

# Wednesday Afternoon

## 8.1 Prayer

Abby Machette (Burlington Monthly Meeting ) prayed us into worship, asking God to help us let go and trust as we step into the hard work before us.

## 8.2 Epistle

We heard the epistle from North Pacific Yearly Meeting.

“Our Friend in Residence warned against seeking to be comfortable: white people should not confuse one's discomfort with lack of safety, at this the room quaked with a gasp of recognition. Language is often a sore point: we wish to be authentic and speak the truth of our experience, but in ignorance we use words that wound others. We know we will make mistakes even as we go forward in a brave way, and feel exasperated by that reality. In follow-up workshops Friends considered how to deal with the manifestations of cultural and systemic bias. We are thankful for the Friends of color that offered resources and open insights while supporting each other in healing. We began to look at a proposed minute supporting engagement to uproot racism. Our worship group discussions helped us look more deeply into the privileges of our educated, Euro-American majority, and to empathize with the sufferings of vulnerable people at the corner of invisibility and exposure.

...We are challenged to make effective witness, to uproot racism from our hearts and our communities now. This is not the time to talk about our ideals; it is the time to act to bring forth actions that manifest ideals we cannot yet see. The Spirit is working among our Beloved Community, leading us to recognize past failures, to acknowledge our progress, and to live up to the Light we now have.”

## 8.3 Visitors

Nancy Shippen, NEYM's representative to the Friends Peace Teams, reported to us about the work of Friends Peace Teams. She invited us to get involved, and to learn more on the Friends Peace Teams website.

## 8.4 Report from Friends Camp

Anna Hopkins, Friends Camp director, and Achieng Agutu, a long-time counselor, told us about what is blossoming at Friends Camp and ways that Friends can become involved. There have been enough campers and camp sessions to put the Camp in good financial shape, and this year 100% of our leadership staff returned to their positions from last year.

They had an on-time start to our summer in spite of a few hiccups, and it was very good that they had the financial reserves to make needed repairs. New initiatives include a leadership skills program, a developing relationship with Vassalboro Meeting, and a growing understanding of what diversity means to the Camp. There are opportunities for volunteers, and the continued financial support of Friends has been very important. Forty percent of families attending camp this year requested some degree of financial assistance, and this year Friends Camp was able to say yes to everyone who applied for financial assistance.

### **8.5 Earthcare Ministry Committee - Proposed Minute**

Last year, Sessions approved a minute (2018-36) calling for us to reduce our carbon footprints by 10% over the ensuing year. ECM has provided an online calculator ([climatecalculator.org](http://climatecalculator.org)) that individuals and meetings can use to estimate our carbon footprints. Friends have done a good job, but if we are to meet target CO<sub>2</sub> levels for the future, greater efforts will be required.

Emma Condori from Bolivia described for us the effects of climate change on the land and the people of her country, and a visitor from Kenya described the devastation she had seen caused by a cyclone.

Earthwitness Ministry proposed a minute) that sets a goal for us to reduce our carbon footprint by an additional 10% in 2020, and Friends of comfortable means to reduce by 15-20%. The minute also urges Friends to devote an hour a week to influence others through such activities as letter writing, education, conversation, or art and music. They reminded us that as Quakers, we should be working not just toward practical steps but should commit to an inner transformative journey in our relationship with the Earth. Our loving actions can invigorate us as well as transform the world.

[Minute to be inserted]

Understanding that this is not a commitment for individuals to each reduce our carbon footprints by 10%, but rather an encouragement to work together towards this overall goal, Friends approved the minute.

## 8.6 Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness Working Group

Friends approve continuing the work of the Elders for Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness through the coming year under the care of NEYM Ministry and Council.

The Working Group asked to continue in its current configuration for one more month. Friends approved.

### Report from the Elders for Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness

**EppChez** We have been asked to report to the body on what patterns we have noticed at Yearly Meeting sessions over the past several days. We recognize that the number of examples we have noticed is far too large to share in our brief report this afternoon, so we will talk about some overarching themes of patterns we noticed and offer examples to illustrate each one. We also intend to produce a written report that more fully captures the noticing work we did this week. Each “we” on this list carries the love of many Friends who registered gratitude or some reopened trauma and shared these with us. This work stretched and tested us, and we will speak hard truths to you, honoring our charge to notice patterns of oppression and faithfulness, and holding New England Yearly Meeting in unconditional love. We have co-created a rocky time here. We are grasping in all manner of directions and hanging on for dear life.

**Polly** We will start our report with examples of patterns of faithfulness that we noticed in our time together. Here is some of what we noticed:

- We hear friends joining the experiment and using the suggested prompts to notice patterns of oppression and faithfulness.
- We see moments of learning happen in business meeting and we moved with grace to new patterns when a harmful pattern was named.
- We feel the faithfulness of our opening celebration which led us into deep worship.
- We heard faithfulness in admitting errors and the loving forgiveness freely given.
- We felt joy at the witness of our plenary speaker and the challenge to un-conform and resist Empire.
- We heard from Friends with ministry in Kenya who prepared for their work faithfully by building relationships and learning about Kenyan Friend’s culture before traveling there.
- We see faithfulness in the Nominating Committee’s decision to allow time for discernment of gifts rather than fill slots.
- We hear the faithfulness of the Clerking Structures and Practices working group completing the challenging work they were given to do.

**Melissa** In looking at patterns of oppression that were noticed, we will present examples in 5 categories: Undermining and Erasure of Experience, Cultural Misappropriation, Avoiding Discomfort/Enabling Stagnation, Humor that Hurts, and The Tyranny of Time.

Undermining and Erasure of Experience is when our words or actions make a Friend question if they truly belong here or ignore a part of someone’s identity that is important to their life. Here is some of what we noticed:

We recognized a pattern of saying ‘us’ ‘our’ ‘we’ when the surrounding statements were not inclusive of the whole body.

- We feel an assumption of economic and educational privilege among Friends in New England Yearly Meeting that is a barrier for Friends from working class backgrounds.
- We wonder about the need for repeated reminders from Friends with disabilities to use accessible language.
- We wonder why it is so hard for Friends to use the proper pronouns for non-binary Friends.
- We recognize patterns of disregarding the inherited trauma that Friends with black, indigenous, latinx, Asian and Jewish experience live with. We hear spirit's invitation to gain a better understanding of the behaviors that bring up these traumas so that, as much as possible, we are not adding to Friend's burdens.

**Polly** Cultural Misappropriation means taking or using things from another culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect cultural context. Here is some of what we noticed:

- We hear white people co-opting African American church culture with shouts of Amen and Hallelujah and we wonder if white Friends can't find spontaneous expressions of spiritual joy and affirmation from our own experience?
- The deeper call we hear is to honor cultures by using language or articles from a culturally specific context only where invited, when invited, and not assume that an invitation from one individual is license to use that culturally specific article however we want to.
- We hear god's invitation to build authentic relationships across cultures while respecting each individual's boundaries.

**EppChez** Avoiding Discomfort/Enabling Stagnation keeps us from staying with challenging emotions and dealing with difficult issues. Friends appear to expend a great deal of energy on this. Here is some of what we noticed:

- We notice instincts kicking in to protect the comfort of white, wealth-privileged Friends over the care and safety of beloved Friends who are directly impacted by hurtful policies. The tone of this presentation is probably playing into that pattern.
- We hear "change is painful" as a way to make change appear bigger and scarier than it needs to be, and prioritizes the discomfort of those of us who are content with the status quo over the current painful experiences of those who are not members of the dominant group.
- We see a pattern of setting constraints in advance of difficult discussions and moving on quickly out of fear of conflict.
- A way we see us using power is by shouting, "that Friend speaks my mind" to pile on to a statement, possibly preventing others speaking their Truth if it is not in agreement with the group.

**EppChez** Humor that Hurts. Keeping in mind that nearly all humor is culture-specific, humor used by the dominant culture can be hurtful, insulting, dismissive, and evade real engagement. Here is some of what we noticed:

- We hear laughter each time the idea of consent around touch is raised.
- We feel confused at jokes used to pull us out of tender holding in difficult moments, such as when members of the body notice and name instances of oppression.
- We hear jokes that lack cultural awareness trigger laughter among white/straight/able-bodied/cis-gendered people that are hurtful to those who do not fit these categories.

**Eppchez** The Tyranny of Time manifests in perfectionism, values staying on schedule more than spirit moving among us, and blocks deep discernment. It also appears in the misuse of time by speaking in

ways that take up more time than necessary and therefore prevents other Friends from sharing ministry. Here is some of what we noticed:

- We see a clerk's table pressed to keep on schedule by an overload of agenda items fitting into limited business meeting time.
- We see power being used to guide the body's discernment in order to stay on schedule and resolve agenda items that we feel would have benefited from further discernment. (Eppchez example)
- We wonder why Friends reporting to the body do not take care to honor the amount of time they've been asked to use.

**Melissa** We know that this experiment makes some Friends among us uncomfortable and felt polarizing among the body. We know that our process was imperfect. And we know that, to the best of our ability, we were faithful to our charge. We are grateful to all of you for engaging in this experiment. Any of these patterns that hurt particularly to hear or you noticed yourself feel numb when thinking about, you are not alone. Please reach out to any of us on the working group; we want to hear you and learn from each other. We love you.

**Polly** Some questions for reflection:

- 1) Many Friends noticed a pattern of white men dominating speaking from the floor. How can we work to overcome our society's mainstream socialization which does not teach men to consider if their words will contribute something vital before speaking and allow other voices to come through?
- 2) What impact does the increased use of Christ-centered language, including references to the cross and crucifixion, have on our Jewish and non-Christ-centered Friends? How are we honoring our theological diversity in this Yearly Meeting?
- 3) What other ways of operating can we begin to cultivate that leave time and space for Spirit to work in us at Sessions and avoid the Tyranny of Time?

**Eppchez** We love ourselves unconditionally. We forgive unconditionally. We feel ourselves loving ourselves unconditionally. We feel ourselves forgiving ourselves unconditionally. We thank you. We thank you. We thank you.

## **8.7 Ramallah Friends School**

Eden Grace of Beacon Hill Meeting, and Global Ministries Director of FUM, introduced Adrian Moody from Ramallah Friends School. He shared with us stories of staff and students at RFS and told us of the school's accomplishments. RFS provides an education unparalleled in Palestine, using the International Baccalaureate curriculum, and has sent students to colleges around the world, including Ivy League schools. They were the first school in that part of the world to educate girls, they educate students with disabilities who are stigmatized elsewhere, and they offer subsidized education to the children not just of teachers but also of operational staff. Their students will be the adults engaging in the peace process in the future. RFS was founded by Friends from New England and continues to exist because of our support.

## **8.8 First reading of epistle & feedback**

LVM Shelton (Plainfield), Brianna Hollowell & Jay O'Hara (West Falmouth), presented a first reading of the Epistle. Friends were invited to give feedback directly to members of the epistle committee.