

**Minutes
Permanent Board
Mt Toby Friends Meeting
December 9, 2023**

23-58 Welcome and Gratitude

Susan Davies (Vassalboro), clerk of the Permanent Board, thanked Mt. Toby Friends for preparing a welcome to us. This included setting up the technology for our meeting and preparing the coffee and food for those of us meeting in person.

23-59 Roll Call

Willa Taber (Fresh Pond), Recording Clerk for the Permanent Board read the roll.

Bold is present in the room. Underline is present on Zoom.

Susan Davies (PB Clerk), **Willa Taber** (PB Recording Clerk), Deana Chase, Darcy Drayton, **Martin Forsythe**, **Christopher Gant**, Elizabeth Hansen, Ian Harrington, **Newell Isbell Shinn**, **Roger Jasaitis**, **Carolyn Lamar Jordan**, **Meg Klepack**, **Frances Lightson**, Edward Mair, Anna Radocchia, Bob O'Connor, Allison Randall, John Reuthe, Martha Schwope, **Liesa Stamm**, **Eleanor Warnock**, Diane Weinholtz, Donn Weinholtz, **Morgan Wilson**, **Kathleen Wooten**, Mary Zwirner, Leslie Manning

Ex-officio members

Scot Drysdale (Finance Clerk), **Sarah Gant** (Clerk, Meeting Accompaniment Group), **Rebecca Leuchak** (Presiding Clerk), **Noah Merrill** (YM Secretary), Robert Murray (YM Treasurer), Elizabeth Reuthe (YM Secretary Supervisor), Carl Williams (Clerk of Ministry and Counsel)

Regrets

Kimberly Allen, Thomas Brenner, Christopher McCandless, Carole Rein, Jackie Stillwell (Clerk of Nominating Committee)

Visitors

Nia Thomas, **Peter Blood-Patterson**, **Nicola Metcalf**, **Honor Woodrow**, **John Ridgeway**, **Jennie Isbell Shinn**, **Sadie Forsythe**, **Andrew Grant**, **Mey Hasbrook**, **Kathy Olson**, **David Colleta**, **Kristina Keefe-Perry**, **Nan Davies**, **Mary Link**, Katie Bond, Melody Brazo, Marian Dalton, Melissa Foster, Phebe McCosker, Polly Atwood, Pamela Tierrien, Fran Brokaw, Elizabeth Hacala, Michelle Wright, Janet Hough

23-60 Embodiment Exercise

Continuing our practice of supporting the work of being gathered in our individual bodies into the corporate body, Jennie Isbell Shinn (Mt Toby) led us in some exercises to share a framework for grounding and techniques for anchoring into the present moment in order to be more fully present with our full selves. She asked us, “What helps you to be more present to Spirit in meeting? What conditions free you to tend to the leadings of the Spirit?” She then asked, “How can this body support you being available to the Spirit? How can you support others in this body to be available to Spirit?” She introduced us to sensory anchors to help us bring ourselves back to our bodies and to focus in the moment. These included noticing the space between our fingers, noticing the back of our bodies, noticing our feelings, and noticing our thoughts. Where are you when you are not in our body? Are you

in the future, in the past, or in a story that does not relate to what is happening to you now? She ended by reminding us that we are practicing to be a beloved community.

23-61 Permanent Board Clerks opening comments

Susan Davies, Permanent Board clerk, started by responding to some questions that came to her about the inclusion of travel minutes in the advance documents. Leslie Manning (Durham), the former Permanent Board clerk, was faithful in checking in with people who traveled in the ministry for the Permanent Board. Including the minutes is a way to be faithful to the reporting back of the travels that they have undertaken. There were various other documents that are not part of the work which we are undertaking today but which may be of interest to members or may relate to work that will come to us in future meetings, including the interim report from the 3 Rivers Visiting Committee and the Memorial Minute for Richard Regen.

Susan also reported that, on her own initiative and with the support of the Coordinating and Advisory Committee (C&A) she called a closed meeting of the Permanent Board, held over Zoom on November 27, 2023, for the purpose of strengthening relationships among Permanent Board members. The meeting was an opportunity to recognize the Permanent Board's role in ensuring the accountability of the Coordinating and Advisory Committee to the Permanent Board and the Yearly Meeting, and to lift up Permanent Board members' responsibility to care for the entire body of Friends in NEYM. The dialogue was fruitful, direct, and open. She expects continuing the dialogue will contribute to improving our relationships, and the functioning of the Board, as it seeks to be faithful to the charge it has been given by New England Yearly Meeting.

23-62 Approval of Minute 23-36

Minute 23-36, Recommendation from July 15, 2023, Listening Session for Salem Quarter, for Three Rivers Worship Group, from the August 5, 2023 Permanent Board Meeting was not approved with the rest of the minutes at our September 30, 2023, meeting. A revised minute, here attached, was brought back for approval.

Friends approved the revised minute. All of the minutes from the August 5 Permanent Board Meeting have now been approved.

23-63 Approval of Minute 23-39

Minute 23-39, Concern for Youth and Youth Ministries, from our August 9 Permanent Board Meeting was not approved at our September 30, 2023, meeting. A revised version of this minute is attached.

Friends approved the revised minute. All of the minutes from the August 9 Permanent Board Meeting have now been approved.

23-64 September 30 Permanent Board Minutes

The minutes from the September 30 Permanent Board Meeting, here attached, were presented.

The minutes of the September 30, 2023, Permanent Board Meeting were approved.

23-65 Presiding Clerk's report

Rebecca Leuchak (Providence), NEYM presiding clerk, reported that she worked with Hisham Awartani, one of the students shot in Burlington, and this has touched her deeply. Another of the students in her department also took their life. This has been a tough time for her.

She is excited and hopeful about new initiatives that are rising in the Coordinating and Advisory Committee but are not yet ready to come forward.

She attended the Friends General Conference Central Committee annual gathering at Pendle Hill in October and learned much more about that organization. She also attends Legacy Gift meetings and meetings of the Notice Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness and Right Relations Working groups.

23-66 Report from the Coordinating and Advisory Committee

Rebecca Leuchak presented the report from the Coordinating and Advisory Committee, here attached.

Kathleen Wooten (Lawrence) and Liesa Stamm (Hartford) have volunteered to start the work of setting the priorities for NEYM contributions to outside organizations, but they have not been given a specific charge. C&A hopes to bring a charge for that group in February. C&A also would welcome other people to join in this work.

23-67 Developing an Ongoing Capacity and Practice of Consultation and Reflection on Youth Ministries

Nia Thomas (Northampton), Yearly Meeting Program Director, presented a proposal for developing a practice of regular, cyclical, reviews of Youth Ministries work, here attached.

She sees these consultations happening over a 3-year cycle. The youth ministries committee has been inactive because it has not been properly peopled. She hopes that in February the Nominating Committee will bring back a full slate for the committee and that this reconstituted committee will bring a timeline for the consultation to us in May.

Proposal: That the Youth Ministries Committee (which is composed of NEYM's Youth Ministries staff and six volunteer members) undertake consistent, robust, creative, and widely consultative listening to inform youth ministry decisions and to provide more transparency, accountability, and support for our youth ministries.

Rather than seek to address these issues "once and for all," we are imagining a cyclical process, regularly returning to essential questions to continually improve and build resilience in our youth ministries. Taking place every 1 to 3 years, this consultative cycle may take multiple forms of engagement (written reports, online or in-person gatherings, calls to local meetings and individual youth ministers, focus groups, etc.), but should be grounded in the questions below and should culminate in a periodic report shared with the wider Yearly Meeting for comment and ongoing conversation. Insights from these reports would then inform funding priorities, staffing responsibilities, and other important discernment of New England Friends.

Reflection questions for youth ministers, interested youth, and parents to respond to at least annually:

- **What recent stories related to youth ministry should the wider Yearly Meeting hear?**
- **Based on your recent experiences, what challenges and possibilities do you see related to the following:**
 - **Current and emerging models of youth ministry**
 - **The spiritual condition of youth, families, and youth ministers**
 - **Quaker faith formation**
 - **Outreach to youth and families**
- **What new experiments seem ripe to try in the above areas? What current work do you sense should be deprioritized or set aside?**
- **What do you see as current indicators of the health of the path we are on in regards to youth ministry?**
- **What resources, relationships, and connections seem most vital to this ministry at this time?**
- **Is there any support needed to sustain this ministry that is not currently being provided?**

Today, we ask that the Permanent Board approve that the Youth Ministries Committee be tasked with leading ongoing, cyclical consultation regarding youth ministry, consistent with the description above. While the particular forms of consultation may change from year to year, the Youth Ministries Committee shall report to the Yearly Meeting as part of each consultation cycle.

Friends approved this proposal.

23-68 Charge to the Conflict Response Group

The Coordinating and Advisory Committee considers the way forward as a two-step process. First is the discerning of the charge of a working group on strengthening capacities for response to conflict rising in the life and work of the Yearly Meeting. That task requires a small group of Friends working in collaboration with the clerks of the Coordinating and Advisory Committee, Ministry and Counsel, and the Permanent Board. Many Friends across our meeting have been consulted for their perspectives and wisdom on this matter and two Friends have felt led to engage in this work; a third Friend is in discernment about serving.

Darcy Drayton is a long-time member of our Yearly Meeting and a career-long educator. She served for many years on the Yearly Meeting Committee on Racial, Social, and Economic Justice.

Melody Brazo, serving on the Noticing Patterns Working Group, is also a long-time member of the Yearly Meeting and an educator, who coordinated for 20 years an inclusion program in the Cambridge public schools.

Friends approved Darcy Drayton and Melody Brazo to serve on the working group to discern the charge of a Conflict Response group.

23-69 Noticing Patterns Debrief

Newell Isbell Shinn (Mt. Toby) and Polly Atwood (FMC) reported on the October 18, 2023, Noticing practices debrief for our September meeting. The written report is attached.

Some of the learnings and questions from the debrief are:

- People will experience the same event differently.
- We bring their own history and experience to the same event.
- What do we do with the noticings? Where do we go with them?

We need to continue to hold this practice and to let it change us.

23-70 Yearly Meeting Secretary's report

Noah Merrill (Putney), NEYM Secretary, said that he appreciates hearing people asking how they can improve our time together. He then spoke to his written report, here attached.

All members of the Permanent Board will be invited soon to make phone calls thanking our Give Monthly donors for their contributions to the YM. All members of the Permanent Board are encouraged to accept this invitation. If everyone makes a few calls, none will be overly burdened.

Noah reported that two people from Maine with strong relationships in the regional Jewish and interfaith community have expressed tentative interest in assuming ownership of the North Fairfield meetinghouse (which has long been vacant while we sought future uses for the property) and transforming it into a multifaith community center for the region. Initial explorations are underway to see if this possibility might be viable. He hopes and expects to be able to devote more time to resolving the legal status and future of the North Fairfield and South Pittsfield properties in the new year and hopes to have more to report in February. Any decision would be brought to the Permanent Board for discernment and approval.

23-70.1 Budget Funding Priorities for FY2025

As many Friends are aware, the Funding Priorities process of the Yearly Meeting charges Coordinating & Advisory with bringing forward each fall recommended funding priorities to guide the Finance Committee in the preparation of the coming year's budget. Our practice is that these priorities are approved by the Permanent Board; the final proposed budget is approved by Annual Sessions.

This is a time of uncertainty in our finances, as in other ways. The last two fiscal years have ended with deficits; despite responsive attention to needed changes, the Yearly Meeting is still feeling the effects of the disruptions caused by the pandemic and more. While recent fundraising efforts have been promising, aided by Friends newly energized to support the work of the Yearly Meeting, we still have work to do to rebuild a more robust financial position.

Several discernment processes are ongoing that may have financial implications for the Yearly Meeting (Sessions visioning & design, youth ministries, financial contributions to other organizations, and more). In recommending funding priorities this year, C&A feels it is important to take care not to get ahead of other ongoing discernment that may have financial implications.

Coordinating & Advisory is aware that, when Permanent Board approved (PB Minute 21-43) a commitment to paying honoraria to Friends serving in key volunteer leadership roles, there was a commitment to review and revisit this experiment after three years, beginning in the spring/summer of 2024. While this review may not be among the Board's most urgent priorities or within the Yearly Meeting's capacity this spring, C&A hopes the Permanent Board will give this review and reflection

attention in a timely way, both to help us learn from this experiment, and to clarify whether this budget commitment of approximately \$15,000 dollars annually will continue in an ongoing way.

In light of the above, the Coordinating & Advisory Committee recommends that, for the FY2025 budget process, the Permanent Board approve maintaining existing spending levels as much as possible, with particular attention to sustaining staffing at current levels, adjusted for inflation, health care, and other changes consistent with our policies.

Friends approved these budget priorities for FY2025.

23-71 Financial Contribution Discernment

The Finance committee has had trouble deciding on the proper balance of giving to other Friends organizations. The Permanent Board has already decided that it is not the work of the Finance committee to decide how that money is distributed. We lack a shared understanding of what principles and shared understandings underlie our decisions on what organizations we should support and what the relative allocation of the funds would be. Are our contributions a manifestation of a relationship? Are they an expression of our values? Are they a way to do good in the world?

In May 2021, Permanent approved (**Minute 21-42**) creation of a working group to help establish guidelines and a more spirit-led understanding of our intention behind the donations that we make. This working group reported back to the April 2022, Permanent Board meeting (**Minute 22-26**) recommending that the Finance Committee prepare a budget with a total amount for contributions to other Friends organizations and that Permanent Board be responsible for allocating those funds among the other organizations and that it be laid down. The Permanent Board did not approve the specific recommendation, but it did lay down the working group with the understanding that the Board should continue work on this concern and requested that the Presiding Clerk consider making a spacious time for deep reflection on the concern for how we use our financial resources. In May 2023 (**Minute 23-22**), the Finance Committee recommended that, because of our financial condition, no contributions be made to any outside Quaker organizations in the FY 2024 budget. At that time the Permanent Board clerk announced that they have sent invitations to many people to serve on a working group to propose a process and criteria to guide the Yearly Meeting's decisions about contributions, with the goal to develop such guidance prior to the September 2023 Permanent Board meeting. So far only Kathleen Wooten and Liesa Stamm have volunteered to work on this working group. The Coordinating and Advisory Committee will work with Kathleen Wooten and Liesa Stamm, to create a specific charge for this working group. They intend to bring a charge to the working group to the February meeting of the Permanent Board.

Friends approved the direction of this work.

23-72 Legacy Gift Committee

2024 Legacy Gift Review

Mary Link (Mt Toby) co-clerk of the Legacy Gift Committee and convenor of the 2024 Legacy Review Committee) reported on the process of the 10-year review of the Legacy Gift experiment. One overall result of the Legacy funds is that they have helped some individuals and meetings to feel more connected to NEYM, especially smaller meetings that previously were not certain about what they got from NEYM. Another unforeseen benefit to meetings has been learning about testing and supporting ministry and spiritual leadings. Some meetings learned about clearness committees or ministry care

committees when a member applied for and received Legacy funding. One small meeting thought that they might need to sell the meetinghouse when the roof needed replacing, but felt the encouragement from NEYM via a Legacy grant and were able to successfully raise the rest of the funds.

The 2024 Legacy Review committee has been working for about 1½ years. It is composed of Mary Link, Legacy co-clerk; Fritz Weiss (Portland) as former presiding clerk; Bob Murray (Beacon Hill) as NEYM treasurer; and Suzanna Schell (Beacon Hill) as former Legacy co-clerk and one who helped with the original process and design of the Legacy Gift funds.

The Review Committee has so far prepared a brief history of the funds, a financial summary, and various other data. It is working on writing up the impacts to date. So far 40 of the 62 meetings in NEYM have been touched by Legacy funding. The remaining 22 meetings generally are very small meetings who may yet apply. In addition, over 20 other Friends' entities including Friends schools, Friends Camp, Woolman Hill, Beacon Hill Friends House, Quaker Voluntary Service, and NEYM committees have received grants.

Their goal is to include input from as many Friends as possible. They have sent out a survey to the NEYM meetings list and grantees list. The November and December NEYM newsletters have included a survey link and invited all Friends to fill out the survey. They have received only about 20 responses so far. Everyone is encouraged to respond to the survey and to ask their meetings and other Friends to do so as well. So far nearly all survey respondents have said they want Legacy Gift to continue, with two saying maybe/that they needed more info.

The Legacy Gift Committee is exploring the idea of holding a workshop with a focus on Holy Abundance: Creating a Gospel Economy among NEYM Friends. They are currently planning this for March. They welcome collaboration with others who we heard during the meeting are clearly also exploring this overarching theme. Stay tuned.

The work of Legacy Gift Committee itself has grown, honoring the experience it has developed—by adding the Bodine-Rustin Fund, and taking on administration of Salem Quarterly Meeting funds while they are on sabbatical. The Legacy Gift Committee will likely need more support to carry out the extra work.

The 2024 Legacy Review committee plans to bring a first draft of its report and recommendations to the February Permanent Board meeting for review and feedback. The final report is expected to be brought to Sessions this summer.

Bodine-Rustin Fund

Mary Link continued in her role as co-clerk of the Legacy Gift Committee to report on the work of the Bodine-Rustin Fund. This is the second year of the fund. The Permanent Board and the Legacy Gift Committee share the administration of the Bodine-Rustin Fund. Grantees do not apply for grants but rather Friends make suggestions of LGBTQ+ related groups to distribute the funds to. These are annual suggestions so that if someone suggested an organization last year, they would need to recommend them again this year. So far this year the fund has not received any suggestions. The posted deadline is December 15, but they will receive them after that. Kristina Keefe-Perry is the FUM representative to the subcommittee that reviews the suggestions, along with two members of the Legacy Gift Committee. That subcommittee reviews the organizations and makes a proposal to the full committee for which

ones to fund and funding amounts, which then goes to the Permanent Board for final approval. Our goal is to bring funding recommendations to the Permanent Board for the February meeting.

Last year's contributions included a group in the Northeast Kingdom that put on their first Pride parade and Friends Uganda Safe Transport (FUST).

23-73 Travel to Cuba YM

Susan Davies reported on the recommendation of the Puente de Amigos Committee for travel to Cuba. The report on the approved delegation and the report of the clearness committee for travel to Cuba are both attached.

The Puente de Amigos Committee is pleased to support the leadings of Robert Watt of Providence Meeting and Christel Jorgensen of Cambridge Meeting to travel to Cuba to attend Cuba Yearly Meeting and immediately after that to facilitate a third Alternatives to Violence training in February 2024. Robert will leave on February 22, 2024, and return on February 29. Christel will leave on February 21 and return on the 29th.

Friends approved this recommendation.

23-74 Travel Minute for Andrew Grant

Friends received a Travel Minute endorsed by Mt. Toby Meeting and Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting for Andrew Grant (Mt Toby) to travel outside the Yearly Meeting with a concern for healing relations with North American Indigenous people with a particular focus on repair of the ongoing harms of the boarding-school era when Quakers participated in the separation and assimilation of Indigenous children, here attached.

Friends approved endorsing this minute.

23-75 Nominating Committee

Beth Hansen (Westerly) brought forward the report from the Nominating Committee here attached.

NEYM Treasurer

The Nominating Committee recommends Marian Dalton (Brunswick) to serve as New England Yearly Meeting Treasurer for a term starting on December 9, 2023. Marian's husband, Robb Spivey is currently serving as the Friends Camp Assistant Treasurer and is therefore a check signer. Robb would be released from being a check signer before Marian would be added as a signer on NEYM accounts.

Friends approved this nomination.

FWCC Representatives

Since Brianna Halliwell is Susan Davies' daughter, Rebecca Leuchak clerked the following approval.

Friends approved Anna Lindo (Framingham Meeting) and Brianna Halliwell (Vassalboro Meeting) to be representatives to the Friends World Committee for Consultation, with terms ending in 2027, and to be delegates to the August 2024 FWCC Plenary.

23-76 Report on Antiracism Consultative Working Group

Kristina Keefe-Perry (Fresh Pond, Three Rivers) presented a report on the progress of the Antiracism Consultative Working Group. This Group was created at the November 2021 meeting of the Permanent Board. (Minute **PB 21-104**) Although the full scope of the work was unclear, the Board was clear that the planning and implementation work should move forward, and that professional expertise was needed. The Clerk of the Permanent Board and the Clerk of the Nominating Committee were authorized to appoint a working group having the needed expertise and experience to refine and articulate a more specific charge, set priorities for next steps, and bring the results back to the Permanent Board.

The first part of the work was to finalize the charge of this working group. This charge was finalized in May of 2022.

The intended outcome of the consultative process is to bring to the Permanent Board a framework and recommendations—a “roadmap”—for how the Yearly Meeting can concretely: 1) bring the perspectives and insights offered by antiracist theory and practice into the Yearly Meeting’s discernment and action as an institution, and 2) support and encourage local Friends meetings (monthly and quarterly) across our region, as they are led, to bring the perspectives and insights offered by antiracist theory and practice into their discernment and actions as worshiping communities, and into the discernment and actions of Friends as a regional corporate body.

Those appointed to the Antiracism Consultation Working Group were: Melody Brazo (Fresh Pond), Nia Thomas (Northampton), LVM Shelton (Plainfield), Morgan Wilson (Framingham), Becky Jones (Northampton, as a prayerful presence), Noah Merrill (Putney), and Kristina Keefe-Perry (Fresh Pond/Three Rivers). Leslie Manning, the Clerk of the Permanent Board at that time, was named clerk.

One of the most significant pieces of work the working group has done was to develop a *Request For Proposals* in our work of selecting a consultant.

Kristina read a part of that RFP:

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (NEYM), an organization of Quakers in the northeastern United States, seeks a consultant to guide us in a process for becoming a more anti-racist organization.

We seek to develop a multi-year plan for action, a roadmap that can be used at all levels of the organization: including local monthly meetings and worship groups, the quarterly and yearly meetings in which they are nested, and the committees and individuals that are part of each of these communities.

We seek common goals, language, and processes that will guide us in living into our intention to challenge and dismantle white supremacy in ourselves and in our faith communities

The specific outcomes outlined in the RFP were:

- NEYM is seeking consultation to work with Yearly Meeting leadership, staff, and the Permanent Board to help us develop a process for living into our commitment to becoming an antiracist faith community.
- We seek to develop a multi-year plan for action, a roadmap that can be used throughout the organization through the development of common goals, language, and processes that will guide us in living into our intention to challenge and dismantle white supremacy in ourselves and in our faith community.
- We seek a process that is consistent with Quaker theology and practice. We hope to partner with consultants in our developing practices, in ways that further a commitment to and articulation of antiracism in ways that are authentic, relevant, and rooted in our faith tradition.
- We know that this work will involve digging into the spiritual roots of racism and white supremacy that underlie some of our traditions and practices. We cannot cling so tightly to tradition—for tradition’s sake—that it hinders our antiracist goals. We may need strategies that help us to let go of beloved historical understandings and practices. This will include responding to harm, as it arises, and addressing resistance.

The working group has solicited more than a handful of consultants. It has engaged in a group held interview with one of those and has hopes to interview another. The work has moved more slowly than the working group had imagined or wanted. However, the working group feels that it has moved at just the right pace.

The scope of this work is delicate and complex. It is intertwined with and colored, at this time, by what the Program Secretary, Nia Thomas, noted in their last meeting is a “trust deficit” that exists in the yearly meeting. They have labored and wondered if addressing that is impeding our work. They have concluded that, while it is not specifically our work, it is clear that it is deeply related to the work that is before them. They are hopeful that when it is right it will move to the next stage.

With a break for Sessions and the transition in Permanent Board clerks, our work slowed over the summer and early fall. We are looking forward to appointing an ongoing convener and setting a regular meeting schedule. The next piece of work in front of us is to interview the second consultant, select one, and begin the work of faithful collaboration.

23-77 Nomination to the NEYM Naming Committee

Susan Davies presented the report on her nominations to service to the yearly meeting, here attached.

Friends approved the nomination of Darcy Drayton (Souhegan) to serve on the Naming Committee.

23-78 Minute of Exercise

This meeting had a much different spirit and feel than our September 30 meeting. Discussions were more focused on the immediate issues at hand and less on personalities or larger patterns of behavior. Many people attributed this change in part to the conversation that was started at our called meeting on November 27. Other factors contributing to this change may also be that there were no controversial items on the agenda, or that people were on their best behavior. While this was a good start, we still have more work to do on the conflicts affecting us and the yearly meeting at large.

We started with embodiment exercises that encouraged us to be aware of our bodies as a grounding for our decision making. Even with this, we found ourselves revisiting a decision after we had made it. We need to learn to trust our discomfort, and give it a voice. Sometimes just saying, “Something about this decision makes me uncomfortable but I am not sure what it is,” can give the body a chance to pause and find together what is amiss.

Susan Davies

[Susan Davies \(Mar 4, 2024 13:01 EST\)](#)

Susan Davies, clerk

04/03/2024

PB 23-36: Recommendation from July 15, 2023 Listening Session for Salem Quarter, for Three Rivers Worship Group

*Note about process: Because Leslie Manning, PB clerk had served on the discernment committee for Three Rivers worship group, Susan Davies, PB Recording clerk, clerked this minute. No back up Recording Clerk was appointed to record this minute, **PB 23-36**.*

PB took up the recommendation of the July 15, 2023 Salem Quarter Listening Session, (hosted by the Permanent Board, for the Salem Quarter), to approve Fresh Pond's recommendation that Three Rivers Worship Group become a monthly meeting.

*For a record of previous discernment and background pertinent to this minute, see PB minutes **PB 22-47**; **PB 22-47.1** ; and **PB 22-47.2** Decisions recorded in the aforementioned PB minutes were further approved by Sessions, 2022. The report from Salem Quarter is available in the Advanced Documents for the June 4, 2022, PB meeting, at p. 34.*

Following discussion that included both enthusiastic support and firm opposition, unity was lacking to approve the recommendation. Consistent with the 1985 Faith and Practice, and the draft NEYM Faith and Practice appendix on Establishing a Monthly Meeting (<https://neym.org/faith-and-practice/appendices/establishing-monthly-meeting-3>), a visiting committee was proposed, to be formed of members from the Salem Quarter. Leslie Manning, PB clerk suggested three names of Salem Quarter Friends to serve on a Visiting Committee, to visit and worship with Three Rivers, and the Salem Quarter, and to report back to the Permanent Board:

Regina McCarthy (Wellesley Friends Meeting)

Ellen Neelands (Acton Friends Meeting)

Mary Zwirner (Beacon Hill Friends Meeting, and Permanent Board member)

No objections were raised to these Salem Quarter Friends serving on the visiting committee, but due to pressures to vacate the meeting room, the Clerk and Recording clerk could not record clear approval of these Friends' service on the Visiting Committee.

PB 23-39: Concern for Youth and Youth Ministries

At the close of Sessions 2023 Friends heard epistles and messages from Young Adult Friends (YAFs) and young adults who serve as youth program Sessions staff. Each, in their own way, voiced a plea for greater understanding of their faithfulness, and exhaustion throughout Sessions, helping to sustain youth programs and ministries during NEYM Sessions, and their personal grief over loss of a robust, restorative spiritual community of their peers.

Permanent Board Friends were deeply moved by their messages. Though minute *PB 23-35: Youth Ministries Committee Purpose, Procedures, and Composition document* was approved at the August 5, 2023 Permanent Board meeting (and subsequently approved by Sessions 2023), the Youth Ministries Committee is not yet seated, thus the work is not yet fully underway. Rebecca Leuchak, NEYM Presiding Clerk, and Clerk of the Coordinating and Advisory Committee (C&A), proposed to the Permanent Board that the C&A committee bring recommendations to PB to be heard at the September 30th PB meeting.

Friends affirmed this plan and noted that care of youth and youth ministries is clearly a part of the charge of the Permanent Board.

**Draft Minutes
Permanent Board
September 30, 2023
Portland Friends Meeting**

PB 23-41 Opening Worship

Friends opened with a period of worship. Toward the end of the worship, Susan Davies, Clerk of the Permanent Board noted that Sarah Spencer, Former Clerk of Salem Quarter and former member of Permanent Board died on Friday and asked Friends to hold her family in the Light.

PB 23-42 Arrival and Welcoming

The clerk welcomed Friends and introduced Jennie Isbell Shinn (Mt Toby) who led us in an embodiment activity to give us time to feel into our own bodies and from there into the sense of the gathered body. Jennie asked us to feel into our bodies and then to notice one other person. She then asked us to see if there was anything in our bodies that needed attention, tending or repair, in each person or in the body. Then she asked us to ask ourselves, "How am I?"

Jennie then led us in an exercise that comes from the Theater of the Oppressed. She asked us to name an emotion that we were feeling. She then asked us to adopt a pose that represented or expressed these emotions and to look around and notice others responding with their bodies to the emotions being shared in the room. She asked us, "What do you notice or wonder about the gathered body today? What is it like to try to connect as a gathered body over Zoom?"

PB 23-43 Invitation into the Noticing Practice

Polly Attwood (FMC), co-clerk of the Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness Working Group (NPWG) invited Friends on Permanent Board into the work of noticing patterns. The practice of noticing patterns of oppression began from the floor of Yearly Meeting Sessions in 2016. This led to the creation of the working group. In April of 2017 their scope was enlarged to include noticing patterns of faithfulness. NEYM continues this practice today and the NPWG is under the care of Permanent Board.

NPWG supports Friends to engage in the practice of noticing and naming patterns. This work starts with self-examination and an honest loving look at how we have been participants in often unconscious oppressive behaviors. This practice resonates with Friends' faithful practices of honoring that of God in all, and our testimonies of peace and equality. We are all products of society and we each need to do the work of rooting out the seeds of oppression in ourselves.

We need each other to do this work of cultivating the faithfulness that can flow from the practice of noticing and naming patterns of oppression that move us away from our testimonies and lifting up patterns of faithfulness that draw on Friends' practices that bring us into greater alignment with our testimonies.

Together as we practice, we are invited to let go of perfectionism, self-blame and blaming one another. We are invited to accept that this learning is messy and that we need to hold each other in love, speak truth, and learn from each other's experiences. Through this practice we consciously choose to listen through our bodies for inner knowing and guidance as Jennie invited us to do this morning. We choose to listen for the Spirit moving among us that calls us into ways of being that we recognize and name as faithful. We choose new ways of being faithful to Divine Guidance that make room for new voices and a deeper discernment coming through the gathered body.

Here are some reminders that can be a resource for us as we engage in this practice

- Focus on patterns (not people): recurring instances that manifest in the body of NEYM that are complicit with oppression
- Attend to what your body is telling you
 - such as tightness or openness in the shoulders; heaviness or lightness of heart; holding your breath or feeling an exhale
- Discern your leading to speak to name a pattern as you would a leading to speak in worship
 - Am I led to speak?
 - Does this need to be shared here with the Body?
 - Would this better be shared as an individual conversation?
 - Am I being asked to respond with prayer rather than in words?
- Curiosity is a useful approach when offering a noticing
- Outcomes to sharing will vary; what is important is being faithful
- Receive noticings in gratitude

PB 23-44 Roll Call

Willa Taber (Fresh Pond), Recording Clerk of the Permanent Board read the roll.

Bold is present in the room. Underline is present on Zoom.

Susan Davies (PB Clerk), **Willa Taber** (PB Recording Clerk), **Darcy Drayton**, **Martin Forsythe**, **Christopher Gant**, **Joyce Gibson**, **Elizabeth Hansen**, **Ian Harrington**, **Newell Isbell Shinn**, **Carolyne Lamar Jordan**, **Frances Lightsom**, **Bob O'Connor**, **Alison Randall**, **Carole Rein**, **Martha Schwope**, **Leisa Stamm**, **Eleanor Warnock**, **Diane Weinholtz**, **Donn Weinholtz**, **Morgan Wilson**, **Kathleen Wooten**, **Mary Zwirner**

Ex-officio members

Scot Drysdale (Finance Clerk), **Sarah Gant** (Clerk, Meeting Accompaniment Committee), **Rebecca Leuchak** (Presiding Clerk), **Noah Merrill** (YM Secretary), **Elizabeth Reuthe** (YM Secretary Supervisor), **Jackie Stillwell**, (Nominating Committee clerk)

Regrets

Kimberly Allen, Thomas Brenner, Deana Chase, Roger Jasaitis, Meg Klepack, Edward Mair, Christopher McCandless, Anna Radocchia, John Reuthe, Robert Murray (YM Treasurer)

Visitors

Katy Bond, Carl Williams, Melissa Foster, Ellen Neellands, Becky Jones, Reiner Humphries, Aaron Sakulich, **Janet Hough**, **Keith Olsen**, **Marian Dalton**, **Celadry Humphries**, **Maille Wooten**, **Katherine Williams**, **Arty Williams**, **Brian Drayton**, **Mey Hasbrook**, **Melody Brazo**, **LVM Shelton**, **Kristina Keefe-Perry**, **Jennie Isbell Shinn**, **Nia Thomas**, **Pamela Terrien**, **Polly Attwood**, **Gordon Bugbee**

PB 23-45 Orientation and Expectations Document

Susan Davies (Vassalboro), clerk of the Permanent Board, welcomed everyone to our meeting and drew the attention of members, and particularly new members, to the Orientation and Expectations document for members of Permanent Board, here attached. We expect to continue to revise and expand this document over time.

PB 23-46 Minutes from August 5

Susan Davies presented the minutes from the August 5 meeting of the Permanent Board, here attached.

Friends approved minutes PB-23-28 through PB 23-35. PB 23-36 will be brought back for approval on December 9th.

PB 23-47 Minutes from August 9

Susan Davies presented the revised minutes for August 9 here attached.

Friends approved all of these minutes except PB 23-39 Concern for Youth and Youth Ministries which will be brought back for approval on December 9th.

PB 23-48 Presiding Clerk's Report

The Presiding Clerks written report is attached to these minutes. Rebecca Leuchek (Providence), Presiding Clerk of NEYM, reported that she has been in conversation with many people about sessions and has read the comments on the evaluation of Sessions. These evaluations have been invaluable to gather a greater sense of how things were.

She has appreciated the comments and suggestions she has received in regards to the group to examine our responses to conflict. She has not responded to all of the 22 Friends who have emailed her about this but she is looking forward to having conversations with all of them.

Rebecca is here with you as a person who has an extraordinarily busy life. She works, she has a family, she cares for her home, and she wants to serve the yearly meeting. Are there hours in the day for all of this? This yearly meeting is her love and she wants to serve it as best she can. She knows that we are all people who love the yearly meeting and want to serve it the best we can. She is sorry that she only added her written report to the advance documents yesterday afternoon.

Attending the various committees that she serves ex-officio, she is impressed by the amount of faithful work that Friends are doing in service to the yearly meeting. The Coordination & Advisory Committee (C&A) held a retreat on September 21-23 at Woolman Hill. One of her

learnings from this retreat is not to schedule a C&A meeting so close to a Permanent Board meeting. Much of the work of the retreat involved responding to the events of Sessions. There are many communications that get circulated that contain incorrect information and this has been a problem. What is important is that we lean into our differences and conflicts and hold each other in love and tenderness and the faith in God's grace. We are broken open and I am so grateful to be here with you.

PB-23-49 Coordinating and Advisory Report

The full written report from the Coordinating and Advisory Committee is attached to these minutes.

PB-23-49.1 Understanding the needs of Youth Programs

Coordinating and Advisory Committee proposed that Permanent Board take the following action:

Approve a charge to the Coordinating and Advisory Committee that they bring back to PB for consideration (and approval) in December a Consultative Process that will guide us in an inclusive and responsive understanding of our needs for Youth Programs as a Yearly Meeting, including direct response to the needs of our monthly meetings. This highly consultative work will be assigned to Coordinating and Advisory in collaboration with the Youth Ministries Committee with its vital role of nurturing youth programs, and with the assistance, support, and input from our Yearly Meeting staff. The aim of this work is to put forward a plan for mission, evaluation, dialog and integrative visioning of our Youth Programs, highlighting specific and concrete priorities with which we can align the functions of Youth Programs going forward. This will be accompanied by proposed action steps, under the care of the respective committee and staff charged with this work, all in an effort to advance our growing edges of this essential life within our community.

Friends approved this recommendation.

PB 23-49.2 Dealing with Conflict

The Coordinating and Advisory Committee recommend that the Yearly Meeting:

1. Reflect on ways in which the practices described in the C&A report are functioning currently, and how they might be strengthened or changed to better serve these purposes;
2. Explore ways to more effectively and consistently communicate pathways for responding to conflict, recognizing that many Friends may not be aware (or may need of be reminded) of these practices;
3. Consider opportunities and capacities for ongoing education, training, and engagement with skills and methodologies for responding to conflict consistent with Friends faith and practice, both for Friends generally and for those charged with

specific responsibilities for response to conflict in the life of the Yearly Meeting. This would potentially include committee and working/resource group clerks, staff, youth ministries volunteers, and Friends serving in other volunteer leadership roles;

4. Examine how resources or capacities developed might relate to our primary purpose of strengthening the life and ministry of local meetings, and how efforts focused on response to conflict arising beyond the scope of a local meeting might relate to and be informed by wisdom and existing practice in local meetings;
5. Integrate insights from the steps above into the ongoing work of the Yearly Meeting, including especially the work of the Nominating Committee to nurture and support the expressions of gifts and skills in service, and to support the functioning of the Yearly Meeting as a whole.

In support of this, Permanent Board charges the Coordinating & Advisory Committee, in consultation with Nominating Committee and consistent with our practice, to bring forward to the December 9, 2023 meeting of the Permanent Board nominations for a working group on strengthening capacities for response to conflict rising in the life and work of the Yearly Meeting and to make recommendations to Permanent Board for further discernment and action.

Persons serving on this working group would include Friends with relevant gifts, skills, and experience who have expressed their availability and interest, as well as other Friends whose names may rise in this process, to allow for broad consideration. In making nominations, C&A should consider the qualities listed in Sessions Minute 2023-1002. Consistent with Sessions Minute 2023-703, this working group will include the Presiding Clerk, Clerk of Ministry & Counsel, and Clerk of the Permanent Board.

The first charge of this group will be to create a plan of work on creating this process.

Permanent Board encourages this group to consider:

- 1. When conflict involves members of C&A, there need to be ways to bring the conflicts to other places.**
- 2. There is a need to balance the needs of confidentiality and transparency and there is also a need for there to be ways of reporting back on the resolution of conflicts.**
- 3. The goal is not to eliminate conflict but to accept that conflict is a normal part of our life together.**
- 4. There is a need to find ways to resolve conflict that bring us to healing.**

Friends approved the creation of a working group on strengthening our capacities to respond to conflict in the yearly meeting as outlined in the bold text above.

Rob Spivey (Brunswick) Treasurer for Friends Camp presented the Capital and Operating Budgets for Friends Camp here attached.

Friends approved the Friends Camp Operating and Capital budgets.

PB 23-51 Youth Ministries Program FAQ

Noah Baker (Putney), NEYM Secretary, presented a draft of a FAQ document on our Youth Ministries Program, here attached. Friends are asked to convey any questions or comments about this document to either him or Nia Thomas (Northampton), NEYM Program Director. In particular, they are looking for items that might be added to this document.

PB 23-52 2025+ Sessions Visioning & Design Process

Noah Baker NEYM Secretary presented the report on the 2025+ Sessions Visioning & Design process, here attached. He said that it remains our hope that we can return to Castleton University at a time similar to those that we have used in the past. Friends will be notified when the dates are confirmed.

Friends approved the overall project as outlined in the report and bringing Phase 1 of this process to the December 9 PB Meeting for approval.

PB 23-53 Honoring Service to Permanent Board

We honored and expressed appreciation for the people who have completed their service to the Permanent Board in the past year. Leslie Manning completed her term as clerk of the Permanent Board but continues to serve as a member. Bob Murray has completed his term as NEYM Treasurer. Peter Bishop, Joyce Gibson and Jean McCandless have completed their terms of service on the Permanent Board.

PB 23-54 Nominating Committee Report

Jackie Stillwell, clerk of the Nominating Committee, presented the report of the Nominating Committee here attached.

Friends approved the nominations included in the report.

PB 23-55 Naming Committee

Susan Davies brought forward the names of Jerimiah Dickenson(Dover) and Ed Mair (Amesbury) to be continuing members of the Naming Committee.

Friends approved these nominations.

PB 23-56 Visiting Committee for Three Rivers Worship Group

Because of the chaotic nature of the end of our meeting on August 5, there was some confusion as to whether we had actually approved the names of members of the Visiting Committee to Three Rivers Worship Group. At the direction of the outgoing and incoming clerks of the Permanent Board, they have begun their work and their first report is attached to these minutes.

Friends approved Regina McCarthy (Wellesley), Ellen Neelands (Acton) and Mary Zwirner (Beacon Hill) to serve as a visiting committee for Three Rivers Worship Group. They will follow the process that is outlined in their report.

PB 23-57 Minute of Exercise

In her opening remarks, the clerk noticed a pattern of giving preference to particular positions and an attitude of distrust and assumption of mal-intent which are not healthy for our work together. This will not be resolved in one meeting but the work of healing the lack of trust in each other is the most important work before us. Some of us have wondered if, in part, we are being influenced by the current climate of distrust, division and chaos in the larger society. The spirit of distrust and confusion that was present in our August meetings was part of what prevented us from being able to approve the minutes concerning the appointment of a visiting committee to visit Three Rivers Worship Group, or the minute concerning the Youth Ministries program.

Friends are fond of using traditional Quaker circumlocutions, perhaps being unaware the extent to which some of these serve to gloss over actual issues and they are a part of our long tradition of avoiding conflict. Some of us also have a tendency to speak in metaphors which cause the listener to work hard to understand exactly what is being said. We are people with great imaginations and sometimes we take the metaphors to places far from the intention of the speaker. We need to work to recover the Quaker tradition of plain speaking and name, as clearly as we can, exactly what it is that we are speaking of. We must learn the difference between being tactful and being opaque. We must work to deepen our communications, equally striving to understand and be understood, even when patterns of speech, vocabulary and metaphors vary. Clear and precise language is an invitation to move deliberately and together, under the care of the Spirit whom we gather ourselves to in our corporate practice of expectancy. We also must keep an inward watch to see if there is something in us that keeps us from being rightly convicted by the words that are being spoken.

Several friends noticed that in a number of meetings, meetings that were clerked by different people, when a particular topic came up, the same person was called on to speak to the issue first. This was a person to whom the dominant culture normally defers. It appeared that this was a case of power speaking to power. Each time, these first comments set the tone for the rest of the conversation. We have also noted that it appears that, especially when there are strong emotions involved, the initial reservations we express to a course of action may not be the real source of the concerns. Unless these underlying issues are raised, acknowledged,

and held in patient tenderness by the body, they are unlikely to be resolved. We were also reminded that sometimes our objections are triggered by unresolved issues that are unrelated to the particular business at hand. It is important for us to notice, and to own, when we are enacting any of these patterns because that is an important step in achieving unity.

A corporate body is not its forms and structures but is fundamentally the relations we have with each other when we meet heart to heart and soul to soul. Building these relationships requires communication and connection and recognizing when we are being broken open.

**Report from Rebecca Leuchak, Presiding Clerk and Clerk of the Coordinating and Advisory Committee
To the Permanent Board of New England Yearly
December 9th, 2023
Mt. Toby Friends Meeting, Leverett, MA**

These past few months have been full of deep and faithful sharing of our individual and corporate work as members of the Coordinating and Advisory Committee. As clerk, I wish to inform you of matters the Committee has taken up in several meetings which we have had since the last regular Permanent Board meeting in September. They are the following:

- We reflected on our experience of the called Permanent Board meeting, finding it Spirit-led and helpful. We expressed gratitude to the Friends in attendance for their open hearts and willingness to be forthcoming and fully present with each other. We appreciated the assistance of Jean-Marie Barch, Ken Stockbridge, and Jacqui Clark for the framing and holding that allowed us to put concerns in context. We recognize the systemic challenges before us and we discussed ideas of next steps including the possibility of future such meetings.
- **Reanimating a working group to determine best practice for discerning the Yearly Meeting's Financial Contributions to other organizations.**

It is hoped that this discernment would relate Friends' specific need for a robust process to the larger picture question of our Yearly Meeting's approach to stewardship. This discernment would invite broad consultation and invite Friends' input into the development of Working Group charges and suggestions of who might have the gifts and skills needed to serve on this working group. Two Friends had already been named last year and may still be ready to proceed with this work, perhaps joined by a few others, yet to be determined.

The process would divide into steps giving priority to consultation at each stage, thus allowing for as many voices as possible to be heard. This participatory process to develop the priorities for funding outside organizations according to criteria that are transparent and not static. Broad and deep participation will help to build trust and engagement.

Coordinating and Advisory Committee will be preparing a charge for this working group to bring to Permanent Board for consideration at the meeting in February. We invite your insight and encourage you before then to contact me (Rebecca Leuchak) with your questions and ideas: clerk@neym.org

- **Developing an Ongoing Capacity and Practice of Consultation and Reflection on Youth Ministries**

The committee has provided support for the development of and seasoning for the **Proposal: Developing an Ongoing Capacity and Practice of Consultation and Reflection on Youth Ministries** which is provided in your packet of advance materials. You will be hearing about this initiative separately from Nia Thomas, Program Director for New England Yearly Meeting.

- **Young Adult Concerns within the Yearly Meeting**

The Committee is holding young adult Friends in prayerful concern with invitation that an on-going conversation of deep sharing be initiated between Rebecca Leuchak, Nia Thomas, Noah Merrill, and Carl Williams and Young Adult Friends. The first such meeting to be held within a time frame that is convenient for all who wish to participate. It is hoped that the activation of a robust Youth Ministries Committee will be one way to act upon those things that we learn from these conversations.

- **Legacy Gift Committee Review Process – Consideration of Support**

As clerk of Coordinating and Advisory Committee, I will be in communication with Friends serving on Legacy Gift to support their consultative review process in preparation for their reporting back, as charged, to the Yearly Meeting at Sessions in 2024. Plans for a workshop involving deep discernment among a broad group of Friends may be possible. Some areas to clarify include how this committee's work expresses the Yearly Meeting's commitment to supporting gifts and initiatives and whether they have capacity and vision to manage other funds, as they have already been doing with the Bodine-Rustin and Salem Quarter funds this past year.

- **Supporting Earthcare Ministries**

Noah and Sarah and I met with Friends of Earthcare Ministries, offering apologies for misunderstandings and misrepresentations made at Sessions in August. Coordinating and Advisory Committee is eager to be in consultation with the members of Earthcare Ministries about the best, most integrated approach to supporting Friends in New England as they engage with the issues of the climate crisis. Supporting the witness on this matter may take many forms and initiatives may rise up among concerned individual Friends, monthly meetings, quarters, as well as the Yearly Meeting. We are committed to discerning the way forward together.

- **Response to Conflict Progress**

Coordinating and Advisory Friends consider the way forward as a two-step process. First is the discerning of the charge of a working group on strengthening capacities for response to conflict rising in the life and work of the Yearly Meeting. That task requires a small group of Friends working in collaboration with the clerks of Coordinating and Advisory Committee, Ministry and Counsel, and the Permanent Board. Many Friends across our meeting have been consulted for their perspectives and wisdom on this matter and two Friends have felt led to engage in this work, a third Friend is in discernment about serving.

Darcy Drayton is a long-time member of our Yearly Meeting and a career-long educator. She served for many years on the Yearly Meeting Committee on Racial, Social, and Economic Justice.

Melody Brazo, serving on the Noticing Patterns Working Group, is also a long-time member of the Yearly Meeting and also an educator, who coordinated for 20 years an inclusion program in the Cambridge public schools.

Friends will be asked to approve these two Friends to serve on the working group to discern the charge of a Conflict Response group.

Proposal: Developing an Ongoing Capacity and Practice of Consultation and Reflection on Youth Ministries

Background:

For several years, our youth ministries staff and Youth Ministries Committee have lifted up the need for ongoing consultation regarding the spiritual condition of Quaker youth and families and the overall health of our youth ministries. At Sessions this August, this desire for more robust and sustained attention was heard again and Permanent Board affirmed that care for youth ministries is part of the work of the Board and wider body (minute PB 23-39). The Coordinating and Advisory Committee was tasked with proposing a next step in regard to consultation and care for youth ministries, with awareness that a new purpose and procedure aligned with past learning and intentions has just been approved for the Youth Ministries Committee.

The proposal below summarizes the challenge we are currently facing and a suggested approach to how ongoing consultation regarding youth ministry could become an ongoing capacity and commitment for the Yearly Meeting. This proposal comes from Coordinating and Advisory, in consultation with the youth ministries staff.

Youth Ministries Vision:

New England Yearly Meeting seeks to strengthen vibrant, multigenerational Quaker communities and the practice of the Quaker faith for people of all ages. We honor this intention through offering programs (such as weekend retreats, multigenerational gatherings, and summer camp) and by uplifting, connecting, and partnering with those serving locally.

As the world we live in changes rapidly, so do the day-to-day lives of youth and families. Still, in these times just as in any others, young people are seeking belonging, meaning, accompaniment, and enduring answers to life's hardest questions. In all its offerings, NEYM strives to listen deeply and respond thoughtfully and prayerfully to how we can best foster the spiritual development of youth amid current social, cultural, and economic conditions.

Challenge summary:

A healthy living system is an intelligent learner. It can adapt and survive even though its environment is moving towards increasing disorder. But it must be actively engaged and aware, never losing focus on its environment. Failing to pay attention and adapt is a prescription for death. ~ Margaret Wheatley

The current structures and programming of the Yearly Meeting's youth ministry were designed in an era where social conditions were much more stable than they currently are. For many years, the primary job for youth ministry staff was to offer similar programming from year to year for

an audience which naturally arose from Quaker families' participation in local meetings. Evolution of our retreat programs was gradual.

In recent years, conditions—in our wider society, in the lives of youth and families, and in our local meetings—have changed much more rapidly. Youth ministers have been caught in a bind of both *needing to adapt* to respond to current needs and *not being sufficiently empowered* to make significant changes, because the wider Yearly Meeting and key stakeholders had not yet developed a more shared understanding of the emerging context, with both its opportunities and challenges. Without wider and richer ongoing discernment, youth ministers are left making decisions, not from a primary focus on how Friends are led, but rather from a focus of what won't cause alarm. Working from a place of trying to please everybody, youth ministers aren't given consistent or focused indicators of success, and experience burnout. At the same time, Friends and meetings whose primary participation is not via our current youth programs often feel unheard, underserved by, and disconnected from NEYM's current offerings.

Proposal: That the Youth Ministries Committee (which is composed of NEYM's Youth Ministries staff and six volunteer members) undertake consistent, robust, creative, and widely consultative listening to inform youth ministry decisions and to provide more transparency, accountability, and support for our youth ministries.

Rather than seek to address these issues “once and for all,” we are imagining a cyclical process, regularly returning to essential questions to continually improve and build resilience in our youth ministries. Taking place every 1 to 3 years, this consultative cycle may take multiple forms of engagement (written reports, online or in-person gatherings, calls to local meetings and individual youth ministers, focus groups, etc.), but should be grounded in the questions below and should culminate in a periodic report shared with the wider Yearly Meeting for comment and ongoing conversation. Insights from these reports would then inform funding priorities, staffing responsibilities, and other important discernment of New England Friends.

Reflection questions for youth ministers, interested youth, and parents to respond to at least annually:

- What recent stories related to youth ministry should the wider Yearly Meeting hear?
- Based on your recent experiences, what challenges and possibilities do you see related to the following:
 - Current and emerging models of youth ministry
 - The spiritual condition of youth, families, and youth ministers
 - Quaker faith formation
 - Outreach to youth and families
- What new experiments seem ripe to try in the above areas? What current work do you sense should be deprioritized or set aside?

- What do you see as current indicators of the health of the path we are on in regards to youth ministry?
- What resources, relationships, and connections seem most vital to this ministry at this time?
- Is there any support needed to sustain this ministry that is not currently being provided?

Today, we ask that the Permanent Board approve that the Youth Ministries Committee be tasked with leading ongoing, cyclical consultation regarding youth ministry, consistent with the description above. While the particular forms of consultation may change from year to year, the Youth Ministries Committee shall report to the Yearly Meeting as part of each consultation cycle.

Please send any questions regarding this proposal to Program Director Nia Thomas (nia@neym.org).

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?”

To: The Permanent Board of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends
From: Noah Merrill, Yearly Meeting Secretary, Putney (VT) Friends Meeting
Re: Report in preparation for PB meeting on December 9, 2023

Dear Friends,

In advance of our time together on Saturday, some updates on ongoing work, and one recommendation for approval for funding priorities [see **1(e)** below]:

1. Funding Priorities recommendation for FY2025

- a. As many Friends are aware, the Funding Priorities process of the Yearly Meeting charges Coordinating & Advisory with bringing forward, each fall, recommended funding priorities to guide Finance Committee in the preparation of the coming year's budget. Our practice is that these priorities are approved by the Permanent Board; the final proposed budget is approved by Annual Sessions.
- b. This is a time of uncertainty, in our finances as in other ways. The last two fiscal years have ended with deficits; despite responsive attention to needed changes, the Yearly Meeting is still feeling the effects of the disruptions caused by the pandemic and more. While recent fundraising efforts have been promising, aided by Friends newly energized to support the work of the Yearly Meeting, we still have work to do to rebuild a more robust financial position.
- c. Several discernment processes are ongoing that may have financial implications for the Yearly Meeting (Sessions visioning & design, youth ministries, financial contributions to other organizations, and more). In recommending funding priorities this year, C&A feels it is important to take care not to get ahead of other ongoing discernment that may have financial implications.
- d. Coordinating & Advisory is aware that, when Permanent Board approved (PB Minute 21-43) a commitment to paying honoraria to Friends serving in key volunteer leadership roles, there was a commitment to review and revisit this experiment after three years, beginning in the spring/summer of 2024.

While this review may not be among the Board's most urgent priorities or within the Yearly Meeting's capacity this spring, C&A hopes the Permanent Board will give this review and reflection attention in a timely way, both to help us learn from this experiment, and to clarify whether this budget commitment of approximately \$15,000 dollars annually will continue in an ongoing way.

- e. **Recommendation for approval:** In light of the above, Coordinating & Advisory Committee recommends that, for the FY2025 budget process, **Permanent Board approve maintaining existing spending levels as much as possible, with particular attention to sustaining staffing at current levels**, adjusted for

inflation, health care, and other changes consistent with our policies.

2. Conflict in Israel-Palestine

- a. Under the NEYM policy on time-sensitive public statements, and after prayerful consultation, on November 3 the presiding clerk and I published a letter of concern in response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which can [be read here](#). As is our practice, the letter was sent to media outlets, elected representatives, and Friends bodies and organizations, including to contacts for all monthly and quarterly meetings.
- b. Alongside many others, including Friends serving as part of the Israel-Palestine Resource Group, I have sought to offer additional support for Friends of Burlington Meeting, FUM, the Ramallah Friends School, and others as they have sought to provide care and support to the three Palestinian-American men shot in Burlington, Vermont recently, as well as to their families.

3. Sessions 2024 planning; Sessions visioning & design consultation

- a. As many will by now be aware from recent announcements, we have signed a contract with Castleton University to host our Sessions in 2024, from August 2-7.

Sessions planners intend to change as little as possible about Sessions this summer from last year, save ongoing efforts to strengthen recruitment and support of our youth programs, which have been a sustained focus of attention in the months since August. An in-depth meeting of coordinators in various roles is planned for later this month, to continue efforts to think and act creatively about concrete steps to address barriers and challenges to recruitment and service for this year, even as we look ahead to the future.

Sessions planning is well underway, and this year substantial energy has been invested in pre-planning (planning the planning process) in hopes to address some longstanding challenges and issues that have arisen over many years.

- b. In September, Friends approved a first phase of a Sessions Visioning & Design process, intended to identify and articulate key issues to be considered, and to bring a charge and nominations for a short-term working group for the second phase, to this December meeting of the Permanent Board. Due to unanticipated demands and other urgent matters in recent months, that timeline has proven to be overly optimistic.
- c. I now expect, allowing for further input, to bring a report on Phase I, and recommendations for Phase II of the Sessions Visioning & Design process, to Permanent Board for consideration and approval at our February meeting, after the winter holidays.

The work of wider listening, consultation, and discernment of recommendations would then move forward between February and May of 2024 (consistent with the approved timeline), with a report and recommendations bring brought to Permanent Board at our planned meeting in May of 2024 for discernment and, if led, approval, so that further work can be done in preparation for Sessions 2024.

4. Youth Ministries Updates

- a. In addition to the recommendation from Coordinating & Advisory submitted elsewhere in these advance documents, in recent months I have worked with Program Director Nia Thomas and many others to listen and respond to insights, needs, and concerns from volunteers in our youth retreat programs, Sessions staff coordinators, and year-round YM staff members.
- b. The search for a new Teen & Outreach Ministries Coordinator is well underway, with interviews scheduled for next week. The Search Committee, including Maille Wooten (Lawrence), Isaiah Grace (Beacon Hill), Jessica Eller (Portland), Nia Thomas (Northampton) and myself, has worked together gracefully, and understands its charge both as discerning among current applicants to advise the secretary on the selection of a new staff member, and consulting as needed with me about ways the shape of the current role, and the many responsibilities it includes, might be adapted if needed to the gifts, skills, and leadings of those available to serve. While we are still accepting applications on a rolling basis, I expect to have much greater clarity on the direction of the process following the first round of interviews this month.
- c. As the transition and search continue, I'm deeply grateful that Drew Chasse (Mt. Toby) continues to serve as Interim Young Friends Coordinator, and will do so through Sessions 2024, to ensure continuity and care for current Young Friends participants. Kenzie Burpee (Wellesley) is also continuing to serve as Interim Program Assistant, providing support for logistics for JYM, JHYM, Young Friends, and younger adult programming, as well as programs such as Meeting Care Day.
- d. Through the generosity of a donor who last year made a multi-year commitment to a "growing edges" fund to support our youth ministries, at the Program Director's recommendation we made substantial funding available for an informal gathering of some younger adults with previous involvement in our youth programs. This was self-organized (with modest staff engagement to ensure plans for safety were considered, for example), with an estimated 9 people attending.
- e. I look forward to further engagement with Friends about the growth and direction of our ministries with youth and younger adults in the coming weeks and months, and to the opportunity for me to be present through offering programs and sharing time with both Young Friends (teens) and younger adult Friends at

planned midwinter retreats in January and February.

5. Update on resolution of real estate matters

- a. Two people from Maine with strong relationships in the regional Jewish and interfaith community have expressed tentative interest in assuming ownership and transforming the North Fairfield meetinghouse (which has long been vacant while we sought future uses for the property) into a multifaith community center for the region. Initial explorations are underway to see if this possibility might be viable. I hope to have more to report in February; any decision would be brought to the Permanent Board for discernment and approval.
- b. I very much hope and expect to be able to devote more time to resolving the legal status and future of the North Fairfield and South Pittsfield properties in the new year.

A few last words

I've been reflecting in prayer recently on a quotation shared with me as part of a spiritual formation conversation in a local meeting. This passage speaks, I think, to what we are listening *for* in our meetings for corporate discernment, and how we might know when we are being led by the Spirit, as people and as a group.

I hope these words might be of use to us as we each prepare for our time together on Saturday:

“But how do you know that it is God who speaks and not some other spirit? Much fanatical destructiveness has been born of people thinking God is speaking to them. But then much destructiveness has also been unleashed by adherence to objective principles.

*In Fox there are three criteria I see: **feeling**, **fruits**, and **fittingness**.*

*The right sense is a **feeling**. Over and over again Fox says to “feel it in the life.” The feel is a sense of divine love; it is like a taste of honey, you know it when you taste it.*

*But one can and should query the feeling: what **fruits** will it bear? Does it result in humility or domination of others, the enhancing or destroying of others or of oneself, the freeing up from self-will or subjugation to it?*

*Finally, for Fox the feeling of God speaking...which has intimations of fruitfulness, must have a **fittingness** with my own immediate condition—it must, as Fox says, “speak to thy condition”—**and my community**.*

Early Friends frequently checked their leadings with each other, so that the feel one had of God speaking to him or herself was corroborated by others' intuitive sense of that leading. Such inward revelations felt and shared carry one into unity of fellowship in the life of the Spirit:

All my dear Friends in the noble Seed of God, and who have known his power, life, and presence amongst you, let it be your joy to hear or see the springs break forth in any, through which you have all unity in the same feeling, life, and power. – G. Fox

—“*Seeds of Silence*”, R. Melvin Keiser

In that power, life, and presence,

Noah Merrill
Secretary
New England Yearly Meeting of Friends

Report on Puente Clearness Meeting for Travel to Cuba Yearly Meeting

From Carolyn Stone

December 6, 2023

Len and MaryAnn Cadwallader and Carolyn Stone met with Christel Jorgensen and Robert Watt to explore their clearness to travel to Gibara in February 2024. They plan to attend Cuba Yearly Meeting and then to facilitate an AVP training for facilitators workshop for those people who completed the Level 2 training in September. This will occur at the conference center in Gibara directly after Cuba Yearly Meeting. The cost for Cubans' travel and accommodations in Gibara as well as materials for the workshop is covered by the bequest made by Hanover Monthly Meeting. The bequest is in the care of Cuba Yearly Meeting. Bob and Christel are preparing now, conferring with each other and reviewing the Spanish training manual. In Gibara Kirenia Criado will join them to facilitate the workshop. Len, MaryAnn, and Carolyn found them clear to proceed with our blessings. The resumption of AVP (PAV in Spanish) programming in Cuba is an important relationship building action that NEYM can undertake. In Cuba the workshops will occur in the community. We hope AVP will bolster civil society in this unstable time there.

The Puente committee accepted this report and approved Christel Jorgensen and Robert Watt for travel to Cuba. Christel will travel from 2/21-2/29/2024, and Robert will travel 2/22-2/29/2024. Carolyn Stone will undertake the next actions to support their travel. She will notify Permanent Board of the dates and the names of the travelers. She will also send their passport information to Jorge Luis Peña so that he can request visas for them. In addition, she will ask Jorge Luis to send a formal letter of invitation from Cuba Yearly Meeting.

Carolyn Stone

Dear Friends,

Andrew Grant, a long-time member of Mt Toby Monthly Meeting of New England Yearly Meeting, is traveling under a concern recognized by this meeting for healing (North American) Indigenous relations, focusing especially on repair of the ongoing harms of the boarding school era when Quakers participated in the separation and assimilation of Indigenous children.

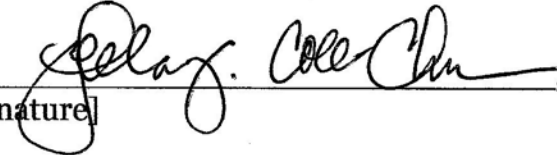
Andrew hopes to travel in this ministry, January – December 2024. We believe him to be genuinely called to this work, on a sometimes arduous path of truth and healing. We commend him to your care and hospitality.

Approved and minuted at Mt Toby Meeting for Business, 10 Sept. 2023
[date]



_____, Clerk
[Signature]

Endorsed by Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting, October 7, 2023
[date]



_____, Clerk
[Signature]

Endorsed by Permanent Board of New England Yearly Meeting, _____
[date]
_____, Clerk
[Signature]

BACKGROUND of request on the following pages.

BACKGROUND from Friend Andrew Grant —

I have recently applied for a Pastoral Study Project Grant from the Louisville Institute, seeking \$15,000 to focus on two primary questions: *How can the unique relationship between the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Indigenous peoples of North America be strengthened for the benefit of all? How can cross-cultural amity ground Indigenous knowledge and support harmonious living on Earth?*

Awards will be announced November 1, 2023 and my request for a NEYM travel minute is contingent on my receiving these funds. Yet, in order to have a letter in hand by January 2024, the beginning of the project period, I have been advised to initiate the discernment process now.

My application, see attached, includes a request for funds to enable me “to respond ‘as way opens’ during the project period (Jan 1, 2024 – Dec 31, 2024). In the manner of Friends, this would include a ‘travel minute’ from New England Yearly Meeting and intervisitation with Friends at a distance, naming my concern for Indigenous relations.”

Three locations are in play, beyond my home region, where I may be led to travel among Friends and that would stage me for extended archival research and on-the-ground discovery:

1. The greater Philadelphia area (Leni-Lenape-Hoking ‘original peoples homeland’) where I have already conducted extensive research.
2. Across the Atlantic Ocean with Quakers in Britain and research at Durham University (UK) during their Epiphany Term (Jan 8 – Mar 15, 2024).
3. West of the Mississippi in former “Indian Territory” and a quest to find more material demonstrating child separation and assimilation through Quaker-run boarding schools.

Other places such as the Washington DC/Baltimore area are possible, again as led.

VISION — As a Quaker peace activist with a recognized concern for Indigenous relations, I am holding a vision of Friends witnessing and deeply listening when people in the American Indian community experience strife (cross-cultural, inter-tribal, and intra-tribal) and offering to hold space for peacemaking — as led by the Indigenous community itself — prioritizing traditional practices (what today might be called restorative justice circles) and ways of relating. This is a leading edge of my sense of calling, with uncertainty about how and where it may gain expression.

Such an approach could signal true and enduring Friendship and a form of taking responsibility for our role in “The Fracture” that separated Indigenous peoples from the Living Land and an intricate web of relations.

Friends may have a role, if invited, to hold space and offer support for conflict transformation. Situations that involve Quakers directly would call for our open-hearted engagement. I also expect that Friends would be stretched and have much to learn from these engagements.

A key advisor in this work would be Grandmother Strong Oak, founder of the Visioning B.E.A.R. Circle Intertribal Coalition, with whom I am well-bonded and in close collaboration.

In summary, I am requesting a travel minute to show general support for my stepping out in this way.

NEYM Nominating Committee Report to Permanent Board
2 December 2023

Nominating Committee as a whole meets monthly and the sub-committees meet regularly as needed. There are currently 7 openings on the committee, so if you or someone you know is called to serve, please let me or the Naming Committee know. We are eager to have more Friends join us in this exciting work.

One of our responsibilities is capacity building with individuals and Meetings. We have provided two workshops recently. At Meeting Care Day on 11 November, ten Friends attended the workshop on Nominating Best Practices and Challenges. One participant observed: *A meeting that is clear about what it is called to do can meet challenges by being open to changing what it does and how it organizes.*

On 18 November, twelve Friends attended a workshop at Hanover Meeting in which we joyfully addressed the roles of all participants in Friends decision making.

There are many opportunities for service reflected in the slate published in the August sessions advance documents, however it is a document fixed in time. Because new people are approved during the year and some Friends need to be released during the year, the Nominating Committee is in the process of developing an online slate so everyone can easily see what opportunities are currently available.

The process for approving nominations by Permanent Board during the year is to send *first readings* in this written report a week or so in advance of the Permanent Board meeting. Any concerns, questions or affirmations should be communicated immediately to the Nominating Committee clerk. The clerk will follow-up with a nominee to share concerns without naming who brought them forward. The focus will be on the concerns and how they may be addressed. Depending on the outcome of this exchange, the nominee will either be brought forward for second reading, or withdrawn from the nomination. Depending on the situation, there may be a brief mention of the concerns and response.

First Reading:

Treasurer – Marian Dalton, Brunswick Meeting to begin 9 December 2023

Recognizing that the primary purpose of the Yearly Meeting is a spiritual one, the Treasurer plays an essential role in ensuring Friends' faithful stewardship of the resources given into our care. The Treasurer is responsible for oversight of the overall integrity, completeness and accuracy of the Yearly Meeting's finances and financial records, and for reporting on the state of the Yearly Meeting's finances to inform discernment, decision-making, and governance. The Treasurer strives to ensure that the Yearly Meeting's accounts are maintained in a manner consistent with generally accepted accounting practices (GAAP).

Marian has a substantial history and understanding of NEYM. Among many volunteer positions, she has served as Recording clerk of Permanent Board and run the YM sessions bookstore, as

well as clerking her monthly meeting. She brings a strong spiritual grounding to the practical work of finance. In her retirement, Marian is called to assist NEYM through the support and oversight of our finances. Marian's husband, Robb Spivey is currently serving as the Friends Camp Assistant Treasurer and is therefore a check signer. Robb would be released from being a check signer before Marian would be added as a signer on NEYM accounts.

Friends World Committee for Consultation representative, and delegate to August 2024 Plenary – Anna Lindo, Framingham Meeting, year 2027

Friends World Committee for Consultation representative, and delegate to August 2024 Plenary – Briana Halliwell, Vassalboro Meeting, year 2027

Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) representatives represent NEYM in the work of the international FWCC, and promote and interpret FWCC's work within the Yearly Meeting. The full Purposes, Procedures and Composition can be found [here](#). The world office has issued a special request to yearly meetings to send rising leaders from younger generations to the upcoming world plenary in South Africa.

Anna and Briana are well seasoned Young Adult Friends interested and willing to step into service connecting Friends from all branches internationally as well as in New England.

The above *First Readings* will come forward for *Second Readings* and hopefully approval at the Permanent Board meeting on 9 December. Please contact me with affirmations, questions, or concerns immediately so follow-up can be done prior to that meeting.

Faithfully,
 Jacqueline Stillwell (Monadnock)
 Clerk, NEYM Nominating Committee
 (603)933-2608 or jacqueline.stillwell@gmail.com

Nominating Committee members: Sara Smith (Concord), Anna Lindo (Framingham), Beth Hansen (Westerly), Chris Gant (Beacon Hill), Tim Lamm (Worcester), Kathy Malin (Smithfield), Martha Schwope (Wellesley)

To: Permanent Board

From: Susan Davies, Permanent Board Clerk

Subject: Permanent Board Clerk's recommendations for service

November 28, 2023, names brought in Advance Documents for the December 9, 2023 Permanent Board Meeting

First Reading and Recommended for PB **Approval** of service on the **NEYM Naming Committee**, which nominates members to serve on the NEYM Nominating Committee:

Darcy Drayton, Souhegan Friends Meeting (Preparative)

Notification of continuation of service as Elder to the **NEYM Noticing Patterns workgroup**:

Fran Brokaw, Hanover Friends Meeting

REPORT OF THREE RIVERS VISITING COMMITTEE TO PERMANENT BOARD 12/1/23

The Three Rivers Visiting Committee's work since our last report to PB has included two meetings with Three Rivers co-hosts (Kristina Keefe-Perry, Lisa Graustein, and Emily Savin) and a listening session with Fresh Pond Meeting to discuss their history and process with Three Rivers. Each of us on the VC has also continued to attend the Worship Group's Thursday worship and Sunday vespers. Some of us also attended a worship debriefing session for conflict resolution and a community building meeting. We have felt very welcomed by Three Rivers Worship Group and by Fresh Pond Meeting (who initiated with us) to engage in our process of listening and discernment.

The Visiting Committee has also invited questions and concerns regarding Three Rivers from the Permanent Board by way of a dedicated YM email address. We have received a small number of questions/concerns and an affirmation of the Worship Group's effort to become a Monthly Meeting. We welcome more input and will address what we have collected in our final report. The email address is visiting@neym.org.

Our next steps are:

- 1) a **listening session** with the Three Rivers Worship Group community and the VC on **Thursday, January 18, 2024**, via Zoom. This is planned as an opportunity for the community to share their thoughts about the Three Rivers Worship Group with special attention to nurturing their spiritual lives.
- 2) a **listening session** with the Three Rivers Worship Group community on **Sunday, January 28, 2024**, and the VC via Zoom. The purpose for this gathering is the same as the aforementioned session but hopes to capture those who attend Vespers regularly and/or those who may not have been able to attend the January 18 session.
- 3) a **question-and-answer session** open to all of Salem Quarter and PB on **January 14, 2024, at 1 p.m.** via Zoom. Members of Three Rivers and Fresh Pond will answer questions submitted by members of Salem Quarter and PB by noon on January 3, via the VC email address (visiting@neym.org)

The VC encourages all members and attenders of Salem Quarter and PB to explore the Three Rivers Worship Group's website, which contains much valuable information, and to attend their worship, to learn more. We believe this will be helpful both for the question-and-answer session and for all future discernment about Three Rivers Worship Group.

The VC hopes to have a further report for the February 10, 2024, PB meeting after we have absorbed and synthesized all the information already learned from the Worship Group and Fresh Pond Meeting, and gathered in the sessions described above.

Respectfully submitted with hope and with gratitude for ongoing revelation,
Regina McCarthy
Ellen Neelands
Mary Zwirner

Informational report to Permanent Board

December 2023

Meeting Care Day

Submitted by NiaDwynwen Thomas, Program Director

Nia@neym.org

We held our second “Meeting Care Day” event on November 11, 2023, at Moses Brown School in Providence, RI. The first Meeting Care Day was held in February 2020, two weeks before Covid closures.

Meeting Care Day is a day-long in-person gathering, specifically focused on service to one’s local Quaker meeting or community, centered on training and consultation, with space for worship and informal connection-making. This year, we were able to offer five workshops:

- *Best practices in nominating* (led by Jackie Stillwell and Martha Schwope)
- *Serving as recording clerk* (led by Brian Drayton)
- *Meeting outreach and communications: websites, social media, and email lists* (led by Kathleen and Maille Wooten)
- *Elements of Quakerism: an adult religious education experience for outreach and inreach* (led by Phil Fitz)
- *Pastoral care* (led by Noah Merrill)

In addition to workshops, members of the Accompaniment Group hosted a lunch-time conversation about the particular issues at hand in small meetings.

Fifty-three Friends participated coming from twenty local meetings. It was especially exciting that there were ten Friends in attendance who had never participated in an NEYM event before and who were not yet on our newsletter mailing list, but rather had heard about the event from someone in their local meeting. Along with Friends newer to service within their local meeting were Friends with decades of experience to draw upon in group conversations.

Formal and informal feedback from participants was consistently positive. When asked how likely participants are to recommend the event to someone in their meeting, the average evaluation response was 9.89 out of 10. On our registration system, which also allows participants to rate the event overall, all respondents gave it a 5 out of 5 stars. Of course, the most valuable feedback will be the growing ripples within meetings over the coming months.

Although in-person events require more resources and preparation than online-only events, Meeting Care Day is a relatively “light lift,” requiring about two percent of the staff hours needed for Sessions.

We plan to offer this event again next fall in a different part of New England. Although it is not yet known which workshops will be offered, it is clear there is strong interest in pastoral care, which was by far the most subscribed offering.

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

April 2019 Noah's prayerful preparation for his visit to Ireland Yearly Meeting was much valued. In his lecture, he challenged us to go back to the teaching of George Fox, and to have faith to follow the leadings of the Spirit. We are glad Noah had the opportunity to visit Ballinacorney, the burial place of Job Scott - E.H. Bewley Ireland T.M. cloth

Putney Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

P.O. Box 381 Putney, VT 05346

FWC Section Meeting 2019, 23rd day 3rd mo Lake Doniphan, MO

Dearst Francis in NEJM,

Noah has been faithful among us. He has received prayers for us. He has taught in and has helped build our Travelling Ministry Corps. Most faithfully he has remained open to the promptings of the Spirit. Thank you dear Friends for all your efforts in the corporate support of individual ministry. Bernardo Sanchez Ephe. Clerk, FWLL Americas

Dear Friends,

Noah Merrill is a member of Putney Friends Meeting whose spiritual wisdom is cherished. We recognize the gift of ministry given through him. We are grounding his service through nurture and oversight. Noah's work is the work of the Meeting.

Noah's faith has served as an instrument of Love in times of trouble. He seeks to live in and be open to the Life and Power of God. We witness this.

Under the guidance of the Spirit and with the prayers of Friends, may his service among you be faithful.

With Noah, we send our loving greetings.

Signed on behalf of Putney Friends Meeting,

Carol A. Forsythe

Carol Forsythe,
Presiding Clerk
Putney Friends Meeting

New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
on behalf of Senior Moyallon Camp 2019:
Judith Poole (clerk) Jonathan Poole (assistant clerk)

Joyfully reaffirmed at Northwest Quarter 3 Dec. 2016
Envelope Market
Minute approved Sixth Month 10, 2016

Dear Friends,

10/14/16

The time we spent with Noah on the evening of October 8, as well as at, and after Meeting for Worship the next day was very special. We thank you for encouraging him to share his gift of ministry with us. We gained a better appreciation for the work of Yearly Meeting and the gifts and strengths of our own meeting as well.

On the Light, Greg Pahl, co-clerk, South Starksboro Friends Meeting

Para los Amigos de Putney Friends Meeting Enero 2018
Ha sido una gran bendición y un privilegio el haber tenido a Noah
entre nosotros compartiendo todos sus ministerios y como el ha sido
guiado por el Espíritu Santo muy profundamente, agradecemos a Dios
por permitir esta visita y fortaleza para nuestros hermanos. Que
Dios los Bendiga. Atentamente. Ruben C. Maybana Torres. - INELS
7/24/22 Grupo de Programación C.L.V.M.

Dear Friends, Thank you for nurturing the Ministry of Noah Merrill. Noah joined us
for a deep & refreshing worship followed by time of sharing from each individual and
about Keene Friends Meeting. We appreciated the chance to learn more about NEYM
2/25/18 with love, grace & respect
Dear Friends, clerk
We, the QVS Boston Fellows, were deeply grateful for Noah's brief but powerful
presence at our midyear retreat. Noah helped us weave
together stories of Early Friends with our own, and helped
us better understand our place in QVS and QVS's place in

Quakerism. He gracefully made space for our questions, and then sat with us
in them. His wisdom, commitment, and passion inspired us. His words and love
will stay with us for a long time to come. With gratitude, QVS Boston house '17-18

4/22/18

Dear Friends,

We are extremely appreciative for the guidance
provided to us by Noah, in facilitating our challenging
decision making process re. our meeting's mission and
facilities. He did so with much wisdom, grace and
humor in moving us forward. We look forward to

deepening our continued relationship in the Spirit.

Matthew Shorten, Clerk, Worcester Friends Meeting

5/17/2018

Dear Friends, It was a blessing to have Noah join us for the final
residency of the NWFF program. He came well-prepared, having learned
a great deal about the program in advance and participated in a series of
conversations with members of the teaching team. The group opportunity he
facilitated on Saturday morning offered us a powerful Biblical story to guide
our exploration of our Spirit-led talk of finding and opening the deep
wells of spirit described in our tradition. Noah was humbly, generously,
and openly present. We're deeply grateful that he was able to be available
to a weekend event centered on the learning shared by participants.
With gratitude, Marcelle Martin

Gracias damos al Señor por tener la oportunidad de recibir entre nosotros a Noah, un amigo muy espiritual que llenó nuestras vidas de esperanzas con sus testimonios y con su búsqueda continua del espíritu, todas quedamos impresionados con su luz y supe conquistas simpáticas y afectos, cuyo corazón es un imán que atrae la bendición de todos y da bendiciones diuinas.

Que el Señor lo bendiga siempre y lo use.

En su luz.

Raouf Bouffria
President of F.W.C.C. Colombia

We give thanks to the Lord for having had the chance of receiving Noah among us, a very spiritual Friend who filled our lives with hope through his witness, and by his constant seeking of the Spirit. We all remain marked by his light. He knows how to conquer our affection. His heart is a magnet that ~~attracts~~ ^{draws out} the goodness of all, and spreads divine blessings.

May the Lord bless him always, and use him.

Reaffirmed 2015
a thousand times over,
Way of the Spirit
Participant + accompanier
Beth Wood

Ranvir Gargya Jangra
Presiding Clerk CYM

Nakuru Kenya April 2012

Our corporate worship has been greatly blessed and enriched by Noah's message. He is adding greatly to this opportunity for worship and fellowship among 900+ Friends worldwide.

Thanks be to God

Jane Snyder
Presiding Clerk F.W.C.C. Section of Americas
Quinta Paula, Mexico

Once again, we are blessed by Noah March 2015
He has served with inspiration on Executive Presence among us.
Committee. We look
forward to his ministries with our new Visitation program.
Jane Snyder
F.W.C.C. President's Clerk

Dear Friends, The time we spent with Noah was filled with the Spirit. We were blessed by his presence. The message that the Divine gave thru Noah touched the hearts and souls of those present this evening. Thank you for supporting him in his ministry. He is faithful in his service to Truth.

Anne Olsen, clerk North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservatives 7/14/23
6/2010

Dear Friends,

Noah's spiritual grounding and direct speaking enabled deep sharing in our meeting. He helped us feel hope + community. Thank you so much! Karen Way, clerk Middlebury Friends meeting 10/22/23

Noah Baker Merrill is a member of Putney Friends Meeting whose spiritual wisdom is cherished. We recognize his call to ministry among Friends and other communities.

Noah's faith has served as an instrument of Love in times of trouble. Noah seeks to live in the Life & Power of God with an openness to be led. We affirm his work in building relationships and waking hearts among the people of Iraq, among Friends, and elsewhere.

We encourage him in the ministry, trusting that under the guidance of the Spirit and with the prayers of Friends, his service among you will be faithful and fruitful. To those who receive Noah, please protect and nurture this Friend, for he needs your care.

With Noah, we send our loving greetings.

Carol Forsythe
Carol Forsythe, clerk

Putney Friends Meeting

New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

TODAY, July 17, 2022, at the New London Friends Meetinghouse, 176 Oswego Ave. Rd., in Waterford, CT., we gratefully welcomed and talked with Noah Merrill about Friends' practices and some questions we have. His ministry's vocation is extraordinary. *Carol Forsythe, Clerk*

We welcome this ministry, and send Noah with our prayers and support. We welcome his leading to travel in the ministry, and to build bridges between people. We ask Noah to come back to us and share again how this ministry continues to unfold.

Reaffirmed,

Constance King-Bunny clerk
North West Quarterly Meeting
March, 2010

ENDORSED, WITH GRATITUDE FOR HIS SERVICE, BY NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS. APPROVED BY PERMANENT BOARD; MINUTE 2010-87, 20TH DAY, 11TH MONTH, 2010

Edward D. Baker

EDWARD D. BAKER, CLERK

Queridos Amigos,

Noah Merrill es miembro de la Junta de Amigos de Putney cuya sabiduría espiritual es muy apreciada. Reconocemos el don de ministerio que recibimos a través de él. Apoyamos y supervisamos su servicio. La obra de Noah es obra de nuestra junta mensual.

Damos testimonio que la fe de Noah ha servido como instrumento de amor en tiempos difíciles. Él vive en la intención de mantenerse abierto a la Vida y Poder de Dios.

~~Deseamos que su servicio entre ustedes sea fiel, cubierto bajo la guía del Espíritu y las oraciones de los Amigos.~~

Les enviamos nuestros amorosos saludos con Noah,

Firmado a nombre de la Junta de Amigos de Putney,
Carol Forsythe, Presidente
Acta aprobada 19 del sexto mes, 2016

Afirmado con gozo en la Junta Trimestral del Noroeste
Penelope Wright, 3 diciembre, 2016

Mi querido hermano Noa,
QUE DIOS TE Bendiga y Te guarde;
Jehová' haga resplandecer su rostro
sobre ti y Tenga de ti Misericordia,
~~senoui~~ ~~su~~ ~~caro~~ ~~te~~ ~~su~~ ~~rostro~~, y
ponga en ti Paz.

Recibe mi gratitud y Amor por
el Testimonio que ofreces a los
Cuaqueros Cubanos, Oramos por ti
Hermano. que Privilegio estar entre
nosotros " Regresa pronto "

Dios te Bendiga Adalys Hernandez

Una vez más hemos recibido a Noah y su presencia entre nosotros continúa siendo muy enriquecedora. Sus palabras nos hacen meditar y crecer espiritualmente. Es un hermano valioso y su compartir con nosotros ha dado fe de su testimonio y ser guiado por el Espíritu. Esperamos continuar recibiendo su visita.

En la Luz de Cristo
Yerandi Ricardo Reyes

Pastor de la Junta Mensual de Santo Padre

We have been delighted to welcome Noah back to Ireland for Leinster Quarterly Meeting held in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, on 29th June 2019. His thoughtful presentation engaged us all. We wish him well in his ministry and send warm greetings to Friends in Putney Friends Meeting and New England Yearly Meeting.

Rachel M. Bentley Bateman.

Co. Clerk.
Leinster Quarterly Meeting, Ireland
M.


1/7/2020 | Woolman Hill, Deerfield, MA, USA.

Dear Putney Friends: In our gathering this weekend, we explored the theme of "Knowing and not knowing: making space for trust and uncertainty." Noah drew on the testimonies of early Friends such as Bayly Byer, whose joyful last words came alive among

us. He encouraged us to help each other rely on the Guide, whose sure presence we can trust to lead us on paths unknown.

In gratitude for your ongoing support of his ministry, we witness Noah's faithful work among us.

On behalf of the Midwinter Gathering
of young adult Friends in New England,


Philip C. Maurer

8/29/21 Winthrop Center Friends, Maine, USA
Noah brought a deep and profound message in honor of our pastor, Maggie Edmondson's 25 years of service to us. We are deeply grateful for the way he lifted up, not only Maggie but our whole Meeting, as he reflected on the gifts we share with one another.

Shirley Hager,
Clerk →

Report of Ministry from Brian Drayton

10/13/23

Dear Friends,

I am late in making my report to the meeting for 2022; and soon it will be time for a 2023 report. Perhaps you will accept this letter as bridging both. I will be grateful for any guidance or questions you may have for me, either to probe the past, or consider the future of my faithfulness in my calling.

At an October meeting forty years ago, Salem Quarterly Meeting entered a brief minute in their records, recording their sense that I had evidenced a sustained gift in the ministry.

This brief declaration was not an award, nor an accolade, but the affirmation of something like a covenant: the meeting and I acknowledged that we were joint stewards of a concern, mutually responsible for my faithfulness to the gift. The concern might be enacted in different ways over its lifetime; my attention or faithfulness might fluctuate with changing life conditions; the gift and responsibility might someday be withdrawn. The recording was therefore not a mandate to perform a particular set of duties, only a commitment that I would be watchful, day by day, for guidance and for opportunities to use the gift; that I would be diligent in following such openings; and that I would undertake to continue my spiritual formation and learning, so that I could become a more useful instrument in the work, and align myself more and more to it.

Thomas Kelly spoke eloquently about the importance of focusing on a few concerns, and I came to see that the calling to ministry was one of mine, an organizing and constraining fact of life which was a necessary path for me, if I was going to learn how to live, as best I could, as a disciple of Christ. This, naturally, is laid alongside other gifts in my life — marriage and parenthood, livelihood, citizenship, and a few other such abiding concerns. The meeting's acknowledgment that this concern was a true one has helped me not forget my responsibility to the gift, not for a day in the past 40 years — even if in the remembering, I feel convicted because I have fallen short.

Knowing very well that my work is one little thread in the great fabric of service and faithfulness by which the divine life is incarnated in our world, I have sought to understand as well as I can how my bit fits with others, and to learn about my learning in case it may be of any use to others in their pilgrimage. The impulse of the teacher is a deep element in my personality, and so I have also felt impelled to transform my own experience — including my experience of limitations and failures — by reflection, and by setting it alongside others' experience and reflections, joining in, as it were, in the long conversations of our faith tradition, a community that extends backward in time, and around the world. Teachers must be diligent learners, and the experiments in faithfulness of my friends and mentors in this timeless community have been indispensable blessings.

Now, I understand my calling to be "gospel ministry," and I want to say a little thing about what that means, as I have come to see it. A minister is a servant, who acts under orders, but often must figure out how best to understand and implement those orders, and this (sometimes scary) freedom may grow as the minister's experience grows. A minister of the gospel is one who serves the life of the gospel, which is Immanuel — God with us — in ourselves and others; and calling it "gospel" indicates that this living God is inextricably linked with the character and person of Christ, before, during, and after the revelation in and through Jesus.

While the implications of this commitment are not always obvious or easy to identify, still it does constrain us, because thereby we know that we are seeking to know and live by a spirit whose commandment is love of God and of neighbor, who calls us to a perfection as articulated in, for example, the sermon on the mount, and whose being embraces life and death, joy and suffering, human and non-human, now, in the past, and in the future. The minister's "job" is in support of this search.

Traditionally among Friends, the ministry of the gospel was in prayer and speech, under the immediate guidance of the spirit of Christ. But the work of the ministry as Friends understand it is not in preparation of ideas or messages, nor in "leadership," but in listening and inward travail (travel). From this inward work, ministers may find themselves led into a wide variety of modes of working — in meeting, or in homes, or other settings, drawing near to the witnessing Light of Christ in companionship with others, and acting, speaking, or keeping silent as led. When I open a new travel journal, I copy in these famous words of John Woolman, as a reminder of what the work consists in:

Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life, and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they might be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them.

Well, this has been my intent, my understanding of the work I am called to. Sometimes I have been adequate to it, often not. Every year I ask myself in prayer, "Does this concern continue, is there life in it?" I believe that this year the answer again is "Yes." You, to whom I hold myself accountable, may sometime or other disagree, of course, and as I have said, I welcome your guidance.

As to what specifically I have been up to in the line of ministry since my last report, that is fairly easily told.

First, I continue to feel, as I have written to you for the past couple of years, that I need to be writing. This has taken two main forms.

I have continued writing in my blog, Amor Vincat (amorvincat.wordpress.com). This is partly a place for proclamation and teaching for those who find it; it is also a way of letting people into my workshop, as I try to digest, shape, and otherwise grapple with things that I read or hear, in the light of my concern.

I have also been working for the past two years on a book I've entitled *The gospel in the Anthropocene: Letters from a Quaker naturalist*. This has now been fully drafted, and with guidance from a small group of gifted, honest, and enduring Friends I am revising and starting to seek a publisher. This project, which for all its slowness has felt most urgent, represents the convergence of most of my "few concerns," as a science educator, ecologist, minister of the gospel, and critter, dwelling gratefully and inquisitively on this astonishing, little-known planet.

I have not been traveling much at all, but during the past year I have, together with Noah Merrill, convened gatherings for ministering Friends. These seem to be happening roughly quarterly, and we have tried to host them in different places around the yearly meeting, to

enable as many as possible to attend. This is the sort of thing that is necessary if our meetings are going to have a ministry of depth, variety, and power. For this to emerge, the Friends who are rightly called must grow in their gift, and exercise loving interest and care for each other, as ministers always have in the times of Friends' vitality. Meetings also must grow in their discerning love for the service of those carrying this gift, so that the gospel ministry takes its place as a vital ingredient in the life of meetings, one among many manifestations of the work of the Minister, in whom we can be a unity. I feel called to help.

Finally, I have continued this year with my "midweek meditations," which have been some use and refreshment for those who attend

As to what the coming year holds, I am very open. No doubt the book will be a continued task, at least for a while. Other writing projects may emerge: the work on William Dewsbury, which I set aside to work on *The Gospel in the Anthropocene*, will probably become a main focus again. I am also starting to suspect that it will be right to begin traveling more in the ministry, but what form that will take I am not sure. If I am asked to do some teaching, I will accept as seems in right ordering. The "ministry to ministers," which has been a persistent, not to say chronic, part of my concern over the past forty years, is likely also to continue.

I will conclude by quoting from something I wrote a while ago, which still expresses my experience:

Jesus teaches us to expect joy in following him, and in our unity through his Spirit with our brothers and sisters. Take time to experience joy in the call to service, and in times when you have served faithfully. The Gospel ministry is costly; yet if it is a concern you are carrying rightly, it is path of rejoicing, and growing peace. The increase of joy, and of confidence in God's reliable presence, has always been accepted as evidence that the minister has been faithful.

This is not to be mistaken for self-congratulation or a sense of superiority, which are antithetical to the joy of which Jesus spoke. In the inward training that we go through, we come more and more to know how to anchor our life and service in divine love, and find our fears diminished and defeated. We become more sensitive to evil in ourselves, our society, and those we meet. We become more compassionate, knowing the many ways that we are likely to be mistaken, deluded, or limited by our personalities, our understandings, our experience, our culture. We feel it more keenly when we come to recognize the Seed's oppression, and we come to understand Nayler's words, when he said that the spirit he felt "is conceived in sorrow, and brought forth without any to pity it, nor doth it murmur at grief and oppression...with the world's joy it is murdered. I have fellowship therein with them who lived in dens and desolate places in the earth."

Yet even so, we are given along with this a heightened sense of gratitude. We become great in thanksgiving, and feel how gratitude is a taproot of prayer and upwelling life. With Fox we "rejoice to see the springs of life break forth in any," and are free to take delight in the multitudinous evidences of the Life and Light, in other people, in the natural world, even in ourselves. As Lewis Benson wrote, "It is a wonderful thing to be called to the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ"

In Christian love your friend,

Brian Drayton

Encouragements for our meetings in a time of crisis

“...[P]rophetic ministry has to do not primarily with addressing specific public crises but with addressing, in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated.”

– Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*

1. **Remember who you are.** A Friends meeting is not a social activist or advocacy group, a political party, or a social service organization. At its heart, a meeting is a body of people covenanted to steward an opportunity for *worship*—for encountering the transforming power of God together, for opening ourselves to be shaped by these encounters over time, and for accompanying one another with patience and courage as we imperfectly live out the implications of this experience of Divine Love with us in the world, in each aspect of our lives.

From this perspective, how is the meeting’s response to present concerns rooted in, and a reflection of, your ongoing experience of worship together? How can both the meeting’s *process* and *actions* bear witness to the Love of God already at work within the meeting community, and help it be expressed more fully in the world?

In a time when crisis is especially felt—when we don’t know what to do—how can we encourage one another—and invite our neighbors—to return together to the Ground of worship, which is our ultimate refuge?

2. **Remember where you are.** How does this present crisis resonate with the ways the Spirit is already at work in the life and ministry of the meeting? How might the meeting’s response deepen and continue the meeting’s ongoing discernment and particular expression of its unique story and calling, trusting that the same Spirit is at work in all, yesterday, today, and tomorrow? Trust that we will not truly be given more to do than we can carry, with God’s help.

Reflecting on your meeting’s particular location, relationships, resources, and gifts, how might the meeting—and each of its members—respond to the present crisis *close to home* in a way that draws on the meeting’s unique context? How can Friends’ actions now deepen trust, increase resilience, and foster wholeness among those with whom the meeting and its members are already in relationship?

3. **Remember you are not alone.** In considering actions, are there wider efforts in the community—in relationships locally, and in the ministry of Friends more widely—with which Friends locally can connect and share, rather than “reinventing

the wheel”? Are there Friends organizations already involved, who can provide guidance or more detailed knowledge drawn from sustained engagement? Locally, are there trusted people or networks who remain persistently involved, even when concerns are not in the headlines? Remember that sometimes a support role, even an invisible one, is more useful than seeking to lead or to stand out, and that patient consistency is often more healthy than urgent reaction.

When grief or despair threaten to overwhelm us, how can the meeting, or particular Friends, encourage and invite opportunities for *lament*, for acknowledging the depth and breadth of our sadness and anger, trusting that our burdens can be held in the arms of the Spirit when we can no longer carry them?

Remember that our spiritual ancestors show us examples of turning our broken hearts over to God's care, crying out, as so many have done before, “how long will this suffering endure?” Allowing ourselves to grieve our own and the world's wounds can allow openings for compassion and creativity to flow. And remember that we can draw on the testimony, strength, and experience of Friends and faithful people, past and present, who have endured profound suffering and trouble.

4. **Remember to let Love move and guide us.** Do we take care that we are allowing ourselves to be moved by God's Love, grounded in worship, and not from a desire to reduce our own anxiety or grief, or to be seen as being “right”? Do we take care that our advocacy, within or beyond the meeting, does not align with the logic of force—trying to cajole, shame, or pressure people into some particular action, regardless of their conscience?

Especially when we feel strong emotions, a sense of urgency, or the righteousness of our path, do we take care to listen to how God may be speaking to us through the voices or experiences of others with whom we may seem to disagree? In the meeting's discernment, do we seek to truthfully share our hearts and our sense of what we have been given, and then release this to the meeting, trusting that others will listen for how our words might open them to God's guidance?

5. **Remember we are each given a distinct part to play.** Remember that the gifts of the Spirit are expressed in diverse ways, through many people. Friends' experience is that important concerns are often felt and carried by particular people for a long time before they might become corporate commitments, if they ever do. In light of this, how can the meeting support the particular ministry of Friends who may feel *this* concern most deeply at this time, both in assisting them with discernment and oversight, as well as in responding to the call they feel?

Mindful of the authentic limitations of the meeting's capacity at this time—and of the reality that we can't do it all—how can the wider meeting accompany those who feel

this concern most deeply, as they seek to discern and responsibly carry what they have been given? We may find ourselves implicated in one another's faithfulness, caught up in the Spirit's work, as we each seek to discern our distinct part. Consider that responding to God's call to rest and renew, when it comes, is also faithfulness.

6. **Remember the story isn't finished.** Are we mindful that whatever decisions we make in this moment are only part of the process of the meeting's discernment, as it unfolds in our living over time? Are we open to hearing "no," or "not now" or "not yet," when this is the authentic sense of the meeting? As a meeting, can we take what might seem like imperfect and partial steps in faith, trusting that more may be revealed in time, to us and to the meeting? These moments of attention to seemingly small or insignificant things may be preparing us for something more, something we have not yet been able to imagine.
7. **Remember we will be changed.** Remember that, in Friends' experience, the journey of carrying a concern involves both inward and outward dimensions. Friends have found that this journey changes us, and requires sacrifice. Sometimes the tendering of our hearts to feel deeply and walk with our own or others' suffering is an essential part of the journey of faithfulness over time, tempering and preparing us to be more faithful instruments of Love in our living.

Frequently Asked Questions: Youth and Young Adult Ministries

At Sessions this August 2023, some Friends expressed interest in and concern for the ways NEYM nurtures the spiritual life of youth and young adult Friends, and how that work has evolved in recent years. Below is a synthesis of key information which has been discerned and shared in various reports and consultation processes over the past decade, structured in a “Frequently Asked Questions” format.

The purpose of this document is to give more Friends a shared foundation of factual information and context necessary to engage in further conversations and discernment to ensure our youth ministries have the support and guidance needed to thrive into the future.

If, reading this document, you find you have additional informational questions or suggestions for strengthening this document to be a more helpful resource for Friends as we continue this work, please contact Yearly Meeting Secretary Noah Merrill (ymsec@neym.org) and Program Director Nia Thomas (Nia@neym.org).

Q: Is the Yearly Meeting reducing funds for youth and young adult ministries?

A: **No.** In fact, funding in support of programs for youth, families, and young adults in the Yearly Meeting’s operating budget—including staff time, program expenses, and more—supporting youth ministries has only *increased* in recent years.

In addition to sustaining the levels of budgeted funds, including staff time, spent supporting youth ministries including our long-cherished retreat programs, NEYM has recently begun making use of a *Growing Edges Fund* thanks to a generous multi-year financial gift for this purpose. This fund supports projects that are on the “growing edges” of NEYM’s youth ministries, ways to explore new, creative, and experimental possibilities to reach and minister to and with youth and families.

In the past year, the fund has been used to support projects focused on support for Quaker families and parents, as well as to increase outreach to Quaker-curious families with children attending Friends Camp. Looking forward, we hope this fund can also enable Spirit-led initiatives happening locally, service-focused youth offerings, and “bridging” initiatives geared towards teens as they depart high school and step into early adulthood. Since Sessions, these funds have also been offered, as part of ongoing

conversations, to support additional informal support for some younger adults who have expressed hopes for opportunities for refreshment and connection beyond existing programming focused on life-stage-appropriate spiritual formation and vocational discernment for younger adults.

In addition to this fund, conversations and consultation are underway about the possibility of establishing an endowment providing ongoing annual support for youth spiritual formation and ministry activities, both now and in the future.

Furthermore, in the past two years the Yearly Meeting has invested substantial new resources to take proactive steps toward renewed or new engagement with families and youth. A key example of this is the decision by the Permanent Board, at the recommendation of the Program Director and youth ministries staff, to dedicate \$20,000 in funds from the YM's operating reserves to ensure that the YM could provide no-charge attendance to *all* youth at Sessions 2022. This bold effort has been credited by many families (and by youth ministers from multiple monthly meetings) with encouraging families' return to in-person Sessions, and the sustained and increased participation and positivity of many families and youth at Sessions 2023 affirms this ongoing commitment.

Q: I've heard there are fewer retreats being offered than in previous years. Is that true, and if so, why is that?

A: This school year (2023-2024) we are offering the same number of retreats for Junior Yearly Meeting (elementary age) and Young Friends (high school age) youth as well as for young adults as were offered last year. For the Junior High Yearly Meeting (middle school) program, there are one fewer weekend retreats scheduled than last year. This decision was made primarily to create a more manageable workflow for the Coordinator, and to allocate sufficient time to embrace the full scope of responsibilities within the Children and Family Ministries Coordinator role. This decision was also informed by the small number of youth currently participating in this program, where a number of recent retreats have served fewer than ten youth.

Beyond this one shift from last year to this school year, over the last five years, there has been some other intentional reduction in the number of weekend retreats offered. This gradual reduction is due to four key factors:

- **Reduced retreat attendance levels.** As has been reported consistently in recent years, our teen retreats now average an attendance of about 25% of what they were ten years ago. It is important to note that this dramatic decline in

attendance is consistent not only with demographic “waves” within our Yearly Meeting but also across the liberal Quaker world and liberal faith communities in general. This is to say, it is a widespread external reality, not simply a challenge we are facing in the youth programs of New England Yearly Meeting.

Not only are significantly fewer families participating in Quaker meetings and churches at this time, the model of weekend retreats—which comes with so many long-cherished strengths—is also increasingly in conflict with economic and cultural realities for many youth and families. Notable factors include: youth activities which require weekend participation now impacting almost all teenagers, youth and parent exhaustion levels from living heavily scheduled lives, working parents unable to drive long distances, and youth being more risk-averse (less likely to feel comfortable attending a weekend-long gathering for the first time or when they do not know the other participants well).

- **The increase in resources required to offer safe and high-quality retreats at this time.** Over the past thirty years, retreat participant needs have increased. With many families and youth living in increasingly stressful and strained circumstances, many arrive at our events with significant pastoral care needs.

Because an increasing proportion of retreat participants do not have an active connection to a local meeting, more of the outreach, follow up, and basic introduction to Quakerism needed to support these participants falls to coordinators. When families are not connected to meetings (and in many cases when families are connected), many youth and families expect coordinators to play a primary pastoral support role outside of retreats that they are not equipped to play in the longer term. In some of our programs, volunteer capacity has been declining and the burden carried by retreat coordinators has become heavier in many arenas.

The pandemic exacerbated these long-term trends and added health and safety planning and management to the work of offering retreats. Many denominations have seen their version of weekend retreats programs dissolve in recent decades. It is a testament to the incredible dedication, vision, and skill of so many volunteers, parents, youth, local meetings, and, of course, coordinators that our programs continue to be such a source of joy and spiritual sustenance amid these momentous challenges outside of our scope of control.

- While we joyfully continue to offer our beloved weekend retreats, we recognize that **weekend retreats are not accessible or desirable for all youth and that,**

for many youth and families, retreats alone do not provide holistic faith formation and a long-term sense of belonging to the Quaker faith into adulthood.

Because retreats are only one component of the faith formation and leadership development which the Yearly Meeting hopes to help to offer Quaker and Quaker-curious youth, we have a commitment to exploring and supporting other approaches and models that can be offered in addition to seasonal weekend retreats. This requires prioritizing time, energy, and attention.

At the bottom of this document, you will find the *Areas of Focus* developed over several years that guide the Youth Ministries Staff in their shared work which includes—and goes beyond—weekend retreats. While there has been much energy and Life discovered in committing to, sharing widely about, and beginning to grow into these *Areas of Focus* in the past few years, it is clear that this is long-term work, requiring diligence, adaptation, patience, creativity, conversation, and partnership.

- A final consideration in setting the retreat schedule for the school year is **a commitment to creating manageable workloads for staff to do high-quality work at a sustainable level of stress and activity**. While many Yearly Meetings and Quaker organizations are confronting widespread burnout and high staff turnover, we strive to support healthy, realistic expectations for all staff.

A reality that may be invisible to many Friends is that some previous youth coordinators worked far beyond the number of hours required or budgeted for their terms of employment, essentially volunteering hundreds of hours of service each year in addition to their staff role. While there is so much to be grateful for that was made possible by these tremendous contributions, it is not appropriate for our Yearly Meeting to expect current and future staff to be willing to do this, or enjoy the life circumstances that allow them to contribute consistently in such a sacrificial way.

As we are now in a time of staff transitions, this is an opportunity for the Yearly Meeting to stand by its commitment to inclusive leadership development, making space for staff with family and other substantial commitments to succeed in their service.

Q: I've heard concerns that there are insufficient volunteers willing to serve as staff for our youth programs. Is this true?

Over the last decade, recruiting enough well-qualified volunteers to serve as youth programs staff has been an increasing challenge despite extensive time spent on recruitment efforts.

Some older Friends who have served these programs for decades have stepped back due to the impact of aging and the need for more rest. Many working-age Friends face barriers to serving a week-long event in the summer due to limited time off and the need to avoid loss of income from time away from paid work.

Coming out of Sessions this year, recruitment is a key challenge being held by Sessions planners and options—including offering financial stipends to a much larger group of volunteers—are being actively explored.

Q: With whom can I share my hopes, concerns, offers of service and resources, and insights?

Kara Price (kara@neym.org) serves as the Children and Family Ministries Coordinator.

Drew Chasse (drew@neym.org) serves as the Interim Young Friends Coordinator while the search for the new Teen and Outreach Ministries Coordinator is underway.

Nia Thomas (nia@neym.org), Program Director, supervises the youth ministry staff and has primary responsibility for young adult-specific programming while the Teen and Outreach Ministries Coordinator search is underway.

Noah Merrill (ymsec@neym.org), Yearly Meeting Secretary, has overall responsibility for the Yearly Meeting staff and care for the wider ministries of the Yearly Meeting.

Contact information for the Clerk of the Youth Ministries Committee of the Yearly Meeting will be available as soon as the role is filled (as of 11/2023)

Areas of Focus: Youth Ministries Team

[These Areas of Focus reflect the guiding priorities for the ongoing service of the Youth Ministries staff of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends. This articulation was first shared with youth, families, and meetings, along with a letter inviting partnership and conversation, in July 2020, and arise from consultation, discernment, and learning over several years prior.]

- 1. Provide youth with flexible opportunities for spiritual nurture, faith formation, loving care, and relationship building**
 - a. Experiment with methods beyond big group weekend long retreats
 - b. With YFs, shift towards localized “youth group” model, building partnerships with local meetings
 - c. Provide a consistency of care and sense of belonging for current participants even as forms change

- 2. Increase skills, motivation, and capacity of local meetings to support the faith formation of youth and families**
 - a. Help meetings grow in the purposefulness and effectiveness of their youth ministries
 - b. Help meetings connect the dots between ministry for their youth and families, engagement in their local community, and justice concerns
 - c. Help more Friends without school age children better understand how this pandemic and related challenges have affected and are affecting families and youth and how to be responsive

- 3. Nurture and develop the leadership of seasoned and emerging youth ministers and religious education teachers**
 - a. Offer opportunities for reflection, connection, and mentoring
 - b. Seek to grow generative partnerships that will serve more youth and families across New England

- 4. Empower Quaker parents**
 - a. Both directly and through our relationship with local meetings, encourage practice of the Quaker faith at home
 - b. Amplify the experiences of Quaker parents and families in places where it can inform Yearly Meeting decision making throughout the year

- 5. Share the story of what is emerging within our vibrant, resilient, and multigenerational faith**
 - a. Communicate regularly with Friends outside the “youth ministries box” about “the wide bridge” we are building so more people hop on



NEW ENGLAND
YEARLY MEETING
OF FRIENDS
QUAKERS

Puente de Amigos Committee

Procedures for Approval for Visitors to Cuban Friends

This document summarizes the steps to be taken for approval of travelers from NEYM to Cuba through the Puente de Amigos process. Legal as well as spiritual aspects of the process must be followed for right order. Careful spiritual discernment is important. Puente Committee maintains several other more detailed documents which are equally important to the inter-visitation process.

1. Letter of interest from traveler to Puente Committee and request for clearness from monthly meeting (MM), including the spiritual intent of the journey.
2. Puente clerks inform the Permanent Board (PB) of the general information (meeting, timing, etc.) and request approval in advance of individual clearness and Puente approval.
3. Monthly meeting Ministry & Counsel committee (or other committee as appropriate) considers each traveler and if deemed clear, forwards to MM meeting for business. MM clerk forwards minute of approval and letter of introduction for each approved group to Puente Committee and to quarterly meeting(QM).*
4. QM (or clerk of QM) approves each traveler.*
5. Puente Committee further discerns clearness of each traveler and, if approved, provides orientation/advice to prepare for the trip.
6. Puente Committee seeks Cuba Yearly Meeting approval, formal invitation and visas for travelers.
7. PB clerk or presiding clerk of NEYM approves travelers, signs clerk's letter, creates transmittal letter(s) as needed for donations and forwards list of approved travelers to PB.
8. Upon their return, travelers return signed letter of introduction or travel minute to Puente Committee, MM, QM, and PB.

*Quarterly meeting approval is required only for those with a travel minute.

Approved by Permanent Board, September 19, 2019

Memorial Minute for Richard W. Regen

Richard W. Regen was a sojourning member of Martha's Vineyard Friends Meeting. He and his wife Sue have been active members of Rochester Friends Meeting, near where they lived year round during his career as a middle school guidance counselor. They have also been members of Martha's Vineyard Friends Meeting, which they helped create in the 1970's. Rich's Quaker family from New Jersey have had a house they named "Storks Nest" overlooking Squibnocket Pond since the 1950s, and Rich and Sue have long been coming there with their family during the warm months of the year. They usually shared "Stork's Nest" with the Martha's Vineyard Friends Meeting for a Sunday Meeting for Worship followed by a potluck, often beach time and kayaking, and always the many birds, especially the beloved swans on the pond. They continued spending time on the Vineyard even after their move in 2015 to Collington, a Kendal affiliate, where Rich's Memorial service took place.

Rich was always careful to provide pamphlets for new attenders and those wishing to learn more about Quakerism. Rich's messages in meeting for worship were always a deep sharing of what was working in him personally, sometimes inspired by *A Course in Miracles*. Rich and Sue have often been especially helpful to Friends needing support during difficult times in their lives. One member wrote a poem reflecting Rich's profound love of nature within memories of visits to "Storks Nest". And Friends remember near rise of meeting one bright morning when Rich's strong, clear voice sang that great hymn, "How Great Thou Art". Love and Gratitude sustained them in their lives.

Rich's memorial service, on October 14, 2023, was well attended by family and friends and on zoom by Friends from Rochester Friends Meeting, as well as by Friends from Martha's Vineyard Meeting. At the Memorial Service Rich's family spoke of his generosity, his love of family and community. His wife Sue spoke especially of his love of music and the love they shared for each other during their 61 years of marriage. Martha's Vineyard Friends Meeting looks forward to seeing Sue in Meeting for Worship when she returns for visits to "Storks Nest" with her family. As Friends gather in worship and in sharing, Rich will join in spirit, never forgotten.

Accepted at Sandwich Quarterly meeting on 10-25-23
Lee M. Hamilton, Clerk

Approved by Meeting
Robert J. Laskowski
Presiding Clerk

10/24/2023






2023-12-09 PB Minutes

Final Audit Report

2024-03-04

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