

Report from the Presiding Clerk to Permanent Board

February 15, 2020

I will not be with you for this Permanent Board Meeting, as I will be in Montreal waiting for my flight from my first trip to Cuba. I am travelling with Jackie Stillwell, Em McManamy, and Marion Athearn, and we will be attending Cuba yearly Meeting Sessions. I am looking forward to experiencing the vibrant, more overtly Christian form of Quakerism which I have been hearing about for years. I have been asked to give a message to the Yearly Meeting – I will go prepared with some thoughts I have in advance, but also go prepared to find that I have been given something else to share. And I expect to be changed by the experience.

Friends United Meeting: Certainly the concern most on my mind this year is NEYM's continuing discernment about our relationship with FUM. As I reported to the last PB meeting, all meetings which had minuted their intention to withhold were contacted by a member of C&A. A few did not reply to our overtures. Others are deeply engaged in discernment and welcomed our presence as a source of information and evidence of our care. Various combinations of Noah, myself, and Frederick Martin have participated in discussions at Wellesley, Cambridge, Northwest Quarter, Providence, and Worcester. I will report that all the meetings we have visited hold a range of views within their membership, and that I have heard very clearly that a number of friends experience real pain that our Yearly Meeting is still in relationship with an organization that discriminates. In my last letter to Monthly Meetings ([Read letter HERE](#)), and in my comments to groups I have spoken to I have tried to share why this is such a complicated issue, and encouraged Friends to think more broadly (how do we show our support for LGBTQ Friends who are not recognized by their YM?) But I have heard clearly that, for some, the personal experience of feeling rejected supersedes all other concerns. I have not yet heard any recommendations that are likely to come to Sessions.

Sessions 2020: I believe I reported verbally at the last meeting that Cherice Bock from Sierra Cascades YM will be our Bible Half-hour speaker. We expect to be engaging friends in offsetting the carbon expenditure of her cross-country flights. Sessions committee is still in discernment about a plenary, but expect to make a decision at a meeting next week. The theme we have chosen is the refrain to a song written on a whaling vessel in 1847. We felt that it expressed both the need to engage in hard work, and the presence of hope:

Row on, row on, another day
May shine with brighter light
Ply, ply the oars & pull away
There's dawn beyond the night.

Purpose, Procedure, and Composition: We have kicked off this process for some committees, while others we are holding back on. We are attempting this year, more than before, to work with committees to see how their work relates to the purpose and goals of the Yearly Meeting, and to draft their P&P to reflect those goals. For several committees we (C&A) see the need for some further discernment before beginning the P&P process. With a lot on our plate, these conversations have not happened yet.

- Personnel – as you will see elsewhere in the advance docs, in addition to needing a complete re-write of the Personnel manual, there is some thought that it time to reconsider the basic functions of this committee. A small group will be appointed to give this more thought.
- Development – over recent years the development committee has worked hard and quite successfully to re-shape New England Friends' commitment to individual support for the YM. We have a very successful give-monthly program that is on-going. Noah's job description includes a significant commitment to development work. In this light, it seems time to re-evaluate what we need from a development committee and how it might be structured.
- Sessions – C&A is planning a meeting with interested parties to reflect on whether it is time for a more thorough consideration of this work
- Board of Managers – the clerk of this committee will be attending an upcoming PB meeting, in part to explore what a more active relationship between PB and BOM might look like.
- Nominating: Longing for better communication between the various Nominating bodies (YM Nominating, Clerk's Nominating, and Internal Nominating) several members of C&A hosted a joint meeting of the clerks, which was followed up by a zoom call. Intentions were set to share both current information and best practices.
- Faith in Action: in September I reported the following, and regret to say we have made no progress to date. *This committee was conceived of, and its Purpose and Procedure drafted, by C&A in response to a request from Sessions 2017 upon the laying down of the Peace and Social Concerns Committee. The P&P was approved by sessions in 2018, and Permanent Board appointed 3 people to the committee, two in September, and one in November. The committee never seemed to find a common understanding of their charge, one person drew back early in their work, and another resigned partway through the year. During discussion about this committee at our recent retreat we recognized that C&A had not adequately supported this committee in understanding its goals and the nature of expected work. For the time being, we consider that this committee is on hold, pending more discernment at C&A.*

Exit Interviews: One of many recommendations of the clerking structures ad-hoc committee was to do exit interviews for those in leadership positions upon their completion of service. With the assistance of Nia Thomas, C&A produced a draft procedure for this process, and have identified individuals to do the interviews. Written reports will be shared with the relevant nominating body, as well as the Presiding Clerk, the Clerk of Permanent Board, and the Yearly Meeting Secretary. Initial interviews will be done with Fritz Weiss, Sarah Gant, Leslie Manning (for her role as Sessions clerk) and Rosemary Zimmerman. I expect to report more on this process after this first round has happened, and we have a better sense of how the process goes and what improvements might be made.

Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness: While this work is not under the care of PB, I will report that I joined this committee for a one-day retreat, and expect to stay in dialogue about the shape of that work in Business sessions.