks who grew up here or are now living here and want to stay connected with Friends. They come in many phases: students, young professionals, young families, etc. She sees a spectrum from “not engaged at all” through “receiving” (information, support, grants) to “attending” to “serving.” PYM offers a lot for YAFs, including communications, grants, programs (retreats and virtual worship sessions), pastoral care, opportunities for leadership and facilitation experiences. YAFs are getting more involved in the YM’s granting process. She quoted part of *Faith & Practice*, p. 112, which she finds a useful program guide, and it is a good foundation for the recent YAF epistles on membership and the Berks Detention Center. This second epistle has led to a chain of inspired actions by YAFs and many other allies.

Discussion: How are YAFs addressing inclusiveness, welcoming young Friends of color? YAFs have done training sessions on racial justice. It’s a long-term issue – there’s still much to do. She is open to creating a separate YAFs of Color if desired.

How do you deal with the aging-out of YAFs? Are YAFs well enough integrated into local meetings – or are they just following a separate track? She sees YAF programs as reinforcement for local meetings – she recommends involving young folks whenever appropriate. Currently Meg herself balances involvement with YAFs, her meeting, and graduate school. As people mature they morph from receiving support to giving support to others.

What’s the difference between YAFs now and earlier? Her impression is that older convinced Friends come from religions that didn’t serve them well. YAFs come from a variety of backgrounds, not just those who grew up Friends, but some non-theist seekers, and some just worried about the future. Quakers today are influenced by the religions and secular culture around us. Yet Quakerism can offer a new and grounded faith. All this work supporting YAFs is so important to the future of the Yearly Meeting. QLC is very supportive of this work.



Ministry and Care Committee Issues

Zachary reported on behalf of the M&C Committee. It requests that we consider the summary of the Spiritual State of the Meeting reports and attach it to our annual report. About half of all the PYM monthly meetings submitted reports. We noted that this increase may be a fruit of our outreach and M&C's work. (Some reports may still be held up in their quarterly meetings.) Steve noted that the summary stresses the shut-down period and how meetings have adjusted, de-emphasizing the good work done in many meetings during 2019. **Susan will ask the Clerk of M&C as to whether the summary report needs to be revised before submitted. When it is, we agreed to append the summary report, as requested, to our annual report.**

At the 2019 annual sessions, QLC was tasked with setting up a truth and reconciliation process. This was passed on to the Ministry and Care Committee for their help and discernment, but that Committee feels this work should be suspended for now and perhaps have a better name. The Anti-Racism Collaborative prefers to focus currently on education and conflict resolution. Does M&C plan to set up a new collaborative to address conflict resolution? In the future we are open to receiving further instructions from the Administrative Council on this issue.

How can M&C change the task as assigned by the YM "body?" M&C has discerned that now is not the time to set up the Truth and Reconciliation process. We asked them to help us discern how to move forward, and as they looked at it more closely, they made their recommendation.

When this arose last year, it was confusing as to what was expected. It's an issue that we need to keep close track of. The Truth & Reconciliation process is a very specific process that needs much preliminary preparation to be done well.

Membership Threshing Session Report – The notes Zachary provided record ideas generated at Haddonfield Meeting in January and an epistle from YAFs. One issue is possible at-large membership. Anthony urged us to listen in on the Sunday, July 19 plenary session. Zachary is also organizing a recorded panel discussion with a variety of perspectives. Follow-up may fall to us to carry out.

Program Committee Updates – Cathleen reported on the new Anti-Racism Collaborative and their relationship to relevant Resource Friends. The Collaborative does not yet have a clerk (Wanda is currently acting). This work requires care and patience. So far the Program Committee has only received one report from a collaborative (out of nine). The Committee is examining its functions and operations.

Annual Report – Anthony offered to prepare this from our minutes, with Zachary's help. He wants to emphasize services to and support for small meetings. He repeated the issues suggested last month. We should keep these issues in mind as we attend annual sessions.

Personal Reflections on Racial Justice – In this round robin we shared from the heart. Key insights included deep emotions (frustration, sadness, confusion), deep listening, deep sorrow, the list of "75 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice," seeking how we can be useful to this struggle. How can we avoid racial justice amnesia? How can grace ("compassion and forgiveness working together") and joy inform all our work? Nurture each human being, regardless of their state or condition. Big reveals: "Spirit is showing us its shadow side," showing us our inequities and greed.



Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

Something has shifted. Caution may be the byword. Evil must be pulled out at its roots. Slavery and oppression have been evil from the beginning. Interracial families “have had a lot of adventures.” Quakers have a spirit and truth that we should cherish and build on. What do we have to do to guarantee that no one ever needs to fear “A knee on the neck?” Some of us acknowledge that we need to make amends for the sins of our ancestors. Working in PYM is really hard – where are we complicit, and where are we making breakthroughs? White folks have a special burden working with each other. We are disappointed at getting caught up into symbols, not dealing with the deeper hurts, the mental anguish. Token acts do not heal systemic damage. The recent injustice of bailing out corporations while giving citizens only a token amount must stop.

To conclude, George shared this passage from Britain Yearly Meeting’s Faith and Practice:
No one said it would be easy, no one promised it wouldn't hurt. This way of life, this trusting one another and trusting God, is no impermeable shield, guaranteed to protect us by cutting us off, building barriers, keeping the bad things and the bad people out. It's messy, muddy, and sometime painful – but the other way, the search for some kind of mechanical invulnerability, for some kind of scientific guarantee against physical death, that way I am sure lies the death of the Spirit. We know the choice -- we've known it all along – and we make it every day. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life that you and your descendants may live" (Deut-30:19) [Mary Leavitt]

These QLC minutes were read and approved before the meeting ended.