

Annual Report April 2022
from Noah Merrill's Oversight Committee

to Putney Friends Meeting and
Northwest Quarterly of the Religious Society of Friends

Committee Members: Sarah Gant, Lucas Braun, Viv Woodland
Mary Osher, and Julie Forsythe, clerk
and Noah Merrill

Noah Merrill's support and oversight committee has continued to meet regularly with Noah, usually every six weeks for warm sharing, followed by silence out of which our listening and sharing unfolds. The committee's work sharpened after recognition and recording by the Quarter of Noah's gifts of ministry. The three gifts of vocal ministry, locally and beyond, presence and written word, stand out clearly as touch stones in our participation with Noah in his spiritual journey. This report reflects briefly on our gatherings (in person or on Zoom) since late 2020 until his return from a four month sabbatical from October 2021 until February 2022.

The text of the minute: Dec 6, 2020

Northwest Quarterly Meeting joyfully approved the following minute: Noah Merrill is recognized as serving in vocal ministry both locally and beyond. We are also grateful for the ministry of his presence and his written word. We are confident that his monthly meeting, Putney, is committed to nurturing and guiding the gift they too, have been given. Recording a ministry is naming the gifts and accepting responsibility to help carry it. Northwest Quarter as well as Putney carries this responsibility. We ask Putney to give bi-annual reports to the Quarter on this ministry.

During this period the pandemic has played a challenging role, as Noah, like so many of us, has been limited to online communication. His travel, which until this time included a portion of national and international travel, has been limited to phones and the computer. This included the huge challenge of gathering Friends on Zoom for Yearly Meeting Sessions again last summer. The committee organized a support system for the time so that Noah had silent accompaniment in his small apartment during online sessions. Meals were provided by Putney meeting.

Noah has been a central figure in helping the Yearly Meeting transition first to Zoom, and then to hybrid models of communication. He has helped translate the technology but more importantly held the door wide open for meetings to communicate with one another to share learning as we go. His patience, and his broad view was widely felt during these months. Many sought pastoral care. The pandemic deepened. Many Friends were increasingly under the burden of awakening to the history of Friends participation in racism and destruction of native peoples in our communities. Noah's role to help Friends stay deeply rooted in our faith was visible in his writing for the NEYM monthly newsletters. At the same time Noah tried to discern more clearly his role as a writer and experimented with different modes.

During this time, the committee was well aware of how much Noah was shouldering and how much he needed to renew. We discussed what could be delegated to lighten his load. We were especially delighted when the Yearly Meeting agreed to a four-month sabbatical. At that point, the committee spent several meetings talking with Noah, first about handing over his tasks at NEYM and then about the elements that he might consider for his time away, models such as Pilgrimage (visiting holy sites or individuals), Sabbatical (study), Retreat (extended Silence), and Renewal (time in nature, etc.).

In mid-October, Noah launched. When we met again in mid-February a few days after his return, Noah was bright and vibrant. Things had not gone as he planned, he was turned back by the pandemic and bad weather, but like a true pilgrim, he took the time to truly return home, to his own essential being. There were a few visits with key Friends, there was time to relax deeply, and as he emerged, Noah brought a sense of clarity to his situation. He says in a report to the Permanent Board of NEYM, "I was brought to a place of conviction in the responsibility to tend with discernment my attention and energy if I am to be of use as my service continues...My hope is that this will allow me to give more attention to what is most essential, to sustain my own capacity to abide in Love and to allow that abiding to guide my service among Friends." (April 2, 2022)

We encourage Noah to continue taking quarterly retreats, to use the next two months of his sabbatical when it can be arranged, to continue to practice the weekly disciplines of reading and prayer that he has established. We hope he will be a model that we might all do less, to hear more deeply.

With profound thanks for this opportunity to be with Noah in this ministry. We continue to see Noah's fitness of this recording of his vocal, written and presence gifts.

Julie Forsythe
Sarah Gant
Mary Osher
Lucas Braun
Viv Woodland