

PEACE AND SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

Annual Report 2022

Peace and Social Concerns Committee brought forth three new working groups under its care this year, each of which has actively and thoughtfully pursued its vision to ways in which Friends can move forward consistent with the Spirit to address its purview. Below are statements from each working group. Interested Friends are invited to join any of these working groups by contacting the respective clerk/convener.

The working group on U.S. Militarism and War, clerked by Jean Athey, was formed in September and has been active all year in exploring pathways to peace. This summer, two additional working groups are in the process of forming under PSC care in response to recent Supreme Court decisions—Kathy Rogers is convening the working group on Reproductive Justice and Barbara Bezdek is convening the group on Friends and Firearms.

In addition to the three new working groups, an ongoing End of Life WG clerked by Patti Nesbitt has had a very full year, although it functioned independently of PSC and is now requesting to be under the care of Ministry and Pastoral Care.

Two final working groups officially under the care of PSC have not met this past year. They are Refugees, Immigrants, and Sanctuary and Civil and Human Rights of Transgender and Non-Binary People. A decision should be made regarding the future of these working groups and whether there is interest in participating.

Other PSC actions have been

- co-sponsoring in fall 2021 with Annapolis Friends Meeting two conscientious objector training workshops for young Friends from around Yearly Meeting. (For materials to share with others who might like to replicate this, contact Phil Caroom.)

- co-sponsoring on 2/20/22 with Annapolis Friends Meeting, Peace Action, and our BYM PSC working group on U.S. Militarism a Zoom webinar with the author of "Humane: how the U.S. abandoned peace and reinvented war."

- obtaining endorsement from Interim Meeting for the Poor People's Campaign and their Moral March on Washington on June 18. Numerous Friends participated in this national event.

Respectfully submitted by

Darcy Lane and Annette Breiling, co-clerks

Other PSC committee members: Jean Athey, Barbara Bezdek, Richard Capron, Phil Caroom, Tamina Chowdhury, Andy Conlon, Jamie DeMarco, Suzanne O'Hatnick, Bob Rhudy, Beth Tauser.

Liaisons to PSC : Erika Janiker, for Prisoner Visitation and Support, Donna Kolaetis, for Quaker House – Fayetteville, NC, and Suzanne O'Hatnick, for Interfaith Alliance for Human Rights.

Addendum: Report by Working Group on U.S. Militarism and War

2021-2022 Annual Report

The original proposal for this Working Group, formed in September, 2021, was that its activities include study, action, advocacy, and collaborative work through coalitions with other faith, community and peace groups. Group members agreed to prioritize concerns related to military spending and nuclear weapons, plus other issues as they emerge or as people feel led.

A key goal for this Working Group is to engage more people, both in Monthly Meetings and in our communities, in the work for peace. Here are some of the activities of the Working Group in its first few months:

- Two of our members revised existing PowerPoints on military spending and on nuclear weapons for use of BYM Friends.
- We had two presentations for our Working Group members and for other interested persons in BYM:
 - Member Phil Caroom made a presentation on “The International Criminal Court—What it is and Why it is Important for Peace Activists.” Slides from the presentation can be found here:
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/14mNiypKup3Kj-aFT38gSSHhvN-r8Vhgz0-2Z3VjBpdU/edit?usp=sharing>
 - Diana Ohlbaum of FCNL discussed the FCNL publication, Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy <https://www.fcnl.org/updates/2021-09/study-calls-out-white-supremacy-us-foreign-policy>
- We cosponsored two webinars, that we promoted widely within BYM: one, organized by Annapolis Friends, was on drone warfare, and the other webinar, organized by Maryland Peace Action, featured Prof. Larry Wittner on nuclear weapons.
- We organized a webinar entitled “The Peace Testimony and the Ukraine War: A Webinar for Friends.” There were 146 people who joined the webinar and others who viewed the recording. Panelists included Robert Dockhorn, Helena Cobban, and Michael Beer.

The Working Group invites Quakers within BYM to join us.

Submitted by
Jean Athey, clerk

Addendum: Draft statement by Working Group on Reproductive Justice

July 19, 2022

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) believe that there is that of God in every person, and that the spiritual journey is one of continual seeking and revelation. Often life brings us to difficult, meaningful moments of decision making. We are taught to hold these decisions in the Light, seeking guidance by Spirit. We may turn to our community for help in gaining clarity. We know and respect the individuality of each person's spiritual journey, knowing that decisions can lead to both endings and beginnings, often in unexpected ways. The decision to have, or not have, children and the decision of who to marry, or not marry, are examples of deeply personal, individual decisions to be made by the person or people involved, in the presence of Spirit.

We are troubled by recent federal and state legal actions which threaten the autonomy of women's and pregnant people's bodies, and which criminalize these private, personal decisions. Friends should work to decriminalize any such decisions, and to preserve an individual's right and ability to carry out their decision.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Friends draw on our shared beliefs and practice in rejecting the reasoning that would enable judges and legislatures to ban abortion and promote forced birth, no matter the risks. We are also concerned about proposed restrictions on additional rights, including same gender couples and contraceptive access. We support rights of conscience, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state.

As a religious organization that adheres to the testimony of equality, we believe that both rights and equitable access to care are important. We believe an equitable society does not impose the greatest burdens on those least able to bear them.

In allyship with other faith traditions and social justice advocates, we seek to address injustice and inequity in reproductive health. We set forward these queries for consideration by individual Friends, Monthly Meetings, and the Yearly Meeting as a whole.

- What actions do we take that empower and support people to choose when, how and if they will have children?
- How do we support people in our meeting and in our larger community to make informed, values-aligned decisions about their sexual and reproductive health throughout their lives?
- How can we support and help individuals obtain the reproductive health care they seek?
- What conversations do we need to entertain to understand the myriad concerns (e.g. theological, emotional, spiritual, economic and social) of Friends as we carry this work forward?

The Working Group on Reproductive Justice will continue to meet and discern further on these issues, working within the reproductive justice framework. We invite concerned Friends to join us as we work on these issues.

The Working Group consists of Annette Breiling, Debby Churchman, Charlie Goedeke, Rob McGarrah, Rebecca Richards, Kathy Rogers (Convener), Martha Solt, Sharon Stout

Addendum: Draft statement by Working Group on Firearms

NEW: BYM Working Group on Friends and Firearms

Scope of Work

This Working Group aims to anchor its work in the Friends' testimony for peace to prevent/address violence, with the special concern for the immediacy and devastation of gun violence in its various manifestations: disregard for that of God in each one, hate crimes, senseless killings, bystander shootings, suicides, public health effects, and so forth. We feel that Friends are called upon to be a people who are deeply concerned by the violence in our society and to respond in ways that are grounded in our central testimonies.

The working group will seek out practical ways to engage with one another while acknowledging our different paths and perspectives and to pursue and share out factual information about the many scourges of gun violence. At the start, we see our work as seeking together to identify and bridge divides among us – possibly Friends in the Yearly Meeting, and certainly Americans in our communities. We have not yet discerned more with respect to actions that Friends might take collectively or individually, after a period in which we gather resources to aid Friends & Meetings to consider gun issues through the lenses of our Testimonies; and see where that may lead the WG. Preliminarily, we will consider measures such as: developing talking points to facilitate personal and public conversations that can get past oppositional statements; identify and make available workshops, speakers, sessions at periodic Friends gatherings, beginning with an Interest Group Session at annual sessions.

Initial members:

Barbara Bezdek (Baltimore-Homewood), Convener

Annette Breiling (Frederick)

Cathie Felter (Baltimore-Stony Run)

Julie Kunz (Frederick)

Beth Tauser (Warrington)

Eileen Stanzione – liaison for BYM Ministry and Pastoral Care

Addendum: Report by End of Life Working Group

2022

Our working group offered a very well-attended virtual forum in October 2021 titled “How We Die,” presented by geriatrician Terence McCormally of Herndon Meeting. It helped to demythologize the process of dying. Terence provided much material usually not shared with patients and families about the clinical and institutional realities of dying in this country. The program was exceeded all expectations, judging from the number of participants who stayed for the entire 2.5+ hour program. The video recording can be accessed directly at:

https://www.bym-rsf.org/file_download/inline/597a281f-35dc-4df2-ab44-04e831832bfd

The primary focus for the working group this year has been the substantial revision of the Langley Hill 2018 booklet on planning for the end of our lives. The new book addresses pastoral care and practical support that Meetings and individual Friends can offer one another throughout chronic illness, terminal disease, and after death. The book also addresses legal issues for Friends in all 5 jurisdictions within BYM. It is a collaborative process being led by a Friendly professional editor, who is assuring we produce a very solid and readable presentation of Quaker voices on the end of our lives. It is expected to be out by the end of 2022.

At Annual Sessions 2022, we are sponsoring 2 workshops; one with a young adult Friend, and the other with a Friend in her 90s sharing about the value of good communications as her beloved husband died.

There is a pervasive and deep need for Friends to discuss, share and heal from past experiences surrounding death. By facing such issues directly, many have felt freed to be more proactive as they plan for a better ending for themselves and their loved ones. We have begun to define how we can take our work to individual Meetings and support more individuals throughout the YM.

The working group is a solid group of nine dedicated members. We have discerned that being under the care of Ministry and Pastoral Care is a natural fit for our collective leadings and work. As a result, we have officially requested a switch of oversight from our current affiliation with Peace and Social Concerns to Ministry and Pastoral Care.

Respectfully submitted,
Patti Nesbitt, clerk
End of Life Working Group