

Debrief of 9/30/23 Permanent Board Meeting -10/18/23 Via Zoom

Present: Polly Attwood (notes), Fran Lightsom, Janet Hough (elder), Newell Isbell Shinn (facilitation & notes), Susan Davies, Eleanor Warnock, Ed Mair, Martha Schwope, Chris Gant, Marian Dalton, Allison Randall, Mary Zwirner, Gordon Bugbee, Becky Jones, Pamela Terrien, Kristin Keefe Perry, Maille Wooten, Carl Williams

We were encouraged to gather in an attitude of worship and hold each other in love, generosity, and faithfulness. Over the course of an hour and a half we took up three pieces of distinct but related work:

- 1) Reflection on patterns of oppression and faithfulness at the permanent board meeting.
- 2) Reflections on the practice of noticing itself, in the context of the permanent board meeting and this debrief
- 3) Themes to offer permanent board about the noticing practice, for further exploration.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility was a theme. Poor audio caused many folks attending by zoom to miss the substance of the first half of the meeting. *"Zoom participants felt like second class citizens."* Attempts to use the zoom tools, electronic hand raise, chatting the zoom host, etc, were not successful until a conversation on zoom at the break revealed it to be a shared problem, not an individual problem. In the second half of the meeting great faithfulness was shown in moving the microphone to each speaker and in speakers moving to the microphone. *"That felt wonderful."*

HOLDING SPACE & TAKING TIME WHEN THINGS BECOME INTENSE

In the permanent board meeting one friend stood and spoke with emotion, noticing a pattern. In the debrief, friends reflected on individual and corporate responses to that friend's speaking, to the Clerk's response, to the speaker's leaving, and to the time after.

One friend noted anxiety in their own body. Another noted we'd spent time at the start on embodied awareness and *"I wished we'd had moments to refer back to that, to check in with what was in our bodies."*

Another friend lifted up the Clerk's faithfulness when she was invited back to the exchange and then allowed space to listen further to the Spirit and each other. Friends also expressed curiosity about whether we had stayed long enough with the substance, or the intensity, of what had been said. A pattern raised up by the first speaker was eventually brought forward through the voice and body of another. *"That felt very faithful."*

One friend said something like: *"I felt saddened and confused when a friend left abruptly, torn between trusting that friend knew how to take care of themselves and was doing what they needed, and concern that the clerk and the body weren't being given enough time to right ourselves. I felt sadness and anger that we didn't have time to work through it."*

Another friend: *"I found it upsetting when our clerk was called to task for something a speaker felt was legitimate and the clerk said she didn't feel convicted, and she was then called out for that. It felt disruptive and disrespectful"*

Another: *"I noticed what may have been an example of a pattern of conflict avoidance. When someone speaks heatedly sometimes we settle back into our ourselves and don't work to figure out what was going on."*

Another: *"I wonder what would have happened if the clerk had responded as they did to another speaker and said "I didn't fully understand, can you say it again"?"*

Another: *"When we know there is pain and we hold it, good can come of it."* We are invited to notice when we are avoiding holding pain.

BEING INDIVIDUALS MEETING IN OUR MULTIPLICITIES

When we gather and do work together *“we sometimes hurt each other.”*

“One thing I deeply value about the noticing practice is that it allows us to hear multiple voices and we can hear more in the moment about how something is being heard and felt. This can take us out of individualism. We can start to hear the patterns beyond individual ‘sins.’”

Many folks mentioned not being able to hear, or hearing and not fully understanding, things said by others. One friend noted *“this is another place we don’t have the right to demand that we understand why.”*

“A lot of this work of noticing can be messy. There can be tension, shame, a feeling of having been mis-guided. It is worth leaning into the work and going through these things.”

“I wonder if the patterns we’re hoping to become aware of are pervasive in the culture we live in most of the time. Also pervasive in that culture is individualism. I wonder if as we do this work we feel as if we are being singled out as individuals. I wonder if there is another way of orienting our hearts and our souls as we go about this?”

Several friends expressed gratitude for the feedback they’d received from others, during and after the meeting, and during this debrief, noting that when the work was hard, this feedback was essential. One friend described cultivating *“a listening heart and a teachable spirit.”*

Folks noted that participants came to the meeting with widely varying levels of information and context. *“If we are not speaking a common language, I wonder how we will achieve the unity needed to do the work we need to do together?”* A friend noted that *“our business process has authority in god, but also comes from full information.”*

Several friends raised up plain speech and naming concerns directly as essential to our practice and our ability to hold each other and to do work together.

OFFERINGS FOR FUTURE PERMANENT BOARD MEETINGS

“I notice we ask a lot of the clerk to clerk a meeting of that length.”

One friend noted *“I have about an hour of good attention span on zoom and by the time the embodiment exercise and roll call were complete I’d used most of it.”*

“I wonder if we can offer more concrete support for the clerk, with advance documents, with tech hosting and with managing zoom.”

Advance documents well in advance would be helpful. *“We have so much discernment to do, I wonder if we might accomplish more if we were more fully informed in all kinds of ways?”*

Could we “pre-game” the full permanent board meeting with info sessions to review advance documents so that our time together can be focused more on discernment than trying to establish shared baselines of information?

When things are particularly heated, could the clerk ask what people are hearing, to invite a multiplicity of noticings?

REFLECTIONS ON THE NOTICING PRACTICE FOR PERMANENT BOARD

What happens next? Do these noticings simply happen and stay here? How do we begin to develop strategies for disruption?

“How do we hold naming and noticing that looks toward change?”