



Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

7.18.2020 Quaker Life Council Minutes

Seventh Day, Seventh Month 18, 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. (clerked by Jonathan Rhoads):

- Zachary Dutton, Associate Secretary for Program and Religious Life, reported that Annual Sessions are about to begin. His PowerPoint included that this is the first time in the yearly meeting's history being entirely virtual, no two sessions run simultaneously (to avoid conflicts), many topical workshop sessions and pre-recorded panels occurred in the "runway" leading up to the main week, the poetry project is an innovation, and minutes will be taken for key business sessions. Christie Duncan-Tesmer, General Secretary, noted that her recent "sabbatical" was amazing – and the staff filling in for her and setting up for sessions merit much praise. Now is the season to send in recommendations for Council nominations to Melissa Rycroft, Nominating Council Clerk (there are still many vacancies).
- Ayesha Imani cited John Lewis and Ellen Deacon cited C.T. Vivian, both recently deceased civil rights leaders.
- Others are deeply concerned about racial justice, gun violence, and supporting the Ujima Friends Peace Center and Ujima's 2016 minute on state sanctioned violence. Ellen asked that we consider this minute in every monthly meeting. Several mentioned the interfaith group called "Heeding God's Call." In doing this work, let's avoid bureaucratic structures and emphasize loving our fellow children of God. Our Councils must provide leadership in these areas – see PYM's 2015 minute on racial justice; there is still much work to do.



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

Participants – Kate Bregman, Margaret Dawson, Sue Dietz, Christie Duncan-Tesmer (General Secretary), Zachary Dutton (Associate Secretary), Steve Elkinton (recording clerk), Ayesha Imani, Cathleen Marion (acting clerk), Jonathan Rhoads (acting PYM clerk), and George Rubin. (Absent: Julia Carrigan, Melanie Douty-Snipes, Bryn Hammarstrom, Susan Kight, and Anthony Stover.)

We began this session with centering worship.

WELCOME – (There was some difficulty getting folks into this Zoom session.) We all agreed that “chatting” on Zoom can be distracting, especially during worship. We also honored again the memory of civil rights leader John Lewis.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE, “PROCOMM,” UPDATE – Cathleen cited the Committee’s recent updated report, including only one report from a collaborative (out of nine!). Reminders were recently sent out for the missing reports. It seems that in these disjointed times, regular deadlines are not being honored. One person feels this is a breach of promise, since annual reports are supposed to be a requirement for these groups. Maybe we should be phoning collaborative leaders to find out what’s wrong delaying the reports (**Sue Dietz volunteered to help**).

Cathleen nominated Jamie McVicker (Downington Meeting) to Program Committee. (ProComm can include four members who are not on the QLC.) **We approved Jamie McVicker as a new member of the Program Committee.**

With Cathleen’s rotation off ProComm, Zachary is in the process of identifying a new clerk. (And Cathleen is willing to help with the transition.) ProComm has a lot of potential and needs some new energy. In reality, our Community Engagement Coordinator, Olivia Brangan, has the best contacts with the collaboratives (not so much ProComm’s members).

Marge reported that the Youth Programs Advisory Committee meetings she has attended are wonderful, well-organized, in short, impressive! Often the young folks are the most concerned, active, and willing to change.

QLC ANNUAL REPORT (with committee reports as appendices) – Some of us have read it. Most of it consists of committee reports. **We all are encouraged to read it if we haven’t already.**

SUPPORT OF SMALL MEETINGS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING AT MEETINGHOUSES – This topic was suggested for discussion at our May 16 meeting. There used to be a regular



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gathering of PYM monthly meeting clerks, but they have not met since the former PYM clerk died. **This function may best be assigned to the PYM Community Engagement staffer (Olivia B.). We urge PYM to re-invigorate inter-meeting communications.** Recently the clerk of Frankford Meeting requested that small groups be organized of MM clerks – about 25 responded. This is a topic we should keep tracking and encourage meetings to learn from each other.

Merion Meeting holds a Black Lives Matter vigil each week and finds it a great way to be visible and both connect to their communities and build solidarity within the Meeting. There, some love Zoom, and some do not. One challenge is a pending socially-distanced burial in their graveyard.

Social distancing at our meetinghouses can be a real challenge. Most meetings are still using Zoom and enjoy including distant and disabled Friends (however Zoom excludes people without access to computers). Ujima FPC has to continue using Zoom because they have only a small yard. They have enjoyed international participation!

Germantown MM is looking into a hybrid of both in-person and Zoom-based gatherings. Zoom is a technology has a lot to offer, especially for dispersed former members. Chestnut Hill meeting is experimenting with an outdoor meeting tomorrow – but it is all still an experiment – and they are still meeting via Zoom every week. Zoom is proving to be rich in spirit despite its shortcomings.

Downington Meeting uses three formats: virtual via Zoom, dispersed seating outside the meetinghouse, and well-ventilated indoor use. They also seek to develop hybrid forms. Given public health expertise, there may be no returning to “normal,” so we need to continue thinking in new ways for the future. Some people need access to meetinghouses as refuges, as emotion/spiritual homes.

Smaller meetings and those without computer access need special attention. **Should a session be set up for PYM about the rudiments of Zoom? How to set up the platform?**

The Religious Leaders of Southern Jersey meet regularly by Zoom – they have developed a list about how congregations can actually meet. (**George is happy to share these ideas with us when he learns more.**) Other yearly meetings put out a list out of their constituent meetings and how to access their worship services. PYM meetings are encouraged to list their Zoom session on the PYM web-based calendar.

However, the PYM website has become so “vast” that it is sometimes hard to navigate. Communication remains a challenge for PYM, and the best results only happen when local meetings send in their stories. (Some MMs resend having to send in information.) PYM



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now tries to minimize information requests so that clerks don't feel overwhelmed. No matter how much information is on a website, people won't look for it unless they are motivated. Most of us are stretched tight time-wise and can't take the trouble to shop for information.

What would a PYM cultural change look like that feels less top-down?

It would be great to have a Religious Education Zoom service to help grow our children. Pooling the resources of multiple meetings might be very meaningful (above about 3rd grade). Small meetings with few children would especially benefit.

Could we list meetings in every time zone so people can worship any time as their schedules allow?

SHARING ON "HOW ARE OUR MEETINGS FARING?" -- (see discussion above)

"HOW ARE WE FARING INDIVIDUALLY?" – This Covid-19 era has been both a difficult and wonderful time. Imani is responsible for two schools with 1,600 students. "It's work all day and all night." She don't find coming home (to a refuge from activity) like she used to (since she's already home most of time). Yet the evidence of God is all around – it's going to be OK in the long run.

Some of us have been able to read and listen more than we did before. One now questions how well we, as a yearly meeting community, really do our work. Do we fully endorse our own minutes of concern? Reconciliation is still deeply needed (even though we put off the details of this process for while). "We need to put our money where our mouth is." How much of our money is linked up to a racist past? In compensation, how can we invest in change whole-heartedly? For example, how can we fully support Ujima FPC?

Another raised the deep issues of refugees worldwide, all fleeing insoluble problems. What candles can we light in the face of this darkness? Covid-related unemployment is more than we can afford, but maybe we can be a spiritual home for some.

For some of us the details of daily life are a Godsend (unless our memories fail us). We all miss hugs and other human contact. We are learning about the consequences of being extroverts – and introverts. And there is the anger at people who will not mask up to protect the rest of us. World War II vets know what stress can do for the rest of their lives. Aug. 6 will be the 75 anniversary of the Hiroshima atomic bombing – how can we be more effective peacemakers? (See the YouTube item "Language of Faces" showing a Quaker demonstration from decades ago.) The danger of nuclear war still haunts us.



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Steve shared his reluctance to join a yearly meeting Council, but he answered the calling anyway. So, too, he chooses, among all the other state of mind available, to dwell as he can in a state of loving-kindness. It helps him cope with all the darkness and uncertainty.

One person sees that gun violence here in Philadelphia is an epidemic. What can we do to bring it under control?

Christie shared that from her prayer work during her sabbatical, God calls her to live both with a schedule and outside of time (in spiritual time). We agreed that sabbaticals should be extended to all essential workers.

And Cathleen, in her last session with us, tearfully shared how rich and nourishing she has found this work. She has been with QLC since it started, and she has learned to accept things as they are. She has moved on beyond the pronouns to just “we are.” The pandemic era is overwhelming by the worldwide suffering it has caused – yet she is so deeply moved by the Human Spirit. And our Quaker meetings are sanctuaries in the storm. **We all expressed our deep appreciation for her service on QLC.**

These QLC minutes were read and approved on September 19, 2020.