

Tuesday Afternoon

6.1 Jonathan Vogel-Bourne (Friends Meeting at Cambridge) prayed us into worship,

Jonathan energizing us with a call-and-response of *Amen! Hallelujah!* and giving thanks for blessings, even those that don't feel good. He asked God, in this moment and in this time when walls are coming up everywhere around us, to hold us.

6.2 Epistle

We heard the epistle from Wilmington Yearly Meeting.

"We gathered this year, in Maryville, Tennessee, knowing that at the rise of Yearly Meeting we would be diminished. Through the course of discussions over the year since our last annual sessions we have wrestled with the expressed desire of several Meetings to disaffiliate from the Yearly Meeting, their Quarterly Meeting, or both.

Our way forward during these sessions was laid out for us:

...because there are Friends in our Yearly Meeting who cannot remain in fellowship with those holding other points of view related to scripture, it is time to consider moving toward separating peacefully and lovingly. If it's time to say goodbye to one another, then let's do it in love. If we cannot reconcile all opinions, let us endeavor to unite all hearts—by loving God and loving Jesus.

As we considered, by turn, the requests of five Meetings to disaffiliate with the Yearly Meeting, we were covered by a spirit of love and humility. Mixed within that worshipful love for God and brotherly love for one another, however, was deep grieving. How do we reach an understanding of what has happened to us? What do we do with our shared history? How do we part ways with kindness, forbearance, and blessing?

In the act of mourning our separation while blessing our disaffiliating Meetings, Friends surrendered our desire to lecture and judge, to make our own special points, to win over other Friends. We agreed that Biblical interpretation is at the heart of our uneasiness and distrust, and that we are not able to come to the same place in how we read the scriptures, or in how we view the autonomy of the Monthly Meetings and the authority of the Yearly Meeting. This is evidenced by our disagreement regarding the proper Christian understanding of marriage.

Both those remaining, and those disaffiliating, acknowledged that each group was acting with integrity, from a deeply-held commitment to faithfulness, striving to live the faith of Friends as they had learned it. Perhaps if we had been more surrendered to Christ's teaching, division could have been avoided."

6.5 Staff Reflections

Nia Thomas has been serving in as Young Friends & Young Adult Friends coordinator, and this spring she took on the newly created role of Quaker Practice & Leadership Facilitator. She is trying to act as a map for people, letting them zoom out and see what lies past the edges of our Quaker world and to zoom in and let seekers find their way around their own small Quaker neighborhoods.

Maggie Nelson is serving as Young Friends Events Organizer, taking on many of the tasks that Nia carried until recently. She sees herself as a container, hoping to be empty enough to be filled by the lives of young Friends. She reminds herself always that it is not her job to fill the container, but to trust the Young Friends to bring their Light to fill the community. There is a saying, "If you trust the people, they become trustworthy," and that is especially true of high school students. She also sees herself as a bridge. The different threads of our youth programs can sometimes feel like isolated bubbles, and by being present, Maggie helps them all to feel part of the whole circle of Friends.

Gretchen Baker-Smith (Westport Monthly Meeting) is the Junior Yearly Meeting & Junior High Yearly Meeting Coordinator. Her ministry is one of being in the trenches over the long haul. She has been reminded this week of how longevity of relationships across someone's growing up is an extraordinary gift and contains empowering, transforming possibilities. So many of today's leaders were once children in her care, whose potential was clear to her even then, and some of those children now have children of their own in our youth programs. The dirt of her feet is a symbol of the ways that her work with children means getting down in the dirt and knowing their lives. She reminded us to pay attention to those around us, particularly the young people, and welcome them in. Belonging is about being seen and known.

Frederick Martin (Beacon Hill Meeting) is Accounts Manager for NEYM. He spoke to us about integrity. He thanked our treasurer for his honesty and transparency earlier this week. He described the integrity of working together in the NEYM office, and also of remembering, pulling things back together that have been dismembered, including working to include people who may face barriers to participation. The integrity of the NEYM gathering is also very important for him.

Sara Hubner (Gonic Monthly Meeting) finds that sometimes, no matter the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees. As the NEYM Office Manager, she finds herself working with the database and recognizes the names of many people she knows from Sessions. This is a form of prayer as she holds each one in the Light. She is grateful for Friends around New England who keep in touch with her, and for the relationships she is developing with committee clerks, meeting clerks, recording clerks, and others who do so much volunteer work for Friends.

6.6 Requests from Northwest Quarter concerning Gaza and the West Bank

Carl Williams (Plainfield Monthly Meeting) read us minute 2017-46 which Sessions approved two years ago. Northwest Quarter is asking us to reaffirm this minute. (Minute 2017-46 will be inserted here)

Friends approve reaffirming this minute.

Northwest Quarter also asks us to request that monthly meetings and quarterly meetings consider if they have lived into this minute, particularly as it applies to Gaza and the West Bank. This issue weighs heavy on the hearts of many here, but the request now is specifically for meetings to consider this, not to take it up ourselves at this time.

Friends approve making this request.

6.7 Recommendations from Ministry & Counsel regarding the FUM personnel policy

Honor Woodrow (Framingham Monthly Meeting) of the Ministry & Counsel Committee played for us a recording of a message by Mike Huber (??) reminding us that discernment in a meeting for business needs to be a work of love, of listening for God's spirit speaking through one another, even those with whom we disagree.

While M&C was not able to unite with the Racial, Social, and Economic Justice Committee's minute regarding regarding the FUM personnel policy, they found it had life and should be heard by Sessions. The minute can be found in the Advance Documents.

6.72 Friends approved affirming the life in this RSEJ minute and that the sexual ethics portion of the FUM personnel policy causes pain and suffering to LGBTQ+ Friends, and to all Friends by creating an obstacle to all fully being in the beloved community. .

6.74 Ministry and Counsel recommended that Sessions direct the Yearly Meeting clerk to write a letter to the presiding clerk of FUM, expressing the pain and sorrow we feel in the FUM personnel policy policy, and recommending that the FUM governing Board continue to explore a faithful alternative take up this matter.

Friends approved so directing the clerk.

6.76 Ministry and Counsel recommended that Sessions request that our Representatives to the FUM general board, in consultation with representatives from other yearly meetings including those who may have different opinions from NEYM, work to develop a proposed alternative to the current policy.

Friends approved.

6.78 Ministry and Counsel considered the possibility of making a direct recommendation in regards to the Withholding Policy. M&C was aware that if the policy is not approved for another year it will no longer continue and was clear that M&C could not come to unity on supporting the renewal or discontinuation of the policy.

Friends labored with the history of this withholding mechanism, shared feelings about the deep divisions within our community, and with the question of whether or not to extend the withholding mechanism. Friends divisions were clear and Friends did not name a clear path forward. Friends approved having the clerks preparing a minute of exercise, to be brought back Wednesday morning.