

Minutes of the Closing Gathering  
July 31, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.  
Virtually via Zoom

Clerk, Jeffrey Aaron  
Assistant Clerk, Elaine Learnard  
Recording Clerk, Lu Harper

2020-07-61. Friends gathered into a period of waiting worship. Jeffrey Aaron (New Brunswick) reviewed Zoom participation practices.

2020-07-62. Marissa Badgley shared a video celebrating Friends' milestones of the last year. Friends re-centered into worship, and shared ministry. Friends expressed gratitude; spoke to the love they have for the yearly meeting; and testified to the living Spirit that has infused our Sessions.

2020-07-63. Clerk Jeffrey Aaron (New Brunswick) made closing remarks (attached). He noted that the documentary we watched has helped us look back at our history, and that we are moving forward to address current concerns. In our Meetings for Business, Friends addressed the remnants of legal slavery still embedded in the US Constitution, raised concerns about unsafe prison conditions in this time of pandemic, passed a budget and made important structural revisions. We remembered dear Friends who recently passed; we wept and laughed and celebrated together in a meeting for grieving and healing and in our worship sharing groups; and we were blessed by the participation of many first time participants.

Jeffrey invited us, quoting Eleanor Roosevelt, to believe in the beauty of our dreams, and to take heart from George Fox's vision of an infinite ocean of light rolling over the ocean of darkness. Jeffrey spoke of Friends' history of leadership in movements for equality, peace and justice, and encouraged us to get into "good trouble," taking inspiration from John Lewis, Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King, Jr., and to continue to do our part to help build the Beloved Community.

Jeffrey announced that we will gather again as we are able, in-person, virtually or a hybrid of both, at Fall Sessions on the first weekend in November.

2020-07-64. We welcomed Elaine Learnard (Conscience Bay) as our new clerk. Elaine noted that although we were not gathered in one place geographically this year, we were certainly gathered and the Spirit moved powerfully among us. She expressed her hope that the things we have learned that allowed us to be more accessible, more inclusive, and more focused, will not be lost as we go forward. Elaine asked Friends for their prayers, love & support in this new role. She understands support as talking to her "when something is not right or clear or when a need is unmet or an injury unacknowledged, not just when things are smooth."

2020-07-65. Melanie-Claire Mallison (Ithaca) presented the final Sessions Committee Report. Cafe Night has raised over \$2800 so far. There were 401 Summer Sessions registrants: 18 youth,

61 young adult friends, 44 returning after a time away, and 117 first time attenders. A Summer Sessions evaluation will be sent out in mid-August. Melanie-Claire introduced the incoming clerk of Sessions Committee, Dawn Pozzi (Rochester).

2020-07-66. Dawn Pozzi (Rochester) presented a report from Junior Yearly Meeting (attached). While registration of youth was low and attendance was sporadic, there were still deep conversations. Facilitators heard what it was like to shelter at home, go to school online, and not be with friends. We heard what the young folks thought about the pandemic, about the divisions in our nation and about the protests in the streets. Dawn expressed optimism for having JYM at Summer Sessions in 2021. She stated that she was glad we offered JYM sessions this year. It is important for the yearly meeting to tell our youngest Friends that we care about them and that we are here for them.

JYM coordinators will be appointed by the Sessions Committee later in the year.

Melanie-Claire shared a list of the Friends who created and made Summer Sessions happen, who helped behind the scenes before and during Summer Sessions, all facilitators and participants, and shared statistics for attendance at events.

2020-07-67. Powell House co-director Regina Baird Haag reminded us that Powell House is still here and eagerly awaiting Friends' return. Due to the pandemic, Powell House has lost \$250,000 in income from programs and rentals. Powell House expects to remain closed until at least November 2020. She introduced our new Powell House Youth Directors, Martin and Sarah Glazer, who bring wonderful energy and gifts to Powell House. Sarah and Martin, members of Rochester Meeting, shared their enthusiasm for the youth program, and announced some upcoming and ongoing events, including Zoom check-ins, guided meditations and virtual conferences.

2020-07-68. The minutes were read and approved.

Before closing, Friends moved into small breakout groups where we reflected on Summer Sessions and envisioned our future; we re-gathered together to share goodbye wishes.

## **Attachments**

### **Clerk's Closing Comments**

*See minute 2020-07-63.*

Friends, we have looked back at our history, with the help of a wonderful, informative and unvarnished documentary. We have also dealt with many current concerns and done good work these two weeks despite adverse conditions. We have addressed remnants of legal slavery still in the US Constitution, a concern about unsafe prison conditions in a time of pandemic, passed a budget and made important structural revisions. We have heard inspired and inspiring reports from committees, staff members and affiliated Quaker organizations, and an inspiring epistle

from Friends of color. We have memorialized dear Friends who recently passed; we wept and laughed and celebrated together in a meeting for healing and grieving and in our worship sharing groups. And we did much more, with the welcome participation of large numbers of first time participants.

A great American hero once said, "*The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.*" That hero, Eleanor Roosevelt, contributed significantly to world peace and to gender and racial equity during and after World War II, another harsh era in our history. During a much earlier era of struggle in a harsh and punitive world, George Fox was nevertheless able to see an infinite ocean of light rolling over the ocean of darkness.

As we struggle to see our way through so many troubles in the world, we need to remember these great leaders and take inspiration from them and from many others, including in our midst. When we are at our best, we find ways to inspire the world with our work. Even in a time of great difficulties, we walk cheerfully across the earth, answering to that of God in everyone. We teach ourselves and the world that there are no "others" by group to fear and hate; that is a human illusion, a disease of the Spirit. There is much to inspire us in our history and among Friends today. We have raised great leaders, disproportionate to our small numbers, in the abolitionist movement, the women's suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, the LGBTQ movement, the indigenous rights movement, the prisoner rights movement, the peace movement, the equal rights movement and the earth justice movement. Quaker insights have been *critical* to the advance of human society for three and a half centuries. We have stumbled along the way, and we may not yet have attained the blessed community that we aspire to, but we move forward and challenge the world. We must hold to the Spirit, even in the face of rising authoritarianism at home and across the world, even while facing the difficult struggles of our own, in particular our Friends of color and our young adults, our future and present.

And yet our numbers dwindle because most people are not the committed idealists that we are. Too many in the world choose the false security of power and rank, financial inequality, white supremacy, and a tenuous sense of control, coupled with fear of its loss as its motivation. How do we change that way of thinking? We gather, we labor together, we commit to the Spirit reflected in our testimonies, we stand tall like John Lewis, who spoke of "getting in good trouble", and like our own Bayard Rustin, who spoke of "angelic [Quaker] troublemakers". In John Lewis's final words published yesterday, entitled "Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation", he referenced Martin Luther King as saying that "*we are all complicit when we tolerate injustice....each generation must do its part to help build...the Beloved Community.*" We are currently in the midst of great cultural change. We may not have yet fully achieved all that we envision, but the world would be significantly worse off without Quakers, few that we may be in number, and we continue to do our work.

In the book *Beauty* by Sheri Tepper, the main character observes that "*God has given us the earth. He is not waiting in the next room, ready to fix it for us if we ruin it. If we do not care for it, no one will....He cares for us, but he does not control what we do.*"

Friends, let us continue to spread light wherever we walk, fixing the world. The values that we espouse are of the Spirit; they make us better and stronger when we work together, lifting each

other up. We welcome all who would walk with us along the path toward the blessed community. I have been honored to serve as your clerk, to have worked with the many remarkable people who pulled these sessions together. And I honor all those powerful Friends working out there every day. I regret that I was not able to accept a nomination for another term as servant clerk at this point in my life, but as was evident these weeks, you will be in good hands.

We look forward to gathering once again at Fall Sessions on the first weekend in November, at Rahway and Plainfield Monthly Meeting if we are able, but with continued online access, however we may meet.

Jeffrey Aaron

## **Report from Junior Yearly Meeting**

*See minute 2020-07-66*

Friends,

Ellie Rosenberg and I, as co-coordinators, were part of the Reimagining Summer Sessions work group. Plans were put in place to have sessions for each of our traditional age groups. Because of low registration, some groups were reconfigured.

Attendance was sporadic. We did not have the groups and the spaces we enjoy at Silver Bay. We could not play games they love, like duck, duck goose, elbow tag, or wizards and giants and elves. We did not have the numbers we would need for wagon wheel or concentric circles. But there were some deep conversations.

Facilitators heard what it was like to shelter at home, go to school on line, and not be with friends. We heard what the young folks thought about the pandemic, about the divisions in our nation and about the protests in the streets. Some shared how they and their families had been part of protests in their home towns. Some children talked about prayer and drew prayers for Gabi's heart. Three generations in one family heard Jake Swamp's prayers of thanks to Mother Earth. The Senior High collaboratively solved a crossword puzzle.

We certainly are optimistic that we can be together playing in the fields at Silver Bay in 2021. I, for one, am glad we offered JYM sessions this year. It is important for the yearly meeting to tell our youngest Friends that we care about them and that we are here for them.

I guess my time working directly with JYM has come to a close. It feels like it has been off and on forever, when it's really only been 36 years. It has been an honor and a joy and I thank you for trusting me to do well by our young Friends.

Usually at this time, you would hear who next year's coordinators will be. We can't tell you that yet. Those appointments are made by Sessions, typically during our week together, but Sessions has not yet met to take that up. Rest assured that we will have JYM next year, and, as always, I ask that each of you look into your heart for the leading to join this very important work. As we heard this week, our young Friends are not just our future, they are our present.

I have been hearing a song from my youth in my head for the past weeks. I will paraphrase.

You of tender years,

Can't know the fears  
That your elders grew by.  
And so please teach us with your youth.  
We seek the truth before we can die.

Thank you. Blessed be.  
Dawn Pozzi