



New York Yearly Meeting

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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To Friends Everywhere,

We send our love to you from the ancestral lands of the Matinecock and Shinnecock, the Lenni Lenape, the Haudenosaunee, and the Abenaki peoples before the genocide that followed European settlement. New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) met online for two weeks this July with a full schedule of events: meetings for business, social meals, affinity groups, interest groups, worship sharing groups, young adult Friends groups, and activities for children. We began our Summer Sessions with a full day of extended worship we call Meetings for Discernment, which this year was made a permanent function of NYYM. Registration did not require a donation. Four hundred one people registered, of which 117 were first-timers, 18 were youth, and 61 were young adults.

We gathered this year during the pandemics of racism and the coronavirus from our homes, where COVID-19 keeps most of us sheltering in place. Many can't go to school; many have lost jobs. We're listening to the radio, watching the news, seeing protests and demonstrations in our streets against systemic racism. We do our daily chores, and we sit down at our electronic devices to meet together. We have found that God covers our meetings here online too and allows us to enter into a profound space of spiritual nourishment and transformation.

Each of our business meetings was preceded by a full hour of worship, which centered us in the Divine Light and allowed us to attend to our concerns with enough patience and quiet to stay in touch with each other in this new virtual space. We needed that time. Friends found ourselves deeply moved by the Epistle from the Friends General Conference Virtual Pre-Gathering of Friends of Color and Their Families, a community which allows People of Color "the rare opportunity of not being othered in Quaker space." European American Friends have so much work to do, and this epistle gave Friends some queries to wrestle with: "How can we encourage the support of Friends of Color in Quaker worship and meetings around the world? How can Friends de-center themselves in order to listen to and hear Friends of Color? How can I support respite for Friends of Color?"

At our plenary Friend Angela Hopkins, founder of the Friends Center for Racial Justice (FCRJ) in Ithaca NY, asked NYYM to consider the query, "How can we contribute to building a faithful, more inclusive community?" She showed us that building an anti-racist structure requires inward work as well as outward. Our General Secretary Steve Mohlke asked us to consider the assumptions behind the question, "How can I help the Friends Center for Racial Justice?" He wanted us to consider how our understanding changes when we ask, "How can the FCRJ help within the Society of Friends?" We can build a multicultural community that does not

center whiteness and privilege, but it will take time. Some of the ways our practices “other” people among us were pointed out to us during these sessions, for which we are grateful as we look to ways we desire to change. In the minutes of our business meetings, we were asked to include substantive vocal ministry. This practice evokes a truer sense of our experience and our commitment to continuing revelation.

Marissa Badgley, NYYM’s Young Adult Field Secretary, reported on her work. In 2019, when we began Pay as Led for Summer Sessions and thanks to a year-long Young Adult program by Marissa, there was the largest ever YAF registration for summer sessions—70 young adults. Despite being online in 2020, 61 registered. The interest is there. One new initiative, a Mentoring Program, created intergenerational pairs to nurture each other’s spiritual lives. She told us that 26% of the 83 NYYM young adults who responded to her survey have lost their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic. We have been trying for three years to allocate enough money for a full-time position for children, youth, and young adults, so far only successfully funding a part-time Young Adult Field Secretary position. Young Adult Friends are not only our future; they are also our present. Can we trust the Light to lead us toward unity?

We began some of the work we have before us. We authorized our clerk to send a letter to Governor Cuomo, asking for early release and clemency for people in New York State who are incarcerated in crowded conditions in this time of COVID-19, and asking him to support the HALT Solitary Confinement Bill. There will be letters to follow to the Governors of New Jersey and Connecticut. Our Black Concerns Committee has formed three action study groups to address structural racism: Advocating for College behind Bars, Disrupt the School to Prison Pipeline, and Racial Justice and Anti-Racism Resources. Witness Coordinating Committee endorsed and forwarded a proposal that NYYM urge Congress to approve a new amendment to the United States Constitution, changing the 13th Amendment to read: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction,” omitting the exception for “punishment for crime,” thereby finally abolishing all slavery in the United States. We committed to this process, and NYYM will send such a letter to our members of Congress. We urge local meetings, individuals, yearly meetings, and community groups everywhere in the United States to do the same.

Friends, there is always more to do. As our Black Concerns Committee reminds us, “Our hearts are heavy but our Spirit is strong.” Our labors continue with trust in the Divine Presence that leads us to let our lives speak.

Jeffrey Aaron, clerk
New York Yearly Meeting
July 31, 2020