

Reparations Action Working Group (RAWG) Annual Report 2022

The Reparations Action Working Group (RAWG) learned more about reparations in our country and among Friends in our second year as a working group. Through the year, we reached out to our Yearly Meeting through a number of initiatives to build a better understanding of reparations within our BYM community, and discerned a series of actions to pursue (given below). As we worked, many interesting and very good things have been happening around our country to further reparations for indigenous and African American communities. Little known historical events have become more widely known, and some jurisdictions have taken steps to repair the harm resulting from racist policies and practices. Among Friends, some first steps towards reparations and retrospective justice have been taken. Such events and actions give us a deeper understanding of the many ways harms have been done, and the very creative and positive ways that such harms have been addressed so far.

In our Yearly Meeting, the Indian Affairs Committee published a far-reaching document about the role of BYM Friends in the oppressive Indian Schools. The extent of harm done by these Indian Schools has come to light in many parts of our country. In our Yearly Meeting, our Camp Property Committee is considering ways they can offer reparations to indigenous people who once lived on the land used by the camps. Our local Meetings have done good things. Adelphi worked on “mini reparations,” and decided to give to a local community college to cover the cost of licensure fees for students beginning a career. Annapolis worked through creating and approving a statement about reparations. Outside BYM, Germantown Friends Meeting has begun a multi-year program to provide legal services to their African American neighbors so that these neighbors can keep their homes and protect their family wealth.

RAWG has continued our mission to put the concerns of indigenous peoples and African-Americans at the center of our work. To do this, we must listen very carefully and deeply, and put ourselves aside. We also need to give time and prayerful quiet to take in what we hear. When we do this, we find that we change: we become more understanding, more empathic, more able to see things from the point of view of those who have been the target of racism. The result of this listening is that we feel better able to work together to address the pain, the suffering, that has been experienced because of injustices. And better able to take reparative actions.

For our next step, we seek to become better neighbors in the communities that our Meetings and Camps are part of, learn about harms that have been done and, with the guidance of the Spirit and with courage we trust we will find, help to repair the harms that have been experienced by our neighbors.

First, a review of our year.

1) Last summer at Annual Session, RAWG sponsored a workshop in which three speakers told us their perspectives about reparations as leaders of indigenous and African American organizations. The workshop was a time for Friends to listen and not engage in reactions and quick ideas about what to do.

2) We followed up with a visioning workshop in November to see how BYM Friends would want to address issues raised. A lot of good and creative ideas were shared in our conversation and in an online Jamboard, some of which are being developed into plans and programs. It was good to hear from a wider group of Friends.

3) Starting a new Liaison Program, RAWG asked local Meetings and the Camps to appoint liaisons to work with us. In January we had a gathering for these liaisons and heard about the good work going on in our local Meetings, the processes that Friends are using to develop their ideas, and the many questions that arise in this work. It is good to work in a mutually supportive way, so we will continue this liaison program.

5) One of the unforeseen things that took time and energy in our working group meetings was thinking about and sharing our concerns about the tensions that arose during our Interim Meetings as the plans for BYM's 350th Anniversary were discussed. Seeking to deepen understanding among BYM Friends, we planned a Programmed Meeting for Worship, along with the Growing Diverse Leadership Committee and the Working Group on Racism. Through this programmed meeting, we brought the words of those who had been enslaved into a space of worship where we could listen in quiet and in the Light of the Spirit. With the support of the Spirit and each other, we listened to the stories of suffering. This suffering is truth leads us to seek to repair harms that have been done and that continue today.

6) We sought to have our RAWG meetings be places of truth telling, something that Friend and activist Harold Weaver exhorts us to do. African American members of our working group shared honestly with White Friends on a number of topics, helping all of us better understand the impact of racism in the world around us and in our own Quaker world. These conversations challenged us and changed us.

7) In the spring, our working group helped in the planning of an event to celebrate the 350th Anniversary of Quakers in Maryland, on the shore of the Chesapeake Bay in Galesville, Maryland. This area is still the home of the West River Quaker Burying Ground. Not only did Friends speak at this event, but members of local community organizations spoke as well. The event brought together a diversity of community voices in a rich program.

8) As Juneteenth approached, RAWG, along with the Growing Diverse Leadership Committee and the Working Group on Racism, sponsored the preparation of two newsletters to help BYM Friends learn more about Juneteenth and find ways to celebrate. In these newsletters was a vision for a way for all of us – accept,

recognize, understand the harm that has been done, AND celebrate all the love, innovation, resilience that has been possible even through centuries of harm.

We did not do some things that we had thought we would do. For example, we have not yet found a way to mobilize Quaker support for the national reparations movement. We trust that we will discern a way forward in the coming year. Because we have not made progress yet on this issue and others, we lost a valued working group member this year. We hope to find a good pace for the projects we now have planned. We also hope to keep weaving everyone into our work, even those we have discouraged.

Here are our plans for the coming year. Take a look. Would you, your Meeting or Camp be interested in working on one of these? Let's build a movement for addressing harm, pain, suffering, and bring forth reparative actions:

- **Make our Meetings and Camps places of truth-telling**, where we include people and include historical events that happened whether or not they speak well of Quakers. Our history is important to know and pass on as it truthfully is (idea of truth telling is part of Harold Weaver's Pendle Hill Pamphlet #465, focused on retrospective justice)
- **Learn more about Mutual Aid** – what it is and how people can be part of this way of bringing immediate change to the lives of people impacted by racism. A fall workshop is being planned and written resources will be available.
- **Continue our Liaison program**, working in a mutually supportive way with people from local Meetings and camps
- **Ask local Meetings and camps to look again at their histories** and create timelines or add to ones started in our anniversary year, including:
 - the policies and practices of our Meetings and Camps, as well as the wider community, to see in what ways systemic racism has had a role in our histories. Some Meetings have already added their history of slavery. Meetings can also look at real estate practices and the way wealth has been accumulated. And there are other possibilities, too.
 - the history of the indigenous people or peoples who were living on the land that is now the home of your Meeting or Camp.
 - the history of the wider community of local Meetings and Camps in general – demographics, changes in demographics, and more
- **Be active players in the national movement for reparations.** Call together Quakers throughout the US to listen to indigenous and African American leaders in the national reparations movement, and to discern together how we together can support this national movement. Then begin to do this.
- **Explore and discern how to establish a Fund for Reparations.** Perhaps this would be done in each Yearly Meeting in the US or perhaps we would organize a national fund that all Friends can be part of. We would work through the year to discern both the vision and logistics of such a fund. We would like to find a way for Friends to share their wealth with to address specific harms of systemic racism.

- **Work on the relations within our own BYM community**, offering help with conflicts where racism is a factor and offering listening and resolution for those who have experienced hurts from policies, practices, and everyday encounters in their Meetings and Camps, recently or in the past.

To do our work, we have to think in new ways about history, injustice, poverty, and social change. We need the guidance of the Spirit and the support of Friends to make these plans into meaningful actions with enduring results. Please join us.

RAWG Core Group Members:

Tronette Anochie, Phil Caroom, Co-Clerk, Michael Conklin, David Etheridge, Donna Hamilton, Peirce Hammond, Khalila Lomax (BYM STRIDE Coordinator), Karen Moore, Jolee Robinson, Marcy Seitel, Co-Clerk, Nathan Shoyer