

## Advance Documents for Youth, Families, and First Time Attenders, 2021

This is a shortened version of the [complete Advance Documents for 2021](#), intended to give a bit of a foothold into the process and agenda for this session's Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. There are links in each section for further background and consideration. In addition to this abbreviated version, some Friends may find it helpful to connect with a [whisper buddy](#) for clarification and reflection assistance throughout the week. Our hope with both of these experiments is that more Friends will feel welcomed to fully participate in the discernment in worship ahead of us this year as well as during the week of Sessions.

## Queries To Be Held Before, During, And Beyond the Virtual 2021 NEYM Sessions

From the Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness Working Group (June 2021)

We live in a culture where many people have power and privilege they have not earned. Those who are not part of the dominant culture are marginalized and stigmatized, because of their ethnicity, gender, sexual preference or other identities.

As Quakers, many of us want to live in a different way, a way that frees us from the oppression of privilege and power and liberates us to love with our whole Spirit.

Here are some queries to help guide us to seek change in ourselves that can lead to changing the culture we live in.

- *Am I ready to admit my own participation in the culture of domination?*
- *Can I, in this moment, cut the link between my own roots in the culture of domination and my next thought or action?*
- *Can I humbly listen for the "still, small voice" of love-agape within me as a first step in any discernment?*
- *Can I also call others into the blessed kin-dom during discernment?*
- *How deeply am I willing to change?*
- *How can Friends support each other in transformation?*

## Clerk's Reflection on Business Meeting

The formal name is "Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business," and the key is in the first part: Business meeting is at heart a meeting for worship. What do we do in worship? We come, expecting the Divine, we come to sink into the Source to be refreshed, we come listening for the still, small voice and the guidance it provides. We come, in a phrase of Bill Taber's to "put on the Mind of Christ."

If we come to business meeting prepared, both in the worship-preparation of prayer and contemplation and in being well-informed about the topics for discernment *and* sink down to the seed, listening carefully for what is being asked of us, we have a better chance of hearing. Can we listen deeply to the words of the Friend who, for whatever reason, tends to rub us the wrong way? If we truly accept that any of us may be given a message for all, then we need to listen to each voice with a fresh mind, open to the truth as it emerges, if only haltingly or obscurely.

It is in this process of deep listening that we open ourselves to the movement of the spirit. If we are holding rigidly to our position we are not flexible enough to be moved by the gentle voice. If we close our ears when that friend rises to speak, we deny the fundamental premise that any one of us may be given the message we are supposed to hear.

Bruce Neumann (read his full piece [here](#))

## How the Clerk and the Clerk's Table are approaching the agenda

As I considered several major items of business, I recognized that they have common ground in a legacy of white, straight people's belief that they had (and have) the right to impose their will on people that do not look like them. Each of these agenda items in some way attempts to make up for this legacy.

But the recognition of their combined legacies gives us an opening to pivot from reflection to aspiration—a consideration of who we want to become rather than how we atone for our past. One of the clerk's table discernment group posed the question this way: Who do we want to be, as a people in the world? Who is God calling us to be? While we do not want to dismiss or whitewash our history, can we allow ourselves to be transformed, hearts and minds, so that we are more effective in our work to transform the world?

We have chosen a rather unusual approach, in that, after tending to a few other pieces of business, we will hear presentations about the remaining business, which feels deeply connected. We will take time to worship, but will not discern each item as it is presented. When the presentations are done, we will move into several business sessions of open discernment. I imagine that specific items will come up, and we will spend time in discernment of them as they do, but our hope is that Friends can continue to hold and wrestle with the underlying question of "Who is God calling us to be?" Perhaps in words, perhaps in suggestions, perhaps "simply" in how we understand the significance of change from empire toward the kingdom of heaven on earth.

You can read Bruce's full reflection [in the Advance Documents](#).

## What is the Unity Agenda?

Items on the Unity Agenda are either simply being accepted or are routine matters that don't require discussion (unless corrections need to be made) or discernment. They include:

- Accepting staff reports
- Accepting board, committee, and representative reports
- Approving revised committee purposes, procedures & composition documents
- Approving nominations
- Approving bank resolutions
- Approving clerks' authorization to make edits and corrections
- Accepting Memorial Minutes

## Climate Action

NEYM's Earthcare Ministry Committee asks that we reflect on our care of the Earth and how our actions and lives contribute to climate change. Some questions that they ask us to think about:

- How can we address the harm that the poor, people of color, Indigenous communities, and others have already suffered because of climate change?
- How can we help convince governments at all levels (local, state, federal, international) to take action and make changes ending greenhouse gas emissions, finding solutions in nature, and fixing what has already been damaged?
- How can we support Quakers whose calling is to disrupt fossil fuel industries?
- How can we promote peace as a way to stop the greenhouse gas emissions from our military forces?
- Are there ways that we are supporting these industries through our monetary investments?
- How can we reduce our own and our meetings' ecological footprints?

## **Draft Letter of Apology to Native Americans**

At Sessions in 2020, we stepped into our need to work in a more focused and intentional way towards right relationship with Indigenous People. Friends approved forwarding a draft [Letter of Apology to Native Americans](#) as well as [resources for further engagement](#) to local meetings, hoping that we might live into full and heartfelt approval of this work at Sessions this year. The Middle School-High School Racial Justice Group summarized this work as “making the we in the letter <of apology> really be WE.” Over the past year, a number of local Friends meetings have begun engaging with the Apology and their own relationship to Indigenous People in their area. You may find inspiration and fruitful connection by reading some of the minutes, statements, and public actions by local meetings [here](#).

## **Faith & Practice Chapter on Personal Spiritual Practices**

New England Yearly Meeting and the Faith & Practice Revision Committee are currently in the process of rewriting our book of Faith & Practice, a task that most yearly meetings undertake every generation. It is our hope to write a book that reflects the spiritual life and calling of the Yearly Meeting today, while supporting the vitality and continuing growth of our community.

This year the Revision Committee is bringing the chapter Personal Spiritual Practices to Yearly Meeting Sessions for preliminary approval. This chapter names some of the different ways Friends have found to enrich their personal spiritual lives, encouraging Friends in the work of keeping their spiritual lives vital. The chapter was brought to Yearly Meeting Sessions as a draft in 2017 where Friends were invited to give input to the committee. The chapter was sent to the monthly meetings that fall, where meetings engaged with the work and sent the committee further input. With this feedback, and thoughts sent the committee by individual Friends, the Revision Committee re-wrote the chapter. At Sessions there will be an opportunity to share any final requests for revision before the work comes to the Business Meeting for preliminary approval.

Phebe McCosker, clerk

## **Our Relationship with Friends United Meeting (FUM)**

FUM is a Quaker organization connecting hundreds of thousands of Quakers, many of whom identify as Christ-centered, in 37 yearly meetings around the globe. Our yearly meeting is a founding member, with deep ties, fellowship, financial contributions, and mutual service work to FUM. A Minute from 2004 included this description of our relationship at that time:

*Many in our yearly meeting have felt their faith strengthened and recharged by God's presence in our worship, work, and fellowship with FUM Friends...FUM remains one of the most important places where we meet Friends who challenge our beliefs, and where African, Latin-American, Middle Eastern, and North American Friends meet face to face, growing in love and understanding. Since the 1940s when we were called to re-unite our previously separated Yearly Meetings, and since the early '90s when we developed special bonds of love and mutual ministry with Cuba Yearly Meeting we have learned to live with our differences, and we have come to feel how painful it would be to live in isolation from other Friends.*

One of the “differences” felt most deeply in our relationship with FUM is in its personnel policy. Since 1988, it has stated that *staff and volunteer appointments are made without regard to sexual orientation... and that it is expected that sexual intercourse should be confined to marriage, understood to be between one man and one woman.* LGBTQ+ and unmarried heterosexual Friends are not welcome to be on staff for FUM.

Since 1988, the FUM Board has never fully united with it, nor united to amend or remove it. NEYM has struggled as well, disagreeing with the policy and wondering whether or not to stay in relationship with an organization that discriminates. Through the years, there have been extensive minutes, letters, visitations, engagement, and discernment on the local and yearly meeting levels. It has been a difficult, tender, and often painful issue. In 2009, NEYM minuted support for same gender marriage and the belief that *we all have the same potential to reflect the Divine Light in our lives*. That same year, NEYM approved the creation of a withholding fund so that Friends and local meetings that did not wish to have any portion of their contribution to NEYM go to FUM (via the annual contribution) could continue to financially support the yearly meeting. Although the withholding fund was initially created as a temporary solution, the fund has been re-approved several times, each time with a hoped-for deadline on when NEYM would reach unity regarding our engagement with FUM. The latest one is set to end in October, 2021. Eleven Monthly Meetings have submitted minutes regarding our relationship with FUM, many of these asking that NEYM reinstate a withholding policy.

The FUM Committee within NEYM suggests a 3-part proposal towards celebration, experimentation and liberation:

1. Deepen our connections with, support of, and collective work alongside other Open and Affirming Yearly Meetings and Associations within FUM (and beyond) while encouraging intervisitation and relationship in the broader Religious Society;
2. Establish the Bayard Rustin Fund for Support and Witness; This fund would provide support to organizations working for LGBTQ+ safety and well-being.
3. Provide resources (human and curricular) to monthly and quarterly meetings so that we can engage in the work of self-reflection upon how centuries of internalized homophobia might yet be present, and at work, in us; in order to do the work of becoming truly inclusive.

For extensive history, minutes, documents, and responses from local meetings, you can begin to look [here](#).

## **No Way to Treat a Child**

American Friends Service Committee's campaign "No Way to Treat a Child" wants to end Israel's military occupation of Palestine by educating people on how Palestinian children are mistreated. Almost half of those living in the occupied West Bank are under 18 years old and over 10,000 Palestinian children have been seized and held for months, or sometimes years, by the Israeli military without parental or legal contact. Reports of frequent blindfolding, abuse, and prosecution in military courts without fair trials are documented. This treatment violates the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child and has been denounced by UNICEF.

Northwest and Vassalboro Quarters call on NEYM to learn about how Israel mistreats and abuses children and how settler colonialism harms children, both in the U.S. and in Israel and Palestine. The Quarters ask NEYM to endorse AFSC's "No Way to Treat a Child" campaign, and for all to learn about these issues. One of the ways to support this is to call or write to Congress members urging support for Rep. Betty McCollum's bill "Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act" (H.R. Bill 2590) that would push Congress to talk about and act against abuse of Palestinian children by the Israeli military forces.

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