



Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

10.17..2020 Quaker Life Council Minutes

Tenth Month 17, 2020 (using Zoom format)
Decisions and other follow-up actions **are shown in bold.**

Key points from the Joint Session and Orientation for New Members of the PYM Quaker Life, Administration, and Nominating Councils

Clerked by Frank and Jean Marie P. Barch.

We are called to love in the face of hate, anger, and fear. Spirit calls us to this service; even so, will it do any good? (Worship and introductions took a full half hour.)

Last Tuesday many monthly meeting representatives and leaders met to discuss the Yearly Meeting's future. They developed a rich and inclusive definition of this Yearly Meeting. Our connections and communications are key to staying together. We strive to listen together to Spirit. The three current areas of deep concern – anti-racism, global climate change, and membership and belonging – will be addressed starting in December for the next year. YM leadership seeks the widest input from as many monthly meetings as possible. (The biggest area of response so far is around the issue of membership.) Many other YMs are also addressing climate change. On all these issues, we need to know where we are before we can move forward. Listening provides the foundation for action. Do our current YM structures help us achieve our vision?

Christie Tuncan-Tesmer, General Secretary, continued the orientation by stating that this session is really a retreat, standing back to look at our councils and what we need to do our work. (This we did in break-out sessions by Council.) For the QLC, Guinevere Janes took the notes. Highlights included: the desire to serve is a gift. Other gifts we bring include the capacity to surrender our “not-knowing” to the Spirit. We need more youth and better communications -- also better clarity of the Council's purpose and diversity of membership. We cannot start concrete steps by putting things off. We need to balance listening and action so as not to “leave people in anguish.” If we fail, people feel betrayed. In huge issues, such as climate and anti-racism, what would meaningful progress really look like? Both Friends of African Descent and the Eco-Justice working group have already laid out blueprints of action. Some meetings have already labored with these issues for years. Then we reconvened and compiled a chart of gifts, skills, resources, and composition, by Council. Both QLC and Administrative Council realize they need to work more closely together. How do we get beyond “just talking?”



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Melissa Rycroft reiterated that we three groups are really the “board of directors” of PYM. Boards do retreats and orientations. Legally, the boards of nonprofits are responsible for financial soundness, “duty of care” through participation, “duty of loyalty” to disclose conflicts of interest (to avoid profiting from decisions that are made), and “duty of obedience” to carry out the group’s mission. Therefore, we should each fill out the new Conflict of Interest Form thoughtfully. (Potential conflicts are not good or bad, but just a reality.)

Some of the business of each Council should be held in confidence.

Christie ended this session by reporting that the Annual Fund raised more than its target for the 2019-2020 fiscal year! The recent gathering of monthly meeting clerks and leaders broadened outreach to meetings; people were enthusiastic! Follow-up will include various reports and stories. “Our deep reverence is precious.”



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QUAKER LIFE COUNCIL, 11:30 a.m. to 1:10 p.m. by Zoom
Follow-up actions and decisions **are shown in bold.**

Participants – Kate Bregman, Margaret “Marge” Dawson, Sue Dietz, Zachary Dutton (Associate Secretary), Steve Elkinton (recording clerk), Bryn Hammarstrom, Tom Hughes, Ayesha Imani, Guinevere Janes, and Anthony Stover (clerk). Guest – Oskar Castro.
Absent – Julia Carrigan, Melanie Douty-Snipes, and Susan Kight.

We began and ended this session with centering worship.

Report from Oskar Castro, the new PYM Director of Human Resources and Inclusion – He worships at Central Philadelphia MM and has worked with youth-oriented nonprofits most of his career. He grew up in South Jersey in a Catholic community and most recently worked for Quaker Voluntary Service. Now he feels called to help build diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in Quaker institutions. The YM has been working with Prototype Entities as consultants to periodically assess PYM’s organizational “climate.” He seeks to optimize employee engagement (especially in this estranging Covid Era). Updating the employee handbook and practices (such as employee performance evaluations) are important. He also wants to uproot past practices that may now be obsolete in the face of our stated spiritual values. He networks with the Mid-Atlantic Employers’ Association to stay abreast of current practices. And he seeks to enhance transparency and authenticity.

Even though it is a separate 501(c)(3) organization, the Arch Street Meeting House comes under the personnel practices of the Yearly Meeting, and Oskar will be helping to fill current staff openings there.

Addressing Racism, Climate Justice, and Membership – These key issues from last summer’s annual sessions were discussed in our earlier Joint meeting. (For a review of materials related to how these issues were processed during Annual Sessions, go to <https://www.pym.org/annual-sessions/annual-sessions-2020-videos-documents/>.) These issues will be activated in December after the elections.

Some meetings are not clear what the YM is asking in its recent outreach. What more is needed? For the membership issue, Young Adult Friends have made their request. (However, the process for handling it still seems to be unclear.) This issue has been “alive” in the YM for at least 15 years, now it is urgent as we seek to be more inclusive. Monthly meetings were given this additional chance to review the issue since it challenges their primacy as the locus of membership in the Society of Friends. What do we as a Council recommend? Monthly meetings are often overwhelmed. Should we send this issue back to the YM clerks? Small meetings may resist general membership, since they seek to grow, too. We do need to explore this issue aggressively to catch up with current Friends organizations. Membership can be a control mechanism. Why should people



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of color join a mostly white group anyway? Some people do not feel well served by the meetings they belong to – where can they turn when in conflict with their meeting? How much worse would this be for less privileged folks? **This issue is complex and should be discussed regularly by the entire body of the Yearly Meeting.**

Global climate change and environmental pollution affect underprivileged communities first and we should be deeply concerned about this. The development of Ujima Friends Peace Center has been a huge step forward for all of us. In the broader scheme of things, these two issues – global climate change and anti-racism work -- are actually more important than membership.

In summary, we wondered why the three issues went out again and support membership and belonging as a complex issue. **Most of us are not yet clear about what we should do next.** We all need to more deeply discern what membership and belonging have meant in the past. Membership can work well when people discern their Spiritual journey as part of a Quaker community.

New Appointments to Program Committee – Zachary reported that these Friends have been nominated:

Betsy Crofts, Newtown Meeting, former member of the Committee on Friends Education, helped to plan and facilitate the Quaker College Fair for many years,
John Marquette, Lehigh Valley Meeting, served on the Sessions Coordinating Committee in the past, and has experience with buildings, burial grounds, and membership development, and
Wendy Kane, Newtown Meeting, serves as Bucks Quarterly Meeting Coordinator, is former member of PYM staff, and has experience with data management, coordinating the Bridge Contacts, as well as burial grounds.

These nominations were approved.

New appointments & releases for FCS Advisory Panel – Zachary described that Friends Counseling Service offers therapy at discounted prices. It is overseen by QLC's Friends Counseling Service Advisory Panel. **New appointments are underway but are not ready to be announced yet.**

Conflict of Interest Form -- **Go to the PYM Website and fill out the conflict of interest disclosure form:** <https://www.pym.org/administrative-council/conflict-of-interest-disclosure/>. These need to be renewed each fiscal year.

Forming a Sprint Group on Supporting Smaller Meetings – (Postponed until Susan can join us.)

How are we faring in these pandemic times? – As we ended, we shared our current situations and ways to stay active and inspired (especially with local vigils and in the beauty of nature). George Lakey's recent work to cope with pending social unrest has been reassuring (see Pendle Hill's YouTube service).



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NEXT MEETING – November 21, 2020

These QLC minutes (up to the appointments) were read and approved on Oct. 17, 2020.