

Meeting of NEYM Committee on Ministry & Counsel
Westport, MA 5/18/19

Present:

Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting

Gerald Sazama - Storrs
Sarah Spencer - Northampton
Susan Vargo - Northampton

Dover Quarterly Meeting

Marian Baker - Weare/Henniker
Mark Barker - Concord
Jnana Hodson - Dover
Jennifer Smith - Concord

Falmouth Quarterly Meeting

Northwest Quarterly Meeting

Frances Brokaw - Hanover
Hugh MacArthur - Hanover
Noah Merrill - Putney
LVM Shelton - Plainfield
Fritz Weiss - Hanover

Salem Quarterly Meeting

Carolyn Hilles-Plant - Beacon Hill

Mary Hopkins - Fresh Pond
Callid Keefe-Perry - Fresh Pond
Kristina Keefe-Perry - Fresh Pond
Richard P Lindo - Framingham
Bruce Neumann - Fresh Pond
Will Taber - Fresh Pond
Kathleen Wooten - Fresh Pond
Honor Woodrow - Framingham

Sandwich Quarterly Meeting

Deana Chase - Westport
Jay O'Hara - West Falmouth Prep/Sandwich
Kathy Olsen - E Sandwich Prep/Sandwich
Rheannan Williams - Mattapoissett
John Wojtowicz - Westport

Southeast Quarterly Meeting

Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting

Diane Dicranian - Midcoast
Janet Hough - Cobscook

Regrets:

Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting

Dover Quarterly Meeting

Brian Drayton

Falmouth Quarterly Meeting

Jessica Eller - Portland
Leslie Manning - Durham

Northwest Quarterly Meeting

Carl Williams- Plainfield

Salem Quarterly Meeting

Cornelia Parkes- Cambridge

Sandwich Quarterly Meeting

John Rider- Mattapoissett

Southeast Quarterly Meeting

Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting

Key: Ex-O = Ex-officio, M=Recorded Minister, P=Pastor, **Bold monthly meeting name** = appointed by a local meeting, V= Visitor

1. **We opened in waiting worship.**

2. **Review of November minutes:** Friends reviewed the minutes of the 11-11-18 meeting at Woolman Hill, in Deerfield, MA. With minor corrections, which will be passed on to the clerk, **the minutes were approved.**

3. **Annual Sessions 2019 update:** Susan Vargo (Northampton, MA), updated us on the latest discernment from the Sessions committee. Sunday Morning Worship updates included the set up, schedule, and participants, including plenary speaker Lisa Graustein (Beacon Hill, MA) and Bible half hour presenter Colin Saxton. Memorial Meeting updates included shifts to scheduling (now on Sunday) and possible location concerns. Jay O'Hara (West Falmouth) reminded us of his upcoming service on the anchor group committee.

4. **Eldering Workshop:** Janet Hough (Cobscook, ME) brought a proposal for an eldering workshop (attached). **Friends approved** sponsoring this workshop at Sessions 2019, under the care of M&C.

5. **State of Society report:** The clerk summarized the past state of society processes. Meetings have forwarded their state of society reports to her, and they have been sent to members of M&C as received. The clerk asked for volunteers who were led to read the state of society reports, and write a State of Society report for the YM.

The clerk asked Friends enter a period of waiting worship, with the intention of listening for what might need to be said in the Yearly Meeting State of Society report.

What rose included:

- use of poetry in many meetings' state of society reports
- That many meetings are wrestling with challenging issues without easy resolution
- FUM relationship discernment
- Many meetings are struggling with the same concerns- vibrant multi-generational meetings. Some feel this "a problem with aging" others feel it as an exciting possibility to rethink how things have been done, and an opportunity to express the core of our faith more explicitly and boldly.
- Many meetings are addressing white privilege among Quakers, and in the world (both painful and joyful process)
- The engagement around indigenous concerns is of note
- There is a sense of increased movement from "talking to action"
- The State of Society Report is not just an opportunity to name what we see, but also what we can say.

The clerk asked for volunteers for this task of writing the State of Society Report. Friends reflected on their sense of responsibility for this work, and the richness of this process.

Friends approved the following volunteers to write this year's State of Society report:
Carolyn Hilles (Beacon Hill)
Richard Lindo (Framingham)
Sarah Spencer (Northampton) will convene the group but is not led to participate in the writing of the report
Honor Woodrow as clerk will oversee the process on a limited basis as needed.

The clerk invited Friends who might have more suggestions to forward them to her or the working group directly, in advance of Annual Sessions.

6. Memorial Meeting Format and Location: The clerk summarized recent changes to scheduling and format of the memorial meeting for this upcoming year, and noted our past practices. The clerk shared feedback that the memorial meeting had not felt spacious enough, perhaps in part due to the amount/length of minutes read, or that the meeting seemed very long despite efforts to shorten its length.

Friends entered into discernment around whether to maintain past practice, or explore changes to the current process for this upcoming year. Concerns included:

- remembering that this is a spiritual process uplifting testimonies of lives well lived,
- that remembering *all* who have passed has been important to many Friends,
- this is not a process by which we are singleing out “special” individuals through the inclusion of their minutes
- loved ones of those who have passed often attend this meeting
- that some names of those who have passed are not received, thus they are inadvertently not included.

Friends approved the following procedures for the Memorial Meeting at Annual Sessions 2019: Some memorial minutes will be excerpted for reading at the memorial meeting. The minutes will be chosen based off of the way that the writing of the minute helps to (as they say in Britain Yearly Meeting) illustrate the “Testimony to the Grace of God as shown through the life of this person”, with careful attention to brevity as well as lifting up examples of lives well lived.

The full booklet of all memorial minutes received by the Yearly Meeting office will be available as in years past.

Friends approved/named a working group to hold the care of this memorial meeting for 2019. Those Friends are:

Sarah Spencer (Northampton)
Marian Baker (Weare/Henniker)
Jnana Hodgson (Dover)

Friends support the recommendation that the Memorial Meeting be held in the Pavilion at Castleton University acknowledging logistics that might affect that use will need to be determined by others (staff, etc).

7. Continuation of anchor groups/addition of “reflection groups”: The clerk introduced the concern for discernment (see attached advance document). Discussion followed, including definitions and considerations of “reflection groups”, which was introduced in the report from the Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness Working Group (see attached).

Discussion Friends shared the following:

- The value of anchor groups to the body at Sessions for some,
- consistency among groups as grounding,
- time constraints,
- concerns about how we are welcoming to newcomers to Annual Sessions,
- availability of space, and
- the recognition of the weight that choosing to support a particular path has, when it comes from those who serve as part of the organization of the New England Yearly Meeting. In this case, choosing to explicitly set aside time for Friends to process, and engage with the ongoing work of transformation that must occur within us if we are to live into right relationship, particularly as it relates to racism and white supremacy says something important about our priorities, and how we think God is leading us.

Noah Merrill (YM Secretary) reminded Friends that much of the registration materials, schedule, and other logistics were already in process and their messaging might not be easily changed without significant effort for this year.

Friends approved the following actions in regards to Anchor groups:

1. Anchor group assignments/offerings would continue as in years past.
2. M&C (clerk) will ask the Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness Working Group to work with anchor group leaders/planning team to intentionally provide questions/framing and tools around naming patterns of oppression to leaders for use in their group shepherding.
3. M&C (clerk) will affirm/encourage the additional formation of a consistent “drop in” location for Friends to talk about their experiences in noticing these patterns of Oppression and faithfulness during Sessions, details to be determined by the Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness Working Group (as suggested in their report). The institution needs to say “this is our work”.

8. Continuation of “sacred space” at Annual Sessions: The clerk summarized the past practice of having a designated space during the week as “sacred space”. She informed us that

Paul Spence (Northampton) has felt led to shepherd that space again during the week of Annual Sessions 2019, as he did in 2018. Discussion followed.

Friends approved continuing the process of offering a “sacred space” at Annual Sessions in 2019, as in 2018. This will be under the care of M&C, directly under the care of Paul Spence. Kathy Olsen (East Sandwich Prep) also offered to help Paul with this task. M&C hopes it will remain in the coffee cottage at Castleton University, as that seemed ideal space in the previous year.

9. Discernment: Early Morning worship at Annual Sessions: The clerk asked if Friends were clear to continue providing early morning worship opportunities at Annual Sessions as in years past, and if so, in what format. Discussion followed.

Friends approved offering early morning worship opportunities as follows:

1. Programmed worship will be offered each morning, coordinated by Marian Baker (Weare/Henniker)
2. M&C will ask Earthcare committee if they will shepherd early morning outdoor unprogrammed worship
3. M&C will provide an unprogrammed early morning worship opportunity, in the coffee cottage, as part of the “sacred space” of the week (as in 2018).

10. Discernment: Programming during Annual Sessions 2019 on Sunday before Memorial Meeting: The clerk brought to the body a request from the Sessions Committee clerk, to consider what might happen on Sunday at Annual Sessions from 1:30-2:30. Due to other schedule changes, what might happen in this time has not yet been determined, and is listed as “TBD” on the draft sessions schedule.

Friends approved the following action: The M&C clerk will ask the Sessions Committee to determine whether or not to hold anchor groups (or another activity) on Sunday afternoon before the memorial meeting, recognizing that there are many factors involved in this decision, and trusting that the Sessions committee has the information it needs to make that decision.

11. Discernment: Healing Space at Annual Sessions: The clerk presented a proposal she had received from Jennifer Swann (NYYM) to offer a “healing center” at Annual Sessions (attached). Discussion followed, including concerns around logistics, who might shepherd, the need for those with gifts of healing to be involved, and the immediacy of the request for 2019.

Friends approved the following action: Friends felt led to continue this conversation with Jennifer about this proposal. Considering the specific next steps for Friends in NEYM needed in offering this “healing center” was approved - with continued conversations and discernment. As logistics and other concerns are worked out, it will become more evident if this is a possibility for Annual Sessions of 2019, or in future years. The clerk of M&C will reach out to Jennifer for further conversation, and perhaps

those in NEYM who specifically have gifts of healing, for further consultation. NEYM staff (events coordinator and others) will be consulted in regards to logistics and liability concerns.

12. Naming and Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness (report from the working group attached): The clerk called our attention to the work of the Working Group on Naming and Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness. The group suggests as its elders for sessions: Eppchez Yes,
Melissa Foster, and
Polly Attwood.

We affirmed the choice of elders, and encourage the group to proceed with workshop offerings. Friends spoke with appreciation of the depth and speed of the group's work, and we thank them for encouraging us to grow into a culture of growth, learning and change, particularly we are grateful for the orientation that calls us closer to God by encouraging connection, rather than blaming and separation. Further comments, questions, and offers of collaboration are warmly welcomed by the working group.

13. Minute from Racial Social and Economic Justice re: the Friends United Meeting Personnel Policy and New England Yearly Meeting's Policy on Withholding: The clerk read a minute from the Racial Social and Economic Justice Committee regarding the sexual ethics portion of the Friends United Meeting personnel policy. She explained that her choice to read this minute before bringing the question about a potential proposal regarding New England Yearly Meeting's policy on withholding (which will be on the agenda at Annual Sessions in August of 2019) was because the two seem to be inextricably linked. She asked whether Friends felt clear to unite with this minute and to forward it on to Sessions in 2019.

Friends were not clear to unite with the minute as written, and affirmed that it was the sense of RSEJ, and should be heard as such.

Discussion about the RSEJ minute:

- One Friend shared that the words in the minute "main issue", "moral injury" and "however" imply a particular perspective. There are complexities, including the privilege of Friends with the ability to withhold money/spend money as they choose.
- One Friend suggested that we can affirm the portion of the minute which states, "We value our relationship with with FUM, especially the good work it has done in many countries. However, we also value the equality and inherent worth of all individuals including members of the LGBT community. LGBT people are vital to the life of our Yearly Meeting. We hold the hope that the personnel policy will evolve to include the worth of all those who seek to do God's work in the world."

- In response to the suggestion that the board is no longer in unity, one Friend noted that the words of the personnel policy haven't changed. This minute tries to address the impact of the policy itself.
- One Friend shared their sense that we are pained by not having been able to reach unity. We would love to engage more with those who feel like the personnel policy should remain.
- We were cautioned against setting up a dynamic where we either unite with this minute or keep others from hearing the minute. Is there another way to proceed? We want the voice of RSEJ to be heard.
- One Friends suggested that we could ask the clerk to write a letter to the FUM general board expressing our concern
- Friends seemed to in unity that it is time to be explicit with FUM that we believe the policy is not rightly ordered.

The clerk asked Callid Keefe-Perry (Fresh Pond, MA) to share his report (attached) about the work that has been done in response to the charge to collect information about where meetings currently stand with regards to the NEYM withholding policy.

Discussion about the withholding policy and the potential for a recommendation:

- One Friend expressed that individuals keeping back money was self-serving.
- One Friend asked, “How do we bring about change?” and “How do we share the understanding that we have discovered with others?”
- Another Friend suggested that this minute allows us to say we are making a witness when there is no witness.
- We were reminded that our strongest emotions are not always our best guides, and they are not to be ignored either.
- One Friend suggested that we as a Yearly Meeting could recommend a change to the FUM policy that it say “hiring members in good standing within their own yearly meeting”.
- One Friend suggested that at Sessions this year we might change the language of the withholding policy to clarify why we have it.
- One Friend shared that integrity and perfection are not the same thing.
- One Friend brought up the question of withholding as “right” or withholding as “witness”
- “Even a mistaken conscience is binding on the beholder”
- One Friend expressed that the withholding policy is sending money, to be doing the work that we need to be doing ourselves.
- Another Friend suggested that as long as we have this division, we haven't completed our job of *corporate* discernment.
- One Friend suggested that we might ask the clerk to share with FUM what this policy is doing to us as individuals.

- One Friend suggested that we close the fund for individuals to “make up the difference” and that the Yearly Meeting take on that responsibility. In response to this suggestion we were reminded that if the Yearly Meeting were to do this, we would need to be clear where that money would come from- operating reserves, individual contributions, more money from local meetings etc.
- It was suggested that we put energy toward helping Friends to build up a shared sense of who we are as a body, rather than trying to get Friends to engage in a particular concern.
- Some expressed that the withholding policy has served as a pressure release valve **and** the pressure is mounting. And the need for love is ever strong.

As a body...

- We hear the truth in the minute from RSEJ, and affirm RSEJ in bringing it forward.
- We know we are not finished and there is urgency.
- We heard again and again the importance of dialogue as a way of changing hearts and minds.
- We don't see a clear way forward, but don't see how the current policy helps us...

Friends approved the following:

Ministry and Counsel heard a minute from the Racial Social and Economic Justice (RSEJ) committee (attached) on the sexual ethics portion of the FUM personnel policy, and we found it to speak powerfully. Callid Keefe-Perry (Fresh Pond, MA) reported on the work that has been done in response to the charge given at our November meeting to share information about New England Yearly Meeting's policy on withholding financial contributions from FUM. This is intimately connected to the portion of the personnel policy which the minute from RSEJ works to address. We take note that many monthly meetings are only now beginning to grapple with this painful topic.

- *We ask our Yearly Meeting clerk to write to the FUM board expressing the pain and sorrow we feel in response to this policy, and asking them to consider to changing the sexual ethics portion of the personnel policy.*
- *We ask our FUM committee to develop a proposed replacement, if possible in consultation with representatives from other yearly meetings. Our first suggestion might be that being a member in good standing of one's own yearly meeting be sufficient.*
- *We are not able to affirm as a body that the yearly meeting's FUM withholding policy has integrity; at best it is a compromise that has allowed us some room for conversation. Given how recently some of us have engaged with this conversation, we also feel unable to set a deadline on the withholding policy.*

- *We are aware that as written if the Yearly Meeting cannot affirm the policy it will cease after Sessions of this year.*

As one Friend observed, “The quest for perfection is deadly. And if we identify integrity with perfection, then the quest for integrity can become deadly.” Let us continue to hear one another in love.

The meeting closed with a period of worship