

Report to Permanent Board

From the Presiding Clerk

November 16, 2019

Praise the Lord!
Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.
From Psalm 106

I find that there are many moments, even with work for the yearly meeting, that worldly concerns and emotions, and patterns of behavior take the sway – anxiety about accomplishing something, worry about saying the right thing, concern about being late. And then, often but not always, I catch myself and remember that I am God’s servant and yours, and that human emotions don’t have any added value. I love Penington’s phrase “Be still awhile.” I have a part to play, but the divine is always here for guidance. And praising the lord is a wonderful habit.

I would say that I am settling in, to this role. While the yoke is not completely familiar, it does not chafe. Most days there is some work – correspondence, writing, meetings or conference calls, and some days there is a lot more than others. Through it all, and through many moments when I am not in active consideration of Yearly meeting issues, I find that I am holding a concern for the body, and what I can do to support Quakers and the Quaker faith in New England.

Change in withholding policy: Coordinating and Advisory has been in communication with most of the Meetings which have done withholding in the past. Our most basic work here is to let meetings know that we recognize that this is a difficult change, and to provide such support as we can, whether it is “just” listening, giving background on our relationship with FUM, or helping them discern how to respond to the anticipated absence of a withholding mechanism. It is clear that some meetings will avail themselves of more than others. Noah, Frederick and I met with the Overseers of Cambridge Meeting. Noah and I went to Wellesley where we participated in a conversation with Friends there. We are also scheduled to go to Providence in January. I am in conversation with Brunswick about a possible visit. I have spoken to the clerk of Wilderness Meeting, Honor and I have communicated with a Friend at Middlebury, and Honor is in contact with a Friend at South Berkshire.

So the work is on-going, and it is too early to know if some new understanding of our relationship with FUM will come forward.

Financial priorities: C&A did some work in August in gathering and naming ideas for financial priorities. This is our second year of a new process where C&A does some initial discernment on priorities for what the Finance Committee should consider, if there is room to work in the budget. We did some further discernment at our October 20th meeting, and expect to finalize our suggestions on November 10 (after the deadline for advance docs, but before the PB meeting). Permanent Board’s role is to make recommendations to the Finance Committee, and may choose to agree with our suggestions, or to amend or modify them.

Purposes and procedures: One of C&A's regular responsibilities is to shepherd a re-consideration of every standing committee's Purpose, Procedures, and Composition. At C&A's October meeting, with some help from Nia Thomas, we began the process of considering how to approach the work, this time around, with a particular concern for the recommendations of the Clerking Structures report – in particular looking deeply at how a committee's work relates to the current and on-going work and priorities of the YM. Dialogue with committees is also an opportunity to encourage them to be thinking about good practices, including nurturing leadership.

A lot on our plate: I will add that, like most other YM committees, we have a lot to consider. I am still wrestling with trying to figure out how to get things done, yet have time for more open reflection on the condition of the YM. I will note that we are finishing our discernment on financial priorities only in the nick of time, that we ideally would have been able to report who will be serving on the new ad-hoc committee on Ministry and Spiritual nurture; and that ideally we would be further in the planning for P&P. And I regularly ask myself – is the busyness necessary, or is this the encroachment of the nature of the larger society?

Bruce