

31 October 2020

**Report to Permanent Board of New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM) From the  
Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness Working Group**

**Imagining Unbounded Diversity in Wholeness**

*May I meet you where you are  
May I never lose my center  
May I meet you where you are  
May we never lose our center  
Reaching back for truth  
Bringing forth the healing  
Healing for the future  
Born of living from the heart right now!*

—From a song by Niyonu Spann, founder of Tribe One

**Purpose of this Report**

This report fulfills the Noticing Patterns Working Group (NPWG or simply NP) commitment to report on its work in the last year, including work at and coming out of Sessions. It will be followed by a second report to the wider NEYM community.

We affirm the continued importance of this Noticing Patterns work, and this working group, to the spiritual life and organizational growth of NEYM. We value being a working group that can be flexible to the needs of NEYM as we carry out this work.

In this report, we

- articulate our evolving understanding of NEYM's hope that it become an institution where Revolutionary Love is practiced and where systemic versions of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other elitisms can find no home,
- provide some background on the process that brought NPWG into being, ● document some of NP's work of the last year, some fruits of that work, and some reflections upon that work and its fruits,
- articulate our current understanding of the NPWG's role in the transformative process NEYM has undertaken,
- outline some of the specific endeavors we see before us for the coming year.

Further, NPWG requests that the care, support and accountability for the Noticing Patterns work and the Working Group rest with the NEYM Permanent Board, the body that represents the Yearly Meeting (YM) and carries forward its work between annual sessions.

Noticing Patterns Work Group expresses its deep gratitude for NEYM M&C's faithful commitment, consistent support, and skillful care of our working group and our work during these first two years. However, given the centrality of our work and given that NEYM M&C is in a process of reflection and change, NPWG was guided by the Presiding Clerk, Clerk of Permanent Board and YM Secretary to bring our 2020 report to the Permanent Board.

## NEYM's Hope: A Paradigm Shift

Most Quakers fervently desire to remove the social injustices found in the cultural systems of domination (often abbreviated as *Empire*) that shackle all of us. Many Quakers have begun to understand intellectually that the most severe of these pursuits of power over others are systemic, and that anyone with privilege used unthinkingly is complicit in them. The systemic nature of the injustices means that attempts merely not to participate, to say to oneself, for example, "Don't be racist!" "Don't be sexist!" "Don't be homophobic!" (etc.) and expect thought and action to comply, does not work. In fact, to berate the biased thought that leads to an act of oppression may merely increase the "frequency and power of the original" bias.<sup>1</sup>

To change the world, we allow ourselves to change. Allowing a state of wonder and humility as application of the Quaker testimony of Simplicity, we begin to practice thoughts, feelings, and actions that are anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-elitist, and totally anti-hierarchical of persons as persons. Otherwise, at best, the pendulum of injustice swings between wrongs, as those oppressed in one way pay damages to those oppressed in another.

From its beginnings, NPWG has understood this work to be the work of the whole of NEYM. It entails a paradigm shift. Before the work began, we were immersed in a paradigm born of Empire. It states first, that whiteness and its intersection with the other systems of oppression, such as male domination, heterosexism, classism, cis-genderedness and their associated values, are now at the center of NEYM. Second, the paradigm implies that bringing folks on the margins into this center is a process of helping them discard their "darker," "uncivilized," ways—a process of assimilation. This paradigm has shaped our understanding of our Quaker testimonies, not only before the mid-twentieth-century Civil Rights Movement<sup>2</sup>, not only during the era of affirmative action<sup>3</sup>, but today, as well.

The new paradigm is one of continuing transformation: to move away from NEYM's organizational structures and unstated, but powerful, Empire-infused organizational values; to move away from micro-aggression-rich processes in business; to move away from our Empire-motivated actions during fellowship; and to move away from all these things within our constituent programs and meetings. Finally, and most basically, we Friends can take the step of surrendering our individual will to this lifelong process of transformation. Our vision is that the people of NEYM allow themselves to become instruments of Revolutionary Love, love centered in wonder and humility and faithfulness. To adopt this new paradigm with integrity, requires each of us to begin to prune away those beliefs and practices centered in the culture of domination that most people of NEYM have assimilated during childhood.

### Background: Beginnings and 2019-2020 work of NPWG

Our working group was formed under a charge from Sessions to Ministry and Counsel to "develop a practice to appoint people who will observe, name, and reflect back to us long-standing, unseen patterns and practices that result in our complicity in oppression" (NEYM

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<sup>1</sup> Valarie Kaur, in *See No Stranger* (Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition) makes this point on p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Paula Palmer, "Quaker Indian Boarding Schools," *Friends Journal*, 1 October 2016.

<sup>3</sup> John Punshon, author of *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers* (1984), during the 1980's, held up the rallying cry "bringing the margins to the center." Many, including one co-author of this report, fervently espoused this statement, even though covertly, because of systemic racism, it implies the *assimilation* of exceptional, teachable people of color. The paradigm was (and often is, still) invisible to most Quakers

2018-53).

An overview of how this working group formed and the first phases of the work can be found in our report to Sessions 2019 (page 10 of the Advanced Documents for 2019. In addition, our report of a year ago, September 2019 report to NEYM Ministry and Counsel, reviews the specific work that we have felt led to do as we have faithfully sought to live into the ministry given us by NEYM M&C. Also see [Lisa Graustein's article in Friends Journal](#) (4/27/2020) that describes the first year of NEYM's experiment with noticing patterns.

In the attached appendix, you will find a list of NPWG's meetings, retreats, workshops since Sessions 2019 and a list that documents how NPWG carried out its work during Sessions 2020.

### **Observations from Sessions**

The following patterns reflect some of the observations we find especially salient. They emerged through the Noticing Patterns email box at Sessions, what we heard and tracked during Business sessions and from our attendance in the other YM Sessions spaces mentioned earlier.

#### Growth and Deepening through Patterns of Faithfulness

- Much joy, freedom, gratitude, love, compassion, honesty and encouragement was expressed. This felt like what "accountability" is supposed to look like in our tradition.
- Attenders of Annual Sessions are more grounded in, and comfortable using, language of noticing patterns of oppression and faithfulness.
- Less resistance and more openness to feedback, practice with noticing, and taking risks in Business, Home Groups, and other YM spaces.
- More demonstrated curiosity and less judgment in what people shared in noticings email box. People engaged each other in conversations about noticing patterns
- Growing recognition that words and the ways that words land, regardless of intention, matter.
- Less debate and reactivity to words such as white supremacy/ white supremacy culture.
- Less claiming that patterns of faithfulness "cancel out" patterns of oppression.
- The shift in YM Sessions Business to centering voices of color, their experiences and insights, highlighted YM Sessions Business commitment to listen and respond to calls for justice among BIPOC.
- Growing collaboration across the social witness committees, evidenced by the shared minute brought forward by Earthcare Ministries and Racial, Social and Economic Justice. Their shared call challenged NEYM to see climate disaster at the intersection of racial and economic oppression, and called for faithful action to be continually examined and informed by that understanding.
- More trusting of committees in their work and discernment.
- Moving past wordsmithing to hearing the deeper call in the Letter of Apology to Indigenous People and its call it action.

#### The Challenge of Persisting Patterns of Oppression

- Persisting perfectionism with a focus on "getting it right" reflects deep patterns of white supremacy culture, and is "spirit-killing". It focuses on the rules/right behavior as a "destination" to arrive at rather than a joint journey of learning with all its imperfection.
- This perfectionism also perpetuated a pattern that allows the blocking of actions/motions.

- Tyranny of urgency persists.
- The language and ways we act from an unexamined “we”; emphasized the importance to examine who it includes/excludes.
- Around midweek, more noticing (from Friends as a whole) on the patterns of oppression and faithfulness that others were engaged in, but much less looking at our own internalized patterns.
- Pattern of white men in the YM taking up a lot of space, holding up unity, and/or repeating (and unintentionally taking credit for) what has already been ministered.
- Impugning aggressive intent when plain speaking and lifting up patterns.
- Relatedly, an overemphasis on “being gentle” centers white people’s comfort/fragility. Having to take so much care to be “gentle” makes the conversation about the tone, not the pattern.
- Hiding behind the walls of our own comfort. What might we learn from our discomfort if we were to face it more honestly.
- More learning needed around stepping up or back (e.g. in contributing insights) in consideration of what the whole group needs, rather than in consideration of our own importance or lack of it.
- The four microaggressions scenarios practiced in Home Group trainings (othering young people, parents, Asian Americans and misgendering someone) surfaced in Home Groups (again this year). AND, many Home Group facilitators reported using what they learned in trainings for positive interventions and some preventing of microaggressions.
- ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERN: YM continues not to proactively create spaces before and during Annual Sessions for people of color and their families to ground their participation in Sessions. Such a space respects the need of people of color to gather together for support and nourishment as they engage with Annual Sessions, a white dominant and normed space, and honors the need for people of color to meet alone.

### **NPWG’s Role in the Transformative Process NEYM has Undertaken**

1 Corinthians 13: 3: *“If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”*

NPWG’s role is not to fix our behavior, but to provide a mirror that opens us to transformation.

Transformation, becoming a person whose thoughts, attractions, and actions are centered in Revolutionary Love, is not accomplished by merely changing our outsides, our appearances. Yet we must notice appearances—such as the differential ways we speak and respond to people of color versus white people or straight versus gay/trans people, and our use of language that gives voice to our unexamined assumptions. Changing these appearances is one concrete step toward showing our willingness to be open and transformed.

We are together as a yearly meeting to support each other in the surrender of will required for each of us to be true to the light and love within us. In this process we can uncover together right action—and ways of being—around the various commitments our yearly meeting has made. The words above, from 1 Corinthians, lift up a focus on Transformation and inform the purpose of the NPWG. We note that work on reparations and other actions of integrity arise out of this transformation and ongoing listening. There is a central pattern of faithfulness here. “Let Love be the First Motion.”

We see ourselves and NEYM on a journey of faithfulness and transformation that will not end at a single destination. As one among us has said so clearly, “*The journey in some ways is simple, ‘thy will be done,’ and also more nuanced and context-specific. No list/formula/recipe works in every situation.*” AND, we are clear that if we do our work well, this working group will not be necessary in three to five years, or as one among us says, “*We are working to notice ourselves out of existence.*”

We wish to keep the Working Group small enough to stay flexible and responsive to what unfolds, and to be able to meet regularly and coordinate these efforts. We shall draw on support from the wider circle of friends interested in actively learning and promoting the work, and also seek support from NEYM staff where useful and appropriate.

NPWG’s original understanding of its reason for existing remains alive and at the heart of the spiritual wholeness and growth of NEYM—to observe, name, and reflect back to NEYM members and constituents long-standing, unseen patterns and practices that result in our complicity in oppression.

Going forward, NPWG intends to bring this work to a wider audience and to accompany people as they join our paradigm shift. Our hope is that a loving practice of noticing patterns of oppression and faithfulness will become an active and persistent feature of the life of most of NEYM’s meetings, committees, and programs. To make that vision manifest, we seek to develop a wider circle of people who can engage and facilitate groups in all aspects of NEYM, inviting in those who are ready to join us now. We also want to create ways for many to grow their capacity to support this outreach work. Ongoing revelation and the transformation that results from it has been at the heart of Quakerism from its earliest beginnings.

*When a sufficient state of such engagement is reached, NPWG will have “noticed itself out of existence.”*

**REQUEST:**

**In light of all of the above, NPWG requests that Permanent Board be the body of NEYM that holds NPWG in care and support and to accountability in its calling.**

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*... there are no strangers. There are only versions of ourselves, many of which we have not embraced, most of which we wish to protect ourselves from....*

Morrison, Toni. *The Origin of Others* (The Charles Eliot Norton lectures, 2016) (p. 38). Harvard University Press. Kindle Edition.

I will meet you at your center. You will meet me at my center. The mystery: We each find the same new center. That center is dynamic and living. It is where the true unity of unbounded diversity without hierarchy is.

It is the pattern, the true self: that of the divine within each and everything.  
Tat Tvam Asi

*Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.*

Statement of 1656, from *The Works of George Fox* (1831)

Thank you, from the Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness Working Group, which currently includes Polly Attwood (clerk), LJ Boswell, Melody Brazo, Melissa Foster, Lisa Graustein, Becky Jones, Aiham Korbage, Anna Lindo, Richard Lindo, Heidi Nortonsmith, L.V.M. Shelton, Pamela Terrien, and Honor Woodrow.

**Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness Working Group**  
**Appendix to Report to Permanent Board – October 31, 2020**

**Since September 2019, the NPWG work has included:**

Internal Meetings and Collaboration with NEYM Leadership

- **Meeting monthly on Zoom**, we reviewed lessons learned during Annual Sessions 2019, identified members to be liaisons to Racial, Social and Economic Justice (RSEJ), Challenging White Supremacy (CWS), NEYM M&C and NEYM Youth Programs, various members attended meetings with Ministry and Counsel (11/9/19), with Committee Clerks from RSEJ and CWS (1/11/2020), and Coordinating and Advisory (January 2020).
- **January 14, 2020: NP met for a day-long retreat** to welcome two new members to the group, identify specific next steps and goals for Spring 2020 and look toward Annual Sessions 2020. The new Presiding Clerk was present and together we explored new ways to collaborate and position the NPs work and NPWG as integral to Business at Annual Sessions.

Workshops with and by Noticing Patterns

- **Northampton Friends Meeting**: an introductory conversation after YM sessions in September, 2019, to review and expand on the Noticing Patterns work at sessions, attended by 16 Friends. A second workshop in October, 2019 expanded on the noticing theme and gave us an opportunity to role-play and practice responding to noticed patterns.
- **Salem Quarterly Meeting** (at Friends Meeting Cambridge 1/26/20): A basic workshop introducing and practicing noticing patterns of oppression and faithfulness.
- **Hartford Friends Meeting** (2/8/2020): In coordination with NEYM M&C's retreat, NPWG developed two workshop spaces for the afternoon – one, the basic workshop introducing and practicing noticing patterns; second, a “training for trainers,” where people strengthened their skill with facilitating Noticing Patterns work in their Monthly Meetings.
- **JHYM Staff Workshops** (1/16/20 and 3/12/20): Lisa Graustein developed two workshops for JHYM staff and members of NPWG co-facilitated with Lisa.
- *Amid growing concern around the coronavirus, by early March it was clear that additional workshops we had hoped to offer at and with Monthly Meetings would not be possible.*

Preparation for Sessions and Sessions, Itself

- **Met on zoom monthly** in March and April and almost every other week beginning in late May and up until Annual Sessions 2020.
- **A late June meeting** with the Presiding Clerk present, we were deeply led to explore a profound shift for Sessions Business. That shift manifested with
  - bringing forward more and different voices to speak to the body about Quaker leadings in response to the twin pandemics of coronavirus and racism facing U.S. society and a focus on two items for discernment: 1) “The Letter of Apology to Native Americans” from the NEYM Reparations Working Group and an accompanying Call to Action and 2) “A Call to Urgent, Loving Action for Earth and Her Inhabitants” from RSEJ and Earthcare Ministries.
- **Supported three 90-minute trainings of every Home Group facilitator** led by Lisa Graustein with members of the NPWG co-facilitating.
- At the request of the Presiding Clerk, **two members of the NPWG sat with the Clerks**

**Table** in their planning meetings prior to Sessions and each day during Sessions that they met.

- Arising from our experience last year at Sessions and evaluations received, the **NPWG brought its observations on both patterns of faithfulness and oppression to each Business Session**. Different members of the working group shared their observations thereby modeling the collective and evolving nature of the work that is necessarily rooted in the body of the Yearly Meeting. See [Noticings for Business 8/4](#) and [Noticings for Business 8/7](#).
- **Managed an electronic Noticing Box via an email address** – [noticingpatterns@neym.org](mailto:noticingpatterns@neym.org) – through which we collected noticings, questions, and feedback from many Friends throughout the week.
- **Collaborated with the two Young Adult Friend coordinators** to facilitate a 90-minute debrief/discussion of Dr. Amanda Kemp's Plenary.
- **Collaborated with JHYM** to facilitate a 60-minute workshop on noticing patterns work and microaggressions which led to a follow up 60-minute workshop on October 18, 2020.
- **Met daily for one hour during Sessions** during which we shared our reflections and observations about Business Meeting, Home Groups, Bible Half Hour, the Sunday Plenary, and the Tuesday night discussion. There we also coordinated our responses to concerns and questions that came through the noticing patterns email and other avenues. These meetings gave rise to our Noticing Patterns reflections offered during each Business Session.