Baltimore Yearly Meeting Interim Meeting

Bethesda Friends Meeting and online

March 23, 2024

**I2024-1**. **Opening.** Friends gathered at Bethesda Friends Meeting for Winter Interim meeting 2024. We settled into waiting worship. Presiding Clerk Thomas Webb read the Land Acknowledgement, honoring the peoples and cultures of past and present native nations.

Jillaine Smith, co-clerk of Bethesda Friends Meeting, welcomed us and explained the facilities of the meetinghouse.

Clerk Tom Webb introduced himself and others. Deborah Haines, Alexandria, is serving as Recording Clerk. Greg Robb, Friends Meeting of Washington, is holding the meeting in the Light. Sarah Gillooly, General Secretary, and Ken Haaf, Bethesda, will be providing technical support. Tom spoke of how the meeting for attention to business is grounded in worship. We are not here to share our own opinions but to seek the leading of the Spirit. He read advices to guide us when we feel led to speak.

Tom read the Anti-Racism queries that will guide our decision making today, to support our declaration that Baltimore Yearly Meeting is and aspires to be an anti-racist faith community. He noted that the Working Group on Racism has submitted a report on anti-racism work within our monthly meetings which is available in the documents distributed in advance of this meeting. The Reparation Actions Working Group has also distributed an advance report. Friends are encouraged to read these reports.

Sarah Gillooly, General Secretary, explained how the room is set up to ensure that those in person and those online can see the speaker and hear what is said.

**I2024-2.** **Nominating Committee Report**. Debbi Sudduth, Goose Creek, reported the following resignations:

Erika Janifer, Alexandria, as the BYM representative to Prisoner Visitation and Support;

Susan Russell Walters, Homewood, from Ministry and Pastoral Care;

Gary Sandman, Roanoke, from Ministry and Pastoral Care;

Elisa Hansard, Roanoke, from Ministry and Pastoral Care;

Tom Webb, YAF, from Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee;

Sarah Bur, Homewood, from Faith and Practice Committee.

These were received and recorded.

**I2024-3. Naming Committee Report.** Gloria Victor-Dorr, Sandy Spring, brought forward the name of Gene Throwe, Friends Meeting of Washington, to serve on Search Committee, in the class of 2026. She asked that we waive a second reading so that he can begin his service now. Friends agreed, and APPROVED this nomination.

The entire report is inserted here:

Naming Committee Report to Spring Interim Meeting

March 23, 2024

In my role as Naming Committee I am mindful of the BYM anti-racist queries and I am making an attempt to bring diversity to Search Committee. I am a member of the SSMM Change Group, and I bring anti-racist readings and queries to SSMM’s Finance Committee meetings.

I bring the name of Gene Throwe, Friends Meeting of Washington, to serve on Search Committee BYM Annual Session 2023 - 2026 (effective Spring Interim Meeting 2024).

The following are the current members of Search Committee:

Richard Broadbent (Frederick) 2018 -2024

Nate Arbor (Sandy Spring) 2020 - 2024

Meg Meyer (Stony Run) 2022 -2025 Clerk

Six years is the maximum length for service on this committee at one time. We thank Richard Broadbent for his years of service as he will “roll off” at Annual Session 2024. In addition, Nate Arbor will not continue on Search Committee effective Annual Session 2024.

In order to complete and discern the Search Committee’s work the optimal number of members is 6. As you can see, as of today, beginning at Annual Session 2024 there will be just 2 members on Search Committee. It is invaluable that members of Search Committee have connections throughout Yearly Meeting. Search Committee assumes a vital role in the life, spirit, and community of BYM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gloria Victor-Dorr

Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting

Gloria explained that Search Committee is responsible for nominating the Clerk and Recording Clerk of the Yearly Meeting, the Clerk and Recording Clerk of Interim Meeting, and members of the Nominating Committee.

**I2024-4.** **Treasurer’s Report.** Jim Riley, Hopewell Centre, presented the year-end report for 2023. He noted that he received additional information last night that requires minor adjustments to the report. The financial position of the Yearly Meeting is strong. Contributions have risen despite the absence of a Development Manager. Jim noted that the information just received indicates that unrestricted contributions were $50,000 higher than shown on the report distributed in advance of the meeting, while receivables were $50,000 lower. The Treasurer’s Report is attached.

Jim reviewed the Balance Sheet and the Statement of Activities (both attached) and highlighted items of particular interest. Revenues over expenditures totaled $236,000 in 2023, including $110,000 in unrestricted funds. He expressed gratitude to the staff who manage all this activity, and to the many generous donors who are supporting the work of the Yearly Meeting. His written report is attached. In response to a question, Sarah Gillooly explained that this report is primarily for the auditors and only addresses financial activity in 2023. A report that compares past and projected income and expenses will be made available before the apportionment meeting on April 15.

**I2024-5. Supervisory Committee Report**. Rebecca Haines-Rosenberg, Alexandria reported. She explained that the main work of the Supervisory Committee is to support the General Secretary and the BYM staff. The committee has recently completed a series of interviews with staff, which revealed that they love their work, but are feeling overwhelmed. Volunteers are handling less and less of the workload, but the work itself has not decreased, which means that staff are having to do more. She offered two queries for us to consider:

If your committee works with BYM staff, how do you create space for them to say no to work that would stretch them beyond their paid time and their job descriptions?

How do you celebrate the gift of a carefully discerned no?

Rebecca asked us to consider the demands we make on staff in light of the Anti-Racism query that reminds us always to take into account those who will be most affected by the decisions we make. She reminded us to appreciate the staff and all they do for us, and urged us to offer assistance that would lighten their load. The Supervisory Committee report is attached.

**I2024-6. Reproductive Justice Working Group**. Katherine Cole, Herndon, reported. She explained adjustments that have been made in the minute since last Interim Meeting. She then read the revised version (attached).

A Friend raised a question about the statement that BYM is “neither for nor against abortion.” This sparked extended discussion. We agreed that what we are trying to communicate is that abortion is a personal decision, and that it should be guided by conscience, not by the opinions of any outside group. Friends raised a concern about the reference to chattel slavery, which causes us discomfort. Some Friends pointed out that the issue of reproductive justice is urgent, and that we need to make our position known as soon as possible.

We acknowledge that we are not yet in unity. Clerk Tom Webb proposed that we consider this again at a called Interim meeting at the end of April. Friends who raised objections to the wording are asked to communicate the working group to help craft a version that meets their objections.

**I2024-7.** **General Secretary’s Report**. Sarah Gillooly, General Secretary, urged Friends to read the report that was distributed in advance. They spoke of kenosis, the self-emptying love that Jesus showed to others. They said they feel called to play many different roles in BYM, like playing different positions on a curling team. They are constantly seeking to discern just what is needed in any given situation. They spoke of how we need to think about who our minutes are for, and what we are trying to accomplish. They reminded us that our labor is not in vain, although our reaping is always different from our sowing. They introduced their professor at the Earlham School of Religion who is teaching their supervised ministry class. Their written report is attached.

**I2024-8**. **Procedure Change Concerning BYM Nominations to Sandy Spring Friends School Board of Trustees***.* Debbi Sudduth, Goose Creek, co-clerk of Nominating Committee, reported on a request the Committee received from the Sandy Spring Friends School Board. The background paper prepared by the Nominating Committee is attached. BYM currently appoints four members of the Board, but the Board has discerned that it would benefit from a different arrangement. Frank Massey, who serves on the Board, explained that the school has a very diverse student body, and the Trustees would like to involve more alumni, who may not be in the BYM area, in a governance role. This would strengthen the school community, and increase the diversity of the Board. Frank explained that there will still be a Quaker majority on the Board, and Sandy Spring Friends Meeting will still name some members.

Friends expressed support for the Board’s efforts to increase its diversity and engage the school’s alumni community. Friends APPROVED the proposal that BYM will no longer appoint representatives to the SSFS Board. Those currently serving will complete their terms.

**I2024-9.** **Stewardship and Finance Report**. Linda Pardoe, Patapsco, presented the first reading of a proposed policy on travel reimbursement for Friends serving as BYM representatives to outside organizations. The committee that developed the policy included four members of Stewardship and Finance, and one member of the Nominating Committee. The purpose is to insure that Friends will not be prevented from accepting service as representatives to outside organizations by financial considerations.

**Draft Policy on BYM Representative Travel (Last update – March 6, 2024)**

The BYM Nominating Committee nominates persons to serve as BYM representatives to a number of organizations. BYM policy is to pay as funds allow for travel costs of BYM representatives for these purposes:

* To serve on Friends General Conference’s governing body, the FGC Central Committee
* To participate as a BYM representative at meetings of Friend United Meeting (FUM)
* To participate as a BYM representative at meetings of Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)
* To serve as nominated representatives to other outside organizations

There is a line item in the Operating Budget for Representative Travel. This line item is funded every year based on expected travel costs for the year. The Nominating Committee will advise the Stewardship & Finance Committee when a year’s total travel costs for all representatives are expected to exceed $5,000, such as in a year where BYM representatives will participate in an overseas meeting.

When BYM representatives plan travel for the above purposes:

* Representatives should submit their travel budgets as soon as possible to the General Secretary. This will allow for adequate planning and budgeting for the travel fund.
* Funds will be given based on several factors, including cost of travel, applicant’s financial need, type of gathering and access to non-BYM funding.
* Pilot this approach and re-evaluate the policy in 2 years. It is not certain how much travel will cost each year and travel costs will vary year-to-year.
* For planning purposes, Friends are asked to report their expenses, whether they claim reimbursement or not.

Payment of travel costs should not be an obstacle for service. The goal is to cover the full cost of representative travel as the budget allows. Here are the policies for reimbursement from the Yearly Meeting:

* Representative Travel expenses include registration, lodging, transportation, and food. Representatives are invited to seek modest arrangements. Conferences often offer housing options or suggestions that could serve as a guide for reasonable costs.
* Friends are also encouraged to ask for support from their local meetings and other sources.
* Application procedure for reimbursement (Need suggestions from the General Secretary)

Friends expressed support for this initiative. Friends asked for clarification about how expenses will be reported. This will be addressed when the proposed policy is brought back to Interim Meeting in June for a second reading.

**I2024-10.** **Development Committee** **Report**. Arthur Boyd, Stony Run, reported that contributions in 2023 exceeded expectations. Total contributions were almost $750,000, including over $350,000 toward the cost of moving Opequon Quaker Camp to the Rolling Ridge Conservancy property. There had been some concern that starting a special campaign to support the Opequon move would cut into undesignated contributions, but this has not happened. Undesignated contribution were $353,000, compared to a budgeted goal of $302,000. As of this date, Friends have contributed or pledged $400,000 to the Special Campaign for Rolling Ridge, toward a goal of $700,000. Arthur thanked Barbara Wille for her service as Interim Development Director in 2023, and her ongoing service in that role. He thanked Sarah Gillooly for their wonderful and innovative leadership in support of Development. He introduced and welcomed Nikki Holland, who has just joined the BYM staff as Development Manager. The Development Committee report is attached.

**I2024-11. Presiding Clerk’s Report**. Steph Bean, Yearly Meeting Clerk, presented their report. They reminded us that committees are asked to submit an annual report in advance of annual session, and to let the Clerk know well in advance if they have any business items they would like to have included on the agenda. They mentioned the problem of finding enough Friends to fill our committee rosters, and thanked those of us who serve on committees for our service. They noted that If more volunteers cannot be found, some work will have to be laid down.

**I2024-12**. **Naming Committee**. Clerk Tom Webb reported that we need at least one more member for a Naming Committee to name members for the Search Committee. Gloria Victor Dorr is currently the only member. Please let Tom know if you would be willing to serve.

**I2024-13**. **Peace and Social Concerns Committee** **Minute**. Barbara Bezdek, Homewood, reported. She noted that the minute she is presenting was drafted in December, and distributed to monthly meetings for their consideration. It was slightly updated in February. Some meetings have responded by writing minutes of their own. She reminded us of the urgency of this issue.

**The Peace & Social Concerns Committee of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), approved the following Minute on December 12, 2023**. We commend it for consideration by Monthly Meetings throughout BYM. Rev. 2/27/24.

**As Quakers we believe** in the sacred worth of each person and stand against violence in all its forms. We grieve for the loss of each life, and with those in Israel and Palestine who are losing loved ones. We pray with those waiting for the return of loved ones and those living under siege and bombardment. We condemn the violence unleashed by Hamas, and we denounce the retribution of the Israeli Defense Force on Gaza.

**We join** with many millions across the world to call for an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian access, an end to the catastrophic bombing of civilian Gaza, and action to address the inequalities underlying this situation so as to create the conditions for a lasting peace.

**We urge our government** to halt the US enabling Israel’s extraordinary violence against the people in Gaza, through the supply of weapons and by the shameful veto of the UN call for ceasefire. Our participation not only escalates the build-up of hatred, it also escalates the potential for a wider war in the Middle East. We believe our government must call for an immediate ceasefire, immediate and adequate humanitarian aid, and immediate negotiations for a long-term peace.

Further military action will not bring peace. History shows us that retaliatory violence is a failure (witness the wars of retribution in Iraq and Afghanistan). Violence only begets more violence. There are no winners.

Violence such as this is never justifiable, and we insist that a ceasefire must be realized along with the return of all hostages. The Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 killed over 1,300 Israelis, and civilian hostages were taken by Hamas into Gaza. The subsequent Israeli military attack on Gaza had by mid-December killed more than 18,000 Palestinians, primarily women and children, displaced more than one million Palestinians in Gaza, destroyed homes and hospitals. Today the number of Gazans killed is 30,000, no hospital is functioning, and the people are starving. The ongoing siege of Gaza blocks access to water, food, fuel, electricity, and medicine to all people in Gaza. People are going hungry and thirsty, thousands are injured, and overwhelmed medical facilities cannot help those in need. People are dying as a preventable humanitarian crisis deepens.

The many faith traditions represented in the region share a religious obligation to feed the hungry, care for the sick and wounded, and protect the most vulnerable from violence. This fundamental human obligation undergirds the moral authority of International Humanitarian Law. **We urge the combatants, our government, and the entire international community to respect the 4th Geneva Convention for the Protection of Civilians in War.**

**We also call on all of us** – from national and international leaders to religious bodies, media and people in their communities whether impacted or removed from this war -- to firmly disavow dehumanizing anti-Palestinian and anti-Semitic rhetoric and approaches that deepen painful divisions and politicize the current crisis. Our conviction that peace will prevail on earth, as the scriptures of the great religions of the world have promised, requires this of each of us, for humanity to regain its footing amid such incredible violence and suffering. This is a time for strong moral resolve, spiritual fortitude, and immediate action.

Several Friends spoke about how the crisis has grown worse since this minute was drafted. This is something that lies heavy on our hearts. We feel a great deal of energy around this concern, and encourage Friends to do whatever they can to promote an immediate ceasefire and unobstructed humanitarian aid. A revised minute will come back to Interim Meeting in April for further consideration.

**I2024-14**. **Announcement about Preparing the Interim Meeting Agenda.** Clerk Tom Webb made the following announcement.

We will be increasing the deadline for agenda items and documents by an extra week (four weeks for agenda items, and three weeks for documents) in the next program year.  The year after that, deadlines will again be increased, with the goal of six weeks in advance for items that require a decision from Interim Meeting; so that the monthly meetings of BYM have a full business cycle to discern where they stand on them before each meeting.

**I2024-15**. **Closing**. After announcements, the meeting closed with a brief period of worship at 3:55 pm.