

New York Yearly Meeting
Spring Sessions—Minutes
April 5-7, 2019 at Oakwood Friends School

Oakwood School, Poughkeepsie, NY
Saturday, April 6, 2019; 10 a.m.

Jeffrey Aaron (New Brunswick), Clerk
Elaine Learnard (Conscience Bay), Assistant Clerk
Karen Reixach (Ithaca), Recording Clerk
Willow Bennison (Brooklyn and Oakwood Friends School), Reading Clerk

2019-04-01. The meeting centered in worship. The clerk welcomed Friends and offered a reflections on leadings (attached). He concluded, “*May words of the Spirit be spoken; may words of the Spirit be heard.*” The clerk then introduced the individuals at the clerks table and welcomed visitors: Hazel Powless, Oneida Nation Bear Clan, elder to the Indian Affairs Committee, and Ashleigh Dodd from Orlando, Florida, who has attended NYYM Summer Sessions and is a healer.

2019-04-02. Don Badgley (Poughkeepsie) welcomed Friends on behalf of the Host Task and Nine Partners Quarterly Meeting. He counseled us to listen to messages from the Spirit. He invited Friends to attend the Nine Partners gathering, May 5, opening with worship at 10:30 and program “Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change” at noon, with Buffy Curtis and Liseli Haines as presenters.

2019-04-03. Chad Cianfrani, Head of Oakwood Friends School, warmly welcomed Friends and offered a brief message on the connection of the School with NYYM and with Quaker values.

2019-04-04. Buffy Curtis (Mohawk Valley MM) acknowledged the original inhabitants—the Waping or Wappinger and Mahican—and noted the negative impacts of the Salt Water people (Europeans) on these nations. She offered gratitude for the native nations endurance, gifts, and continuing care of the land today. Her remarks are attached.

2019-04-05. The reading clerk read the roll of regions, monthly meetings and worship groups. Friends stood as their meetings were called. All regions were represented.

2019-04-06. Emily Provance (15th Street) and Joe Garren (Brooklyn) described the Creating Generous Congregations workshop at Powell House August 16-18, 2019, and

urged Friends to take advantage of this opportunity. Emily provided background: NYYM is dual affiliated with Friends General Conference and with Friends United Meeting; she and Joe are representatives to FUM, which is affiliated with a Mennonite group, Everance. The organization has been developing programs on the relation of Spirit to money. Joe Garren observed that Everance helped Pendle Hill turn around its finances.

2019-04-07. The clerk introduced Bridget Bower (Perry City), clerk of General Services Coordinating Committee, who brought forward the business of the section.

2019-04-08. Laura Cisar (New Brunswick), NYYM treasurer, reviewed the financial status of the Yearly Meeting as of December 31, 2018, (on the NYYM website and also attached). She reported that in 2018 95% of income was received and slightly over 100% of budgeted expenses were incurred. The budget shortfall was \$35,194.76, largely due to a deposit to Silver Bay YMCA for summer sessions. She noted that the footnotes are now at the bottom of the sections and explained the report on the Sharing Fund and the designated use funds.

She explained the draft of the financial report for March 2019. The income for Silver Bay (contributions and goods and services) is significantly larger because of the changes related to Pay-as-Led. Covenant donations from meetings stand at 12%, which is lower than at this time last year. Financial reports for each month are posted on the website.

2019-04-09. Mary Harpster (Rahway & Plainfield), clerk of Financial Services Committee (FSC), provided an overview of the process of developing the 2019 budget. At 2018 Summer Sessions the body approved hiring a full-time staff person, along with a number of local coordinators, to work with youth and young adults and directed Financial Services to include this position in the 2019 budget. In recommending this new position, Personnel estimated the increase to the yearly meeting budget to go from two part-time employees to one full-time, with related expenses, would be approximately \$50,000. In actuality, once the budget was fully analyzed, the increases turned out to total \$135,000 in 2019, with increases every year thereafter.

FSC drafted a proposed 2019 budget as directed. In order to cover the projected increase, it was recommended that funds be drawn down from the invested funds of the yearly meeting. This budget was presented at Fall Sessions but was withdrawn, as there was discomfort with drawing down the invested funds. Financial Services Committee was asked to discern further.

Because the proposed budget was withdrawn, the process for developing an interim budget until Spring Sessions was triggered. That budget basically continued the 2018 budget with a few tweaks. The interim budget has continued until Spring Sessions, at which time Financial Service Committee is presenting a new budget.

2018-04-10. Mary Harpster offered considerations regarding income and expenses that shaped the revision of the proposed 2019 budget:

Income from Monthly Meetings is essentially flat, based on information provided by the constituent meetings of our Yearly Meeting. Contributions from individuals has grown over the last decade with the establishment of the Development Committee, but is not projected to continue to grow at the same rate. With Pay-as-led, Sessions income is hard to predict and could have a possible significant negative impact on our ultimate bottom line. There is approximately \$1 million in unrestricted invested trust fund principal that could be liquidated to fund operations. However, this principal currently creates \$58,000 in income towards operating expenses. Liquidating principal would reduce this annual income forever.

Discretionary increases to expenses have been minimal. The big increase over 2018 is from the Summer Sessions contract. Since we do not know how Pay-as-Led will go, we have budgeted to break even (see Summer Sessions Payment under income). At the request of Ministry Coordinating Committee (MCC) there is a \$2500 increase to Powell House in lieu of the requested \$5000; MCC also reviewed their budget and provided cuts to other lines to partially fund this request as well as using about \$1,000 from Meeting Visitation Fund.

Outreach Working Group line, which is no longer a working group, contains funds to undertake the next steps recommended by the working group. Manhasset MM has pledged three years of funding towards this project. This is in addition to what is in the YM's budget.

2019-04-11. Based on the lack of any increase in income sufficient to pay for the new position, and taking into account the uncertainty of Pay-as-Led, Financial Services Committee recommends that the new position not be included in the 2019 budget. Work is underway by staff and committees to find ways to do some of the work of this new position within the current budget and resources. Conversations continue about finding the funds for this position.

2019-04-12. The clerk then invited affirmations and concerns from the body: Friends addressed the decision at Summer Sessions that approved a position for a children and youth secretary. The clerk observed that the decision was made outside the budget process; we are now facing issues that we have not encountered before. Mary indicated that FSC is working toward this goal, and this decision implies a \$350,000 cost over three years. Is this a \$350,000 problem or a \$350,000 opportunity? What is our priority? Could we re-designate income? Would Friends contribute more if we took a chance and funded this program? Are we living in terms of risk vs abundance? Why are we equating this issue

with finding money; does this separate rather than unite the body? If we are led as a body, we may need to release current ministries. Once we know the impact of Pay-as-Led, might we have greater certainty and be better able to entertain fully funding this program? Friends were invited to sit with the experience of change.

2019-04-13. The Clerk observed that we are not yet in unity on the 2019 budget. He reminded Friends that if we are not able to approve a 2019 budget, the interim budget based on 2018 will continue until Summer Sessions. Friends will have the opportunity to discuss the budget and program further at a subsequent session.

2019-04-14. Mary Harpster indicated that Financial Services has started to think about the 2020 budget.

\$20,400 in trust fund income is no longer restricted. Conversations are occurring with the affected committees and organizations, as promised at Fall Sessions, to discern the right result for each one and the Yearly Meeting.

Timing of budgeting process for 2020. FSC may make changes to the process to allow more time for discernment and feedback before Fall Sessions.

2019-04-15. Reading and approval of minutes occurred as the meeting progressed. The reading clerk read announcements. The meeting closed with waiting worship.

Oakwood School, Poughkeepsie, New York
Saturday 1:40 p.m., April 6, 2019

Jeffrey Aaron (New Brunswick), Clerk
Elaine Learnard (Conscience Bay), Assistant Clerk
Karen Way (New Brunswick), Recording Clerk
Robin Alpern (Amawalk), Reading Clerk

2019-04-16. The meeting opened with quiet worship.

2019-04-17. Clerk Jeffrey Aaron welcomed Friends and introduced the clerks' table. He shared a message he heard from a Friend about creating a loving community. It may be hard, said the Friend, but "my mother always told me: 'You can do hard things.'" Jeffrey then reviewed the changed agenda for the day.

2019-04-18. Emily Provance (15th Street), clerk of Ministry Coordinating Committee, introduced Maddy Kelly (Old Chatham) who described her recent experience at the Friends Committee on National Legislation Spring Training and Lobby Weekend in Washington DC. The Powell House delegation of six youth and two adults attended in-depth training about immigration and the US southern border, listening to personal stories from those who had experienced policy directly. In Washington, they were able to meet with Representative Antonio Delgado and others. They got to know the city and the halls of Congress. Overall, they found the weekend informative, exciting, and empowering.

2019-04-19. The clerkship was changed to Elaine Learnard in order to prepare for a first reading of a *Faith and Practice* revision to create a path to membership with the yearly meeting itself. Elaine added that membership will be the topic for the meeting for discernment at Summer Sessions.

2019-04-20. Emily Provance introduced Jennifer Swann (South Berkshire NEYM, attending 15th Street) and Marissa Badgley (Poughkeepsie), co-clerks of the Alternative Membership Pathways Working Group. They reviewed the history of the working group (attached). Beginning with Summer Sessions in 2016, AMPWG has explored the history of membership from the beginning of Quakerism until now, noting the changed living and social situations of seekers in the present. The group explored the actual practices in monthly meetings, and gathered extensive information on barriers faced by potential Friends who cannot connect with a local meeting. Barriers include frequent travel, incarceration, distance to a local meeting, scheduling conflicts, caretaking duties, and inability of a local meeting to speak to

a person's spiritual condition. In conjunction with the Friends Center for Racial Justice, AMPWG also asked "Knowing that racism has always impacted membership, how do we invent new pathways?"

In developing a new pathway, AMPWG identified ways in which an applicant could demonstrate involvement and commitment to the life of New York Yearly Meeting. The group also identified people and committees in the yearly meeting who could support the new member of the Yearly Meeting going forward. AMPWG produced a summary listing (1) criteria for applying, (2) the process within the Ministry Coordinating Committee to determine clearness, and (3) the process as experienced by the prospective member (attached). AMPWG then collaborated with the Committee to Revise *Faith and Practice* to draft new paragraphs in the membership section of *F&P*.

2019-04-21. Carolyn Emerson (Conscience Bay) gave a first reading of the revised sentences and new passages in *F&P* that define the practice for managing membership through New York Yearly Meeting (attached).

Friends spoke in response with questions about the details of the proposed process. Some Friends greeted this change warmly. Another Friend expressed concern that we have not thought through the consequences of this change—for example, there would now be Friends with no monthly meeting to provide religious education, or clearness committees, or memorial services. Another predicted that the new practice would evolve in unforeseeable positive ways, stating that "Membership is a spiritual change that has nothing to do with technicalities."

As a first reading, this proposal does not require approval.

2019-04-22. Jeffrey Aaron resumed clerkship. He commented on unity of the body of the meeting, which persists through discussion and disagreement. He emphasized the need to listen quietly when someone else is speaking, rather than seeking the Clerk's attention before they are done.

2019-04-23. We returned to the business of considering the budget for 2019. Friends would like to be able to fund a new staff program to support youth and young adults, but there is not enough money in the current budget. Some Friends spoke of spending versus investment; others wondered what we need to sacrifice. Jeffrey spoke of needing a third way. On one hand, we need to be free to find our hearts again, but we also have causes and people who depend on us. Perhaps we are not clear yet about what we really need. But we know there are young adults waiting to find out what we will say. We were reminded that in Summer Sessions 2018 we directed Financial Services to bring us a budget that would support the position we envisioned. For now, we rest in the discomfort of wanting what we

cannot yet have, committed nevertheless to seeking the third way outside this room, through committees, conversations, and monthly meetings. The work continues.

2019-04-24. Minutes were read, corrected, and approved in stages during the session.

2019-04-25. Meeting closed in quiet worship.

Oakwood School, Poughkeepsie, New York
Sunday morning, April 7, 2019

Jeffrey Aaron (New Brunswick), Clerk
Elaine Learnard (Conscience Bay), Assistant Clerk
Mary Eagleson (Scarsdale), Recording Clerk
Malcolm Condon (Oakwood), Reading Clerk

2019-4-26. The meeting opened with a period of waiting worship.

2019-4-27. The clerk welcomed those present, saying it is springtime, and he sees a garden of flowers, all different shapes and colors, all beautiful. He introduced those at the clerks' table.

2019-4-28. Anne Pomeroy read a travel minute for Don Badgley (attached), who is traveling in the ministry to share the good news of experiential faith, both within Friends and beyond. The travel minute was brought by his monthly meeting, Poughkeepsie. Ministry was offered affirming Don's gifts as a speaker. Friends instructed the clerk to endorse the travel minute.

2019-4-29. Mary Harpster, clerk of Financial Services Committee, brought a recommendation from FSC that the 2019 budget presented yesterday be approved. Financial Services Committee is moving forward with the 2020 budget, having heard the concern expressed yesterday that it should include provision for hiring a children, youth and young adult field secretary. It is the opinion of the committee that the 2019 budget presented to us is better than the interim budget on which the YM has operated since the beginning of this year. The budget was approved.

2019-4-30. The clerk presented for consideration a recommendation of the Liaison Committee concerning consent agendas (attached.) The process was never approved by the body; it was adopted from the business community for the sake of convenience. Jeffrey mentioned a concern with the name we use for the practice. We do not approve agendas, and it is a list, not an agenda. The proposal from Liaison is that the list of items should be called “seasoned business items.” It should be prepared by the clerk and published in time for its consideration before the beginning of spring and fall sessions. At Summer Sessions, there will be two lists: seasoned business items and seasoned nominations. The former will be made available by Tuesday of Summer Sessions, and the latter by Thursday.

Jeffrey suggested that the idea was being presented so that any objections that might arise could be addressed by making changes. One concern was that the process would be confusing for those who were not already familiar with the process; another was the timing. The suggested times might not leave enough time for Friends to consider the items carefully. Finally, we need to discern clearly what kind of items we as a body are willing to have on a seasoned list, and which need discernment in the meeting for business. A Friend suggested that if the “seasoned” items were on the list, some might consider it appropriate to bring unseasoned items directly to the body. There was approval for proceeding with the experiment outlined by the report. It remains open to continuing input and discernment.

2019-4-31. Emily Provance, clerk of Ministry Coordinating Committee (MCC), spoke of the ministry of Rebecca Schillenback of Poplar Ridge. She explained the yearly meeting’s process of recording gifts in ministry. The purpose is to recognize that a Friend holds gifts in ministry which are for the community.

Emily read the following letter from Rebecca’s clearness committee to MCC:

Dear Friends,

The Committee to Record Rebecca Schillenback’s Gifts in Ministry in NYYM has completed its work, and joyfully recommends that Rebecca’s gifts in ministry be affirmed and recorded.

Serving on Rebecca’s committee were Astuti Bijlefeld (Central Finger Lakes Monthly Meeting), Ruth Ann Bradley (Poplar Ridge Monthly Meeting) and Kathy Slattery (Orchard Park Friends Meeting), serving as clerk. Astuti and Kathy took the opportunity to first meet Rebecca at Farmington Scipio Spring Gathering on May 19, 2018, to begin to know each other and the recording process. Ruth Ann was not able to be at this meeting, but has had a long relationship with Rebecca in Poplar Ridge Meeting. In May, Rebecca was just completing her studies at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School; she graduated with honors in May 2018 with a Masters of Divinity.

Rebecca's support committee at Poplar Ridge had helped her discern her way forward to attend divinity school while balancing family life with her husband and young sons, and also leading worship at Poplar Ridge once a month. Rebecca is always carefully discerning her way forward in her path of ministry, and is grateful for the help and support of her home community and family.

Rebecca's Committee to Record met again at Poplar Ridge on June 13, where all four of us deepened our conversation around ministry and gifts. More information on spiritual path, course of study and practical experience, questions and growing edges were shared both in person and in follow-up emails.

We heard from the Poplar Ridge community about their long-standing relationship with Rebecca and their understanding of her particular gifts in an informal conversation with Rebecca's Committee to Record following worship led by Rebecca on September 16, 2018, where we had an opportunity to hear her bring the message. Some 30 persons from the Poplar Ridge community stayed after worship; everyone spoke. Several persons spoke of Rebecca's maturation over the years and how privileged Friends felt to be a part of nurturing her growth and the coming to fruition of her calling as a minister.

- *We heard of Rebecca's love of her family, and of her capacity to draw lessons and metaphors from her own life experience in searching for connections and deeper spiritual guidance.☒*
- *We heard of the vibrancy of images in her stories that makes them so memorable, and how she so skillfully weaves them together with scripture and contemporary wisdom which delivers a message that stays with you.☒*
- *We heard that she is approachable, she reaches out; even a person on her clearness committee found that Rebecca had guided her.☒*
- *We heard that feeling the pain of the world, for Rebecca, is modulated by the light showing through in a stream of optimism.☒*
- *We heard an appreciation of Rebecca's mystical nature, seeing the divine everywhere; moreover, she has the gift to express what she sees eloquently, merging scripture with the new, ancient wisdom with the contemporary.☒*
- *We heard that Rebecca is kind; has deep humility; intelligence; a love of learning and scholarship.☒*
- *We heard in different words how Rebecca is openhearted, genuine and authentic, and willing to share of herself.*

The Committee to Record also heard from Rebecca, in a separate meeting. We heard of her gratitude for finding the best path of service for her capacities, and her love of the Poplar Ridge Meeting community and the opportunities she has had for ministry (also interning at Hospice, and Bible Study at NYYM Summer Sessions 2018). We heard, too, of the tension between a call to ministry and a need to contribute financial support for her family. She is living into the question of where her ministry will take her. Rebecca understands, as do we,

that being recorded in the Religious Society of Friends is an important recognition as she continues her calling to the ministry.

We all feel blessed to have had this opportunity to meet and worship deeply together, and to have been part of Rebecca's process. We all look forward to continuing our friendship and support of Rebecca, whatever shape that takes in the future.

At Coordinating Committee Weekend, MCC recorded Rebecca's gifts in ministry and appointed a support committee for her.

2019-4-32. The minutes were approved to this point.

2019-4-33. Pamela Wood gave a brief report on the Greenhaven Prison lawsuit. At Summer Sessions, the Yearly Meeting approved joining the men in the Greenhaven Preparatory Meeting in suing the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to reinstate their business and quarterly meetings. On March 29, Fred Dettmer, as counsel, filed a motion for a preliminary injunction that would immediately reinstate the business and quarterly meetings.

Fred underlined the need for volunteer Friends from outside the prison to join the business and quarterly meetings. DOCCS offered a settlement consisting of daytime business meetings on weekdays, but counsel's opinion is that they need to be in the evenings to accommodate Friends from the outside. Quarterly meetings should be held on weekends, for the same reason. For those reasons, the plaintiffs have not accepted the settlement offer.

2019-4-34. The clerk read two items from Nominating Committee. Friends received a request for release from service on the Friends United Meeting (FUM) Board from Beverly Archibald, Manhattan Monthly Meeting, class of 2019. The appointment of Gabrielle Savory Bailey, Chatham-Summit Monthly Meeting to the FUM Board, class of 2019 was approved.

2019-4-35. The clerk reported on two interim actions taken since Fall Sessions. First, we received a request from the New York State Council of Churches (NYSCOC) to sign on to a petition for bail, discovery and speedy trial reform, and this was done by the clerk and general secretary.

Second, in response to the recent massacre in the mosque in Christ Church, New Zealand, our clerk and general secretary sent a letter to the Christ Church Monthly Meeting. The clerk read this letter (attached.) A response has been received. Friends expressed gratitude for the witness this letter represents, and asked that the letter be shared with the rest of the yearly meeting. Friends directed the clerk to do so. Another suggested that we should, if such occasions arise in future, also send condolences to the congregation affected,

in addition to reaching out to the local Friends' meeting. A Friend noted that the Christ Church incident was widely covered by the media, but within the last couple of weeks, a Quaker meeting in Michigan experienced the arrest of their pastor for a serious crime. This has not been widely publicized, but that meeting must be deeply traumatized, and no one is responding.

The clerk observed that the need for such letters is frequent, and that the responsibility for discerning when letters are needed should not fall on the leadership alone. He asked Friends' support in this ministry.

2019-4-36. Melanie-Claire Mallison, Ithaca, presented the final report from Sessions Committee: She thanked the host task group for their wonderful work in organizing and carrying out these sessions. She also thanked the hosts who had offered home hospitality, Oakwood Friends School, and Nine Partners Quarterly Meeting. There were 118 participants, all adults.

She reminded us that Summer Sessions this year will be pay-as-led. The deadline for registration is May 15, and payment is needed by June 15. After May 15, the minimum pay-as-led rate may not be available. It is true that registration is possible up to the very end of the Summer Sessions, but it will not be pay-as-led.

2019-4-37. The remaining minutes were approved. Announcements followed.

PLEASE NOTE: many of the attachments can be found here:

<https://nyym.org/session/spring-sessions-2019#resources>