

## **Online via Zoom**

**Monday, July 27, 2020, 7:30 p.m.**

Clerk pro tem, Elaine Learnard  
Assistant clerk pro tem, Jeffrey Aaron  
Recording Clerk pro tem, Lu Harper  
Reading Clerk, Barbra Bleecker

2020-07-38. Friends gathered into a period of waiting worship. The Clerk reviewed the agenda.

2020-07-39. Matthew Venhaus (Buffalo) reminded Friends of our Zoom participation practices.

2020-07-40. Reading Clerk Barbra Bleecker read an obituary for John Perry (Bulls Head-Oswego) while a photo of John and a poem by John's daughter-in-law Jen Perry (Farmington) was shared on screen. A memorial minute will be brought to a later Session.

Ministry followed. Friends spoke of their gratitude for the depth of John's Quakerism, his good-heartedness, and how he served as mentor and teacher for many. A Friend shared how she can still hear his voice and see him in his seat in the Auditorium at Silver Bay. He had a way of getting his message across. A Friend reflected that John was also a troublemaker. In meeting for Business at Bullshead-Oswego, his ministry might be contrary, challenging and deepening. He valued each person's individual gifts and held a desire for meetings to nurture, support and cherish Friends' gifts. A Friend shared that she became a member of Bullshead-Oswego because of John directing her to the writings of Quaker contemplative Thomas Kelly. John taught us how to continue to share our gifts even with the inevitable diminishment of age and disease: he found new ways of reaching out with each diminishment, becoming an AVP volunteer, a hospice volunteer, making art and other creative activities. In his last days, he was still immersed in keeping up-to-date on the problems facing the larger world.

2020-07-41. Anita Paul (Schenectady) and then Jeffrey Aaron read excerpts from the State of Society reports (attached to the July 21 minutes). The excerpts weave a message of how Divine guidance continues to speak to and through us as we face conflict, grief, joy and the individual and collective witness and service we offer in the world.

2020-07-42. Steve Mohlke (Ithaca) presented the General Secretary's report. Steve reflected on the frequently asked question, "How can we support the Friends Center for Racial Justice (FCRJ)?" In the spirit of "Wear thy sword as long as you can," Steve reflected on why it no longer makes sense to him to ask that question; he noted that the question assumes that those who ask the question are the giver and FCRJ is the receiver of the support. FCRJ's mission is to address racism within the Religious Society of Friends. We are the work, the givers and the receivers. Racism has infected all of us and it isn't going to go away on its own. Steve lifted up 3 quotes from the Friends General Conference Friends of Color pre-Gathering epistle that we heard read last week. "We enjoyed the rare opportunity of not being othered in Quaker space;"

“Friends of Color need respite from the systemic racism too often found in our American Quaker community that often goes unseen by white friends;” and “Friends of Color are fatigued from being asked to teach white folks.” Flipping the question, Steve asked, “How can FCRJ support me?” Angela Hopkins of FCRJ welcomes conversations with Friends exploring gifts and leadings around working to become a more anti-racist society. You can contact her at [angela@fcrj.org](mailto:angela@fcrj.org). Steve encouraged Friends to think about what kind of commitment you can make to support FCRJ.

Continuing to speak about racism, Steve noted that as Friends talk to one another about systematic racism in our society, about the murders of black and brown people by police, we are building a shared vocabulary. With shared vocabulary, and with each other, we can take on the work of anti-racism. Steve encouraged Friends to expand our thinking about “racism” from “interpersonal bigotry” to structures, institutions, and systems. He offered up his understanding that “I understand myself as acting racist when I comply with a racist system and acting anti-racist when I resist it. Sometimes I do both almost at the same time.” Steve spoke about why and how becoming anti-racist matters to our faith. He emphasized that our faithfulness depends on a diversity of perspectives. He spoke of patterns of whose voices get heard; how Friends of Color are discounted by the words and actions of white Friends; a pattern of extra scrutiny of Friends of Color; and how as a body, many Friends feel free to ignore community rules. When the community feels free to ignore its own rules, Steve noted that a person of color, particularly someone new to Friends, has to wonder if this is a safe space. When rules are applied unevenly, it is people of color who lose. He noted that fewer than 30% of the people who registered for Summer Sessions accessed the web page with the community agreements we agreed to live by when we registered.

Steve also held up how our Quaker “superpowers” can be used in the work of anti-racism: listening to and for Spirit in the voices of Friends of Color; paying attention to, finding it important and supporting strategic anti-racist actions discerned by Friends of Color; examining our yearly meeting words and practices with a diversity and equity lens; leaning into our diversity of belief as a “big tent” skill in building a multicultural community; and our practice of connecting inward leadings with outward action. Steve wondered about the statement some Friends make, saying that they don’t see color. He asked us to consider how that statement lands for Friends of Color, and that it might be heard as “I feel invisible”.

Moving to the structure of the yearly meeting, Steve described the staffing structure and budget realities. With 5.5 full time staff equivalents, most of the work of the yearly meeting is done by volunteers. Personnel is 2/3 of the yearly meeting budget. Just to keep doing what staff do now will require an additional \$5,000 increase each year going forward. Steve noted that this number gives him a sinking feeling when he faces it. Most of our yearly meeting budget comes from monthly meeting covenant donations, which overall have not increased in a decade. We have kept up with staffing costs largely because the Trustees have directed unrestricted investment income to the operating budget.

Steve reported that this Fall, NYYM needs to make a decision about what level of staff support we want to commit to children, youth and young adults for 2021 and beyond. It would take an

increase of tens of thousands of dollars annually to broaden the young adult support from this past year to include children and youth. The most likely source of this increased income is from individual donors who want to see the work of NYYM thrive. Friends were invited to talk with the Development Committee, which is having an Interest Group Wednesday evening.

Steve announced that after decades of working in her NYYM staff position, beginning September 1, Helen Garay Toppins will transition to working 3 days per week, with hopes that the staff savings will make it more possible to support children, youth and young adults. From the body, Helen Garay Toppins (Morningside) affirmed her absolute dedication to the future of the yearly meeting, by pleading for support for funds to support our young adults and our children. Friends spoke in response to and in gratitude for the General Secretary's report in bringing us to a grounded place of faithfulness. A Friend asked the yearly meeting to help monthly meetings to engage in the questions about how we as individuals treat one another, particularly how we treat people of color; coming under the weight of the work that needs to be done to change systemic racism in our country. Another Friend spoke about how she has heard a lot about race and racism, looking outwardly. Steve has named patterns of how this manifests within the yearly meeting. She named another pattern: if we want to be faithful, it is important to look at the composition of our staffing, especially since, with Helen's cutting her hours, we may be becoming even more white in the makeup of our staff.

Friends spoke to funding for children, youth and young adults. A Friend raised a message she has heard from young adult Friends and Friends of Color: we are not only your future, we are your present. We are here, and we are already doing really big things. Another Friend said that it doesn't feel true to her spiritual condition that we are still asking ourselves where the \$5000 are, or how we can consolidate yearly meeting staff positions for youth and young adults. For years the Young Adult Field Secretaries have told Friends that Spirit needs them to do this work. What is the divine asking of us?

A Friend named the connection between our discussions of racism and the funding in support of children, youth and young adults in our meetings as "othering."

A Friend reminded us to trust the Light as we continue to struggle to find way forward. When we are covered, when compassion and love unite us in communion with the Eternal, nothing is too great an obstacle to overcome in that moment when we become one, when Love resolves everything.

2020-07-43. Interim Young Adult Field Secretary Marissa Badgley reported on the Pilot Mentoring program. Marissa expressed gratitude for the work of the initial planning group, the Advisory Committee, the mentors and seekers themselves, and the yearly meeting as a whole in supporting the program. The program was requested last year by Young Adult Friends at Summer Sessions, and the body heard that request. The pilot program began in January 2020. Twenty-four initial matches were made between seekers and mentors; 10 virtual gatherings took place, from a virtual kickoff weekend delayed by snow through gatherings moved into virtual mode by the pandemic. Twenty out of 24 mentor/seeker matches completed the 6 1/2 month program. Seekers overwhelmingly felt that the program was a good use of their time and energy

this year; that it strengthened their spiritual practice and self-awareness; that they have a stronger connection to Quaker community; that they took steps to change something in their life that wasn't working; and that they built skills in Quaker process. Ninety-six percent of seekers plan to continue connecting with their mentors. Due to the virtual events, the only thing that cost money in the program was Marissa's time. From the body, Friends read reflections from participants in the program. One Friend wrote: "This program and the support I got from it saved my Faith and likely my life." Marissa noted learnings from the pilot program: mentoring relationships across distance are possible; mentors/seekers alike need training and support in community; going through the program as a cohort was powerful; there are opportunities to expand the program beyond Young Adult Friends; and continuing administration and facilitation of a mentoring program will require a team, not just one person. The Advisory Committee is in discernment about how to take what we have learned and build a sustainable program, with a tentative launch of Phase 2 in October 2020. Friends were invited to contact Marissa at [yafs@nyym.org](mailto:yafs@nyym.org) if they wish to serve on the Advisory Committee or wish to involve members of their Meeting.

Friends responded to the report, and thanked Marissa and all involved in the work. A Friend wondered whether guidelines for the program have been written somewhere that Friends can access. Marissa noted that There will be more to share when the work for this pilot was modified and edited for the next iteration of the program. On average, mentors and seekers met more than twice a month. A Friend who participated in the program as a seeker stated that this has been the most powerful, collective movement of Spirit through the body that she has ever experienced. This program was very particular to the yearly meeting, which made it accessible to her, filling a hole in her Quaker community, where she had not yet been reached. A friend saw the possibility of a collaboration emerging between young adult Friends and Friends of Color (via FCRJ and/or other yearly meeting committees). A Friend serving on the Advisory Committee named one aspect of the work of the committee: checking in with mentor/seeker dyads. Another Friend noted that both mentors and seekers learned from one another. She named the value of bringing together a critical mass of young Friends that would have been difficult within a monthly meeting. A Friend lifted up the power of the program, speaking from their own experience of being accompanied through a "dark night of the soul," discerning their own path and living into that.

2020-07-44. The minutes were read and approved.

## ATTACHMENTS

### General Secretary's Report - Summer 2020

When William Penn became a Quaker, he asked George Fox, "Now that I'm into this movement, how long should I keep wearing my sword?" George Fox replied, "Wear it as long as you can." Which I interpret as: "You are going to come to know things and it just won't make sense to wear the sword anymore."

Last Wednesday's plenary was given by Angela Hopkins, Director of the Friends Center for Racial Justice in Ithaca. At the end of the plenary, someone asked, "How can we support the Friends Center for Racial Justice?" I'd like to take a couple minutes to explore that question. It's

a question that gets asked a lot. I used to ask it. But I've come to know things and it just doesn't make sense to me to ask it anymore.

That question contains an assumption: that we, the askers, are the giver and FCRJ is the receiver of support in order to do its good work. Friends, *we* are the work. The FCRJ's mission is to address racism within the Society of Friends. Racism has infected all of us. It is different for Friends of Color and for white folks. We can all be forgiven for not wanting to deal with it. But it isn't going to go away by itself.

In our opening session, we heard the epistle from the FGC Friends of Color gathering. I want to lift up three quotes from that epistle:

- "We enjoyed the rare opportunity of not being *othered* in Quaker space."
- "Friends of Color need respite from the systemic racism too often found in our American Quaker community that often goes unseen by white friends."
- Friends of Color are fatigued from being asked to teach white folks.

How can FCRJ help within the Society of Friends? Angela Hopkins would welcome a conversation with you. She loves to explore gifts and leadings with people, particularly around becoming a more anti-racist Society of Friends. Her email is [angela@fcrj.org](mailto:angela@fcrj.org). And if you plan to spend some time with Angela, think about what you can commit to to make it worth her while. Note that, like others, due to current events the FCRJ is making the transition to online programming.

I'm going to keep talking about racism. Some of what I'm saying could apply to other forms of oppression, but I'm keeping my attention on racism. The murders of black and brown people by police and recorded on cell phone video have more of us talking about racism. This is good, because we can't address something without talking about it. And as we talk, we build a shared vocabulary. With a shared vocabulary, and each other, we can take this on.

Some thoughts on vocabulary. When you hear the word "racism" do you just think about the interpersonal bigoted statement? Do you think about structures, institutions, and systems? What about the term "a racist"? Personally, I don't use the term "a racist" anymore. It seems to imply that a person is or isn't. I draw a parallel to the positive experience we have of trying to name elders. When we try to talk about somebody being an elder or not, where do we draw the line? Who is and who isn't? It seems to work better if we talk about serving *as* an elder as in, "I'm serving as an elder for the Meeting for Discernment." I understand myself as acting racist when I comply with a racist system and acting anti-racist when I resist it. Sometimes I do both in a very short time period.

Why does this matter to our faith? Our faithfulness depends on a diversity of perspectives. We Quakers believe actions speak louder than words. Our actions arise from a decision-making process that depends on a community of participants grounded in the spirit. And the unity of our decision-making is more reliable when the process includes a diversity of perspectives.

It is more difficult to ground ourselves if we are hungry, tired, or trying to smile our way through the latest othering. White Friends, even if there are few or no People of Color in your monthly meeting, are you ready for newcomers? Are you ready to partner with other churches and community organizations?

One of the ways I understand racism is as a series of patterns. For example:

- **Whose voices** get heard the most? We heard this at the opening business session when a Friend observed that the minutes did not mention the ministry of any of the three Friends of Color who spoke.
- **Timing.** Saying “there is that of God in everyone” is a wonderful statement that helps define who we are as Friends. It is great on its own. But if someone says “Black Lives Matter” and I follow with “There is that of God in everyone,” I’ve discounted their statement.
- **Extra scrutiny.** I was in a meeting selecting people for two leadership positions. The first had been chosen and we were considering who might fill the second. The questions being asked about a person were good ones: Does she have leadership experience? Has anyone seen her in action? Does she have experience with the content? The only problem was that these questions hadn’t been asked about the person already selected. The first was a White man and the second was a Black woman.
- **Feeling free to ignore the rules.** When the community feels free to ignore its own rules, a Person of Color, particularly a new Person of Color, has to wonder if this is a safe space. When rules are applied unevenly, it is People of Color who lose. I have a count of how many people registered for these sessions and a count of how many people accessed the web page with the participant agreements. Fewer than 30% of us took the time to look at the agreement that we agreed to live by.

Luckily, Quakerism has some skills and abilities we all have inherited and honed that help with anti-racism work:

- **Listening.** We regularly practice listening to the still small voice of Spirit within. Can White folks use that to listen to the voices of Friends of Color? The Black Concerns Committee and the Barrington Dunbar Fund for Black Development discerned three action teams that Friends can join, to listen and learn: Advocating for College Behind Bars, Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline, and Racial Justice and Anti-Racism Resources. Contact [office@nyym.org](mailto:office@nyym.org) to join.
- **Words.** We are a people able to wrestle with words until we get them just right. Start by writing down procedures — what we do and why we do it. For our monthly meetings, this could range from what constitutes acceptable budget requests to ministry in meetings for worship. For our yearly meeting, it means things like contracts and personnel policy. Then, share that document with others. Examine it with a diversity and equity lens.
- **Diversity of belief.** We have non-theist Quakers, Christ-Centered Quakers, Buddhist Quakers, etc., and though there are occasional skirmishes, we generally manage to make the tent big enough to welcome each other’s ministry. We can use those same skills to build a multicultural community. Note that the idea “I don’t see color” is not the way to build a multicultural community, as it can make people feel invisible.
- **Connecting leadings from spirit within us with outward action.** We need both the inward and outward in order to make this fundamental change.

Now I’d like to make a transition and talk about staffing. Right now, the yearly meeting has the equivalent of 5.5 full time staff positions: 3 full time staff members, 4 half time, and 7 ARCH Coordinators at 10-12 hours per month. Most of the work in NYYM is done by volunteers. The personnel budget makes up roughly 2/3 of the current NYYM budget. For a couple of years, this body has been talking about increased staff support for children, youth and young adults.

Just to keep our current level of staffing, and making some standard assumptions about rising costs, we need an additional \$5,000 increase each year going forward. A \$5,000 increase each year just to keep doing what we are doing gives me a sinking feeling when I face it. NYYM’s primary source of income has always been covenant donations from local meetings. On the

whole, those have not changed in more than a decade. Some meetings have increased their donations, and others have decreased. We have managed to keep up with staffing costs largely because the Trustees have stopped using unrestricted investment income for grants and have directed unrestricted investment income to the operating budget.

This fall, NYYM needs to make a decision about what level of staff support we want to commit to children, youth and young adults for 2021 and beyond. It would take an increase of tens of thousands of dollars annually to broaden the young adult support from this past year to include children and youth. The most likely source of increased income is from individual donors who want to see the work of NYYM thrive. If you want to talk with the Development Committee, stop by our Interest Group Wednesday evening.

One more thing. We are making a staff transition. After decades working full time for NYYM, Helen Garay Toppins will be working 3 days per week starting September 1. She is very clear about her motivations. This is not about retirement. She hopes this change will help make it possible to support children, youth and young adults.