

Minutes of the Meeting for Business  
Online via Zoom  
Thursday, July 23, 2020 2:30 p.m.

*Clerk pro tem, Elaine Learnard*  
*Assistant Clerk pro tem, Jeffrey Aaron*  
*Recording Clerk pro tem, Lu Harper*  
*Reading Clerk, Robin Alpern*

2020-07-22. Friends gathered into a period of waiting worship.

2020-07-23. Gina Varrichio (Ithaca), reminded Friends of our Zoom participation practices.

2020-07-24. The clerk acknowledged that we may experience longer pauses between items of business or between messages. She invited us to experience the closeness possible to be found in this virtual session, with patience for pauses and technical difficulties. She let Friends know that clerks and recording clerks may need to go into a “clerk’s huddle” breakout room to confer. She asks that Friends hold the clerks in the Light should this occur.

2020-07-25. The clerk noted that the minute from Monday on the reading of the FGC pre-gathering epistle from Friends of Color is being revised and will be brought to a subsequent Meeting for Business.

2020-07-26. Pamela Wood (Morningside), Clerk of Prisons Committee, spoke of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic upon incarcerated people. She presented a proposed letter, which has been endorsed by both Morningside Meeting and New York Quarterly Meeting, to New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo encouraging him to “give people hope in a time of despair and grieving” by taking steps to protect prisoners and prison staff during the Coronavirus pandemic, including increased coronavirus testing for prisoners and staff, compassionate release, clemency, and bringing the HALT Solitary Bill to a vote. Clerk Elaine Learnard invited questions and thoughts. Witness Coordinating Committee, in its June 2020 meeting, was clear to recommend sending the New York letter in its current form, with the understanding that the basic letter might be revised appropriately for Connecticut and New Jersey later. A formerly incarcerated Friend expressed his gratitude for the yearly meeting’s work in support of incarcerated people. A Friend suggested that we strengthen this and/or later letters by emphasizing more strongly our testimony that we have witnessed and experienced the power of the Light to change lives. With possible revisions to be brought by the Witness Coordinating Committee, Friends approved sending the letter to Governor Cuomo (attached).

The Clerks heard Friends' support of the Clerk sending amended letters (as interim actions) to New Jersey and Connecticut should such letters be ready before we meet again at Fall Sessions.

2020-07-27. Melanie-Claire Mallison (Ithaca), Clerk of Sessions Committee, presented a first reading of a proposed revision to the Committee’s Handbook page (attached) to reflect the incorporation of Junior Yearly Meeting into Sessions Committee. Friends are invited to send

comments and questions to Sessions Committee Clerk Melanie-Claire Mallison or to incoming Sessions Committee Clerk Dawn Pozzi (Rochester).

2020-07-28. Melanie-Claire Mallison (Ithaca), Clerk of Sessions Committee, announced changes to our practices of hosting Spring and Fall Sessions regionally to reduce the impact upon host regions. Beginning in 2021, Spring Sessions will be hosted by Oakwood Friends School, with nearby regions invited as led to supply volunteers during Sessions. Fall Sessions will continue to rotate, but the Spring Fall Sessions Coordinator & Liaison and the Clerk of Sessions Committee will take on the responsibility of finding and booking venues, inviting appropriate regions to provide “day of” support as they are led.

2020-07-29. Recording Clerk pro tem Lu Harper (Rochester) read the minutes. The minutes were approved.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

### **Prisons Committee Letter to NY Governor Andrew Cuomo (as sent from NYYM)**

(see minute 2020-07-26)

July 27, 2020

*“Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.” Matthew 5:7*

To Governor Cuomo,

This time of sickness and sadness is indeed a time we need to show mercy to one another. In that spirit, we urge you to consider showing mercy to those who are incarcerated, especially those who are particularly at risk of COVID-19. As Governor of the State, there are many steps you have the power to take; we urge you to take this moment to give people hope in a time of despair and grieving.

You could encourage the use of compassionate release for people who are elderly and people who have health issues, thereby saving lives.

You could use the power you have to grant clemency.

We encourage you also to consider clemency for the many incarcerated people who are eligible for parole but are denied parole solely because of the “nature of their crime.” As members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), we have witnessed and experienced the power of the Light to change lives. It is important for you to acknowledge that change.

If people in prison have been granted parole, and they have a place to go in the community, you could encourage their immediate release rather than exposing them to the virus while in transitional correctional facilities.

New York State has a very high re-incarceration rate for minor parole violations. Currently this exposes the formerly incarcerated to a greater possibility of infection from the virus. You have the ability to bring a halt to this.

Testing those over 55 years of age is a very positive step, and making this public is reassuring to those on the outside. Because many are being moved to different facilities, it is important that testing continue, not only for those over 55 years of age but for all who are incarcerated. Younger people also have health conditions that make them vulnerable to COVID-19, and they can transmit the virus to staff and others incarcerated with them. This protects everyone associated with these facilities. We urge you to be more transparent and active in this area.

You could encourage the HALT Solitary Confinement Bill to come to a vote as soon as possible. To experience solitary is to experience torture. In this time of COVID-19, people in solitary are also at greater risk of not receiving the medical care they might need if they are infected.

As members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), we know that there are many non-violent ways to address violence that do not escalate into further violence. Programs such as the Alternatives to Violence Project, already offered in many correctional facilities for those inside, could be used for staff as well. Training Correctional Officers in de-escalation strategies has the potential to improve outcomes for all who live and work in these facilities.



Jeffrey Aaron, Presiding Clerk  
New York Yearly Meeting

## **Proposed Revision to Sessions Committee's Handbook page**

### **SESSIONS COMMITTEE**

### **GENERAL SERVICES**

#### **History**

NYYM Sessions Committee evolved from the former Administrative Committee. A major change was made to the constitution of the committee when Nurture Coordinating Committee was laid down in 2018. Subsequently, the Junior Yearly Meeting Committee was put under the care of Sessions Committee and is now incorporated into the committee structure.

## **Purposes & Objectives**

Sessions Committee is responsible for organizing the logistics of Spring, Summer, and Fall Sessions of Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) and New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM). Sessions Committee stewards the right use of the Equalization (EQ) Fund and the process of Pay as Led (PaL), sets sessions registration fees and forms, and manages the committee's finances in accordance with the NYYM Operating Budget.

## **Functions & Activities**

The functions and activities for Sessions Committee are detailed in three separate committee manuals; one for the committee, subcommittees and appointments, one for Spring and Fall Sessions, and one for the JYM Program. All manuals, which include job descriptions of committee members, subcommittees, and various volunteer positions for YM session activities, and timelines and forms for JYM, can be found on the NYYM website, along with the committee's minutes, and the schedule of upcoming NYYM Sessions.

In summary, the committee works, as appropriate, with the NYYM Clerk and Assistant Clerk, the YM staff (Associate Secretary, Communications Director, Digital Communications Director, and General Secretary), YM treasurer, General Services Coordinating Committee, NYYM Trustees, Liaison Committee, and the NYYM regions to handle all operational details of each session including, but not limited to:

- Research, contact, negotiate, and contract services with venues, following current YM guidelines for processing contracts.
- Update sessions forms, including registration, medical forms for youth, evaluations, etc.
- Arrange for the printing and distributing of advance publicity.
- Set all registration fees and assist the YM staff in creating all registration forms.
- Set and distribute session themes and schedules.
- Invite guest speakers and arrange for their needs.
- Invite f/Friends to serve as JYM volunteers and arrange for the needs of Junior Yearly Meeting Program and its participants.
- Assist and report to the NYYM Liaison Committee and General Services Coordinating Committee when requested.
- Respond in a timely manner to concerns and changes in process, focus, and requirements for all NYYM sessions.
- Ensure that all sessions-related expenses are accounted for and paid in a timely manner, keeping within the parameters of the YM-approved Sessions Committee budget.

## **Organization & Method of Appointment**

Sessions Committee includes four routes to membership; [1] at large members, [2] *ex officio members*, [3] representatives named by the YM Coordinating Committees, and [4] the persons

named by the committee to be coordinators and liaisons, who may not be part of any of the other three options.

[1] at large; nine to twelve at-large members appointed for three-year terms, approximately onethird named each year, upon the recommendation of the YM Nominating Committee and the approval of NYYM.

[2] *ex officio members*; the clerk and assistant clerk of Yearly Meeting, and one or two Yearly Meeting staff, currently the Associate Secretary and General Secretary.

[3] representatives; one representative named by each of the NYYM Coordinating Committees, currently General Services, Ministry, and Witness.

[4] finally, Sessions Committee names a Spring Fall Sessions Coordinator & Liaison, a Summer Sessions Liaison, and the JYM Coordinators (two) and JYM Registrar (one). These five persons do not need to be part of the other three options above.

All Session Committee members, listed in these four categories, are expected to not only attend meetings of the entire Sessions Committee, but also to serve on one or more subcommittees. Current subcommittees (2020) include Finance, Handbook & Manuals, Internal Nominating, Junior Yearly Meeting, Summer Sessions Arrangements, and Summer Program. For the good functioning of the committee as a whole, Sessions Committee names a clerk, assistant clerk, recording clerk, and a representative to General Services Coordinating Committee. Again, see the committee manuals for the complete descriptions of the subcommittees and individual job descriptions.

Sessions Committee is an open committee and all Friends are welcome and invited to attend as led.

### **Meeting Times & Places**

Sessions Committee typically meets in early fall, mid-winter, early spring, and at all NYYM sessions. Subcommittees meet as necessary. The clerk of Sessions Committee will especially ensure time is allotted for subcommittees at the fall and mid-winter committee meetings.

### **Finances**

The committee is funded from the YM Operating Budget. Expenses covered include, but are not limited to: committee expenses and travel; venue fees; costs for session needs (advance reports, JYM program materials, name tags, Summer Sessions Programs, etc.); room, board and travel for invited speakers to Summer Sessions; financial support for Junior Yearly Meeting volunteers, the Sessions Committee clerk, the Summer Sessions Liaison and the YM Office Assistant; copying of materials during sessions; a thank you gift to the venue. Expenses for Spring and Fall Sessions include, but are not limited to, deposits for and donations to venues, volunteer support for the Spring Fall Sessions Coordinator & Liaison, and any Spring or Fall Sessions expenses not covered by the monies collected via registrations.

See the Sessions Committee Manual for a comprehensive description of the Sessions Committee budget and expenses.