



Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

2.19.22 Quaker Life Council Minutes

Second Month 19, 2022

JOINT SESSION OF THE PYM QUAKER LIFE, ADMINISTRATION, AND NOMINATING COUNCILS (By Zoom 10:00-11:00 A.M.)

We were welcomed by PYM presiding co-clerks, Frank and Jean-Marie Barch, with 25 other participants. General Secretary Christie Duncan-Tesmer noted the unfortunate timing conflict today with the thread gathering on clerking. PYM has been fully staffed for the past year; now there are some new openings. The new communications coordinator has already started. A new data manager position has been established. And a part-time sessions coordinator will soon be hired. Also, NY YM has asked for help with their in-prison monthly meetings, including a pending Supreme Court case, and our own Robert Greene has been invaluable in filing our *amicus* brief.

Irene Oleksiw was introduced and reported by PowerPoint on Caln Quarter's activities on growing attendance and membership. Key concepts included holding quarterly meeting retreats, the importance of religious congregants as volunteers, long-term demographic trends among various religions, the need for clear mission statements, and intentional growth (not haphazard). Caln Quarter's Zoom seminar on this topic attracted 120 people and turned into a 7-part series of sessions. Both best practices and barriers to success were discussed, and topics included digital presence, welcoming newcomers, "Friendly fences," growth formulas, Facebook for meetings, maintaining community building, and spiritual vitality. Key lessons included:

- have clear goals for your meeting's website, include an active calendar,
- make the website easy to search and active (especially for responses),
- develop schedules that are family-friendly,
- Facebook postings have to be done sensitively and often,
- explicitly encourage young people to participate in worship,
- avoid assumptions (eldering) about race, gender, and privilege,
- learn about creative conflict resolution (PYM has great resources),
- growing meetings publicize their activities (movie nights, postcards to new residents, etc.),
- offer consistent follow-up with newcomers (an intentional "on-ramp" process),
- share outreach among many of the meeting's committees,
- Adult RE can be vital in attracting and holding new folks.

Good outreach helps all of us talk effectively about Quakerism (QuakerSpeaks are invaluable). Meetings can be classified as "small but re-charging," "sizable but shrinking," and "well-oiled in doing outreach." Could membership development be a higher priority in PYM with dedicated staffing, a place on annual sessions agenda, and suitable corporate publicity for all of PYM?



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QUAKER LIFE COUNCIL (By Zoom 11:20 AM-1:00 PM)

Decisions and follow-up actions **are shown in bold.**

PARTICIPANTS – Marge Dawson, Sue Dietz, Steve Elkinton (recording clerk), Robert Greene, Tom Hughes, Guinevere Janes, Rose Ketterer, and Anthony Stover (clerk).

Ex Officio Members – Jean-Marie Barch (PYM Co-Clerk) and Christie Duncan-Tesmer (Executive Secretary).

Absent – Sue Kight.

We opened and closed the session with centering silent worship.

WELCOME – Anthony welcomed us and reviewed the agenda.

UPDATE ON GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE -- Christie Duncan-Tessmer updated us that the Governance Committee that was once under both QLC and Admin Council is now just reporting to Admin Council. We are welcome to invite them to report to us as needed. (We have already approved having Robert Greene as our representative.) The group will meet soon when fully appointed.

GOVERNANCE & STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS SPRINT REPORT -- Anthony Stover opened with the process for evaluating the current PYM structure. The sprint's survey was poorly distributed, the results meager, and their report and its recommendation have not been widely shared. It turns out that this effort was not clearly understood by many – and there is widespread interest in knowing what this evaluation will be. **We should strongly encourage the Admin Council to issue this report soon so we can all benefit from it.** The sprint's clerk is happy to report to us as invited. **We encourage him to give a full report on behalf of the sprint at annual sessions, not just to us. It should include data on who filled out the survey and what the recommendations are – and be posted on the YM website.**

RESPONSE TO PROGRAM COMMITTEE'S REPORT GIVEN IN JANUARY -- Anthony Stover noted that the Program Committee clerk's "report" to us in January turned out to be his personal comments, not a report on behalf of the whole committee. The Program Committee will meet Feb. 21 to try to resolve this issue, and **Anthony will be attending on our behalf, as will Sue D.** Jean-Marie offered an observation about how integrity has been damaged, troubling her Spirit, so **Anthony invited her to attend the Feb. 21 meeting, too. He also invited us to submit any questions he should be asking on Feb. 21.** (Guinevere also shared how she was summarily dropped from Program Committee when she took her recent health-related leave of absence.)



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REPORT ON THE THREAD GATHERING ON RESTORATIVE RACIAL JUSTICE: FROM THE PERSONAL TO THE SYSTEMIC -- Sue Dietz reported that there were about 110 people in attendance – and they stayed on to the very end with positive feedback. The far-ranging morning session included bodily and psychological reactions to differences and fear and other emotions. The afternoon involved several collaboratives discussing how racism impacts their work. Then various types of interventions to address racism were discussed. Everyone learned. Rose added that parts were puzzling, but the afternoon session was “splendid.” Small group breakout conversations were especially valuable. Starting with deep listening can have many benefits. Sue emphasized that the one glitch led to valuable self-examination, “Gosh, where was I coming from when I said that?” Rose noted that two people of color offered unexpected comments that were then largely ignored.

Anthony shared his personal position about “equity of representation.” Our “Quaker bubble” seems to blind us to the gross inequities occurring all around us. Going back to the same people over and over does not address those who may be feeling the most pain. Why are Quakers silent these days in the face of voter suppression, racist violence, police violence, bomb threats, street violence, and oppressive laws in state legislatures? He is feeling overwhelmed -- and this is why he didn’t attend the thread gathering. (Sue pointed out that many monthly meetings are actually working on these issues of oppression and racial injustice. How are we going to act together if we don’t have deep conversations about these issues?)

Marge reflected on how her meeting’s public protests attracted participation by neighbors and local institutions. Rose noted that maybe our desire to avoid conflict weakens our ability to take strong public stands and move forward meaningfully.

We, as a yearly meeting, could make strong and simple public messages to emphasize racial justice. Why don’t we? Robert echoed Anthony’s concern that we as a body are being too introspective. What are the statements we can and should be making on behalf of the entire yearly meeting? Who can suggest these and carry them out? **Manifesting our testimonies to the rest of the world has to be done carefully.** He noted that the Admin. Council is developing a policy to not violate tax-exempt status. If this shapes our public speaking, it affects this Council, too.

Robert noted that PYM leadership may be currently open to issuing timely public statements as press releases, not just burying them away on our websites.



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NEW BUSINESS -- Marge, from Merion Meeting, raised the issue of finding funds for historic preservation of that meetinghouse. They have a wonderful free lecture series to explore preservation issues and broaden public support for their efforts.

Anthony noted a new Black news network that offered a feature on Quakers, centering on the 1688 Germantown proclamation against slavery. We must reach out “beyond ourselves.” Strong public statements can be a powerful form of outreach.

How do such statements arise? Maybe the PYM Leadership Committee can promote them. **We can bring this up at our next meeting to propose “concrete work.”**

Rose added for voting rights: “I was thirsty and you gave me to drink.” and “This is our testimony to the whole world” regarding the Quaker Peace Testimony of 1660. Anthony quoted Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 statement that “Injustice anywhere is injustice to all.”

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES -- **Steve read the minutes and they were approved with minor changes.**