

## **Report on PYM Annual Sessions, July 23-28, 2019**

I attended PYM Annual Sessions on behalf of Concord Quarterly Meeting. It was a grounding, productive, spirit led week, with some hard sharing and listening and some progress in the Yearly Meeting's desire to become an anti-racist organization and really become a blessed community for all. Approximately 18 people representing 6 of the 8 meetings in Concord Quarter signed into the "Quarter book". I heard there were about 300 people who attended overall.

This was the second time the Spiritual Formation Collaborative offered a one-day pre-session retreat from Tuesday afternoon through Wednesday lunch. I attended this on my personal time and came away grounded and feeling connected to the 30 of us present. This year it featured a workshop led by Valerie Brown on "Centering in Trust and Love" which was wonderful. We also spent a section on how to carry forth our groundedness into Yearly Meeting.

The overall schedule for Sessions was designed with more flexibility to accommodate the possible needs for listening sessions and/or more time for business. One listening session drew 50 people who talked about the sustainability of The Religious Society of Friends. We heard from the Councils, from the Treasurer and from some external organizations. It was noted that the Councils are currently operating at about 60% capacity; there are openings. We also had some time to share what meetings and Quarters are doing in the areas of anti-racism work. Quarter Clerks and Coordinators present met Saturday afternoon and I read our report on Sunday morning. The PYM Clerk is interested in helping Quarters. We have some asks for PYM and plan to meet another time.

There were also opportunities to speak out of spirit on questions of race, inclusion and diversity. Friends were "invited to share what is weighing on their hearts and lift up prayer for beloved community, naming those concerns which most threaten that vision." Deep sharing and listening followed described in the minutes as "We want to acknowledge the pain we have caused to those in our community and work toward healing within and beyond." On Friday evening there was a session on discerning our collective next steps and living into our need to act. Out of that session two proposals were sent to the Clerking Group (Clerk and alternate Clerks of PYM, Clerks of Councils – who planned the agenda and met each morning).

1. "- that we charge the clerks' group to find a process and a body to take up this work, reviewing the Undoing Racism Group proposal from 2016 and propose a way to fold this work into the structure of the Yearly Meeting, as well as revisit our multicultural audit.

2.-that we charge Quaker Life Council to make available a Truth and Reconciliation process to support Friends of Color who have experienced trauma from our Yearly Meeting."

The Clerking Group came back to us on Saturday morning with the following minute, feeling an urgency to move this work forward: "We charge the Administrative and Quaker Life Councils to come under the weight of these proposals and discern a path forward. We charge them to include their progress in a report at the end of September and bring an update back to the body at our Continuing Sessions in November." When we were asked if others would like to join in this work, 15 people stood, and their names recorded. I am hopeful that we can move forward as a body.

There was also a gathering of Friends of Color on Saturday afternoon to look at the FGC Institutional Assessment results with the assistance of Vanessa Julye, FGC staff for their Ministry on Racism.

We also heard from the PYM General Secretary, sharing about nurturing connections in the Yearly Meeting between meetings, Quarters, and other Quaker bodies, and also her journey to learn more about becoming anti-racist, acknowledging the hurt that has occurred sometimes due to her own actions.

In addition to business sessions, there was all together time before the morning business sessions began. These were multigenerational programs planned by staff and the young people themselves. And there were “Vespers” programs each night after the sessions were over. Vespers are brief programs planned by the Youth staff and/or an age group (Middle School). They are always wonderful... Afternoons featured a variety of activities including workshops on Thursday and Friday. Several involved members of Concord Quarter. And there was an Artist in Residence who worked with the children, but also had an art project open to anyone. And we got to see the One Quilt One Yearly Meeting quilt squares sewn together (33 so far), including at least 3 from Concord Quarter. We found out you can still make a square and they plan to expand the quilt.

Saturday evening, we heard from Valerie Brown, who offered an interactive program on centering in trust and love and we explored the questions: *What does it mean to you to center in trust and love? Why is this meaningful?* I came away feeling very connected to those in the room.

Sunday morning, we finished worship, and with epistles from the various age groups including elementary school children, middle school, and young friends. Young Adult Friends had earlier shared their epistle from their April retreat about membership concerns and how this sometimes is a barrier to participation. And we approved the PYM outgoing epistle.

The College of New Jersey campus is a very good one for this event. We were able to eat together for lunch and dinner in a building that was just for us. Other buildings used were generally closer together than in the past. There are lots of trees and benches outside.

All minutes are on the PYM website - <https://www.pym.org/annual-sessions/minutes/>

All the 2019 epistles can be found here: <https://www.pym.org/category/epistle/>

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