Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Interim Meeting

November 11, 2023

**I2023-29**. *Opening.* Presiding Clerk Tom Webb read the land acknowledgement. We honor the peoples who have stewarded the land we now occupy. Lamar Matthew warmly welcomed us to the vicinity of York Friends Meeting, although we are not in the meetinghouse itself. He explained the facilities of the meetinghouse nearby, and offered a land acknowledgement. He reviewed the long history of Friends in York, dating back to the eighteenth century, and noted that the meeting minutes make no mention of the Revolutionary War, or the Civil War, except for a minute of concern for the sufferings of Friends in the South.

Tom Webb introduced himself and others. Deborah Haines, on Zoom, is serving as Recording Clerk. Sarah Gillooly, General Secretary, will be responding to requests for technical help. Tom Webb read a brief statement, reminding us that business done in the manner of Friends is conducted in Worship, with the understanding that we are not here to share opinions, but rather to share messages of the Spirit, to discern what we are corporately led to do.

Tom Webb read the anti-racism queries and asked us to keep them in mind as we conduct our business today.

**I2023-30. Welcome**. Lamar Matthew (York) welcomed us to Interim Meeting, hosted by York Friends Meeting. He explained the facilities we are using, and invited Friends to visit the meetinghouse. He spoke of the long history of Friends in the nearby area, stretching back to the eighteenth century. He spoke of relations with the indigenous people who stewarded the land. We thank York Friends for their hospitality.

**I2023-31**. **Hosting Hybrid Meetings**. Sarah Gillooly described the experiment we are conducting today by meeting in a space near the host meeting, but not in their meetinghouse. When the pandemic began, we started holding hybrid sessions, and these had to be hosted by meetings with the necessary technology. If we continue holding hybrid sessions to make it possible for more Friends to participate, we do not want to be limited to a handful of larger meetings. Today, York is serving as our host, but since their meetinghouse does not have internet, we are meeting in available space nearby.

**I2023-32**. **Nominating Committee**. Karie Firoozmand (Stony Run) reported for Nominating Committee. She presented the following nominations, with the request that they be approved with a single reading so that they may begin their work immediately.

Susan Thompson, Shepherdstown, to Unity With Nature (Class of 2026)

Sue Hunter Woerthwein, Deer Creek, to Unity With Nature (Class of 2026)

Tacy Roby, Bethesda, to Trustees (Class of 2026)

Charlie Goedeke, Adelphi, to Peace and Social Concerns (Class of 2026)

Friends agreed to a single reading, and APPROVED these nominations.

Karie reported the following resignations:

Jean Athey, Homewood, from Peace and Social Concerns

Tamina Chowdhury, Friends Meeting of Washington, from Peace and Social Concerns

Elizabeth Tauser, Warrington, from Peace and Social Concerns

Kallan Benson, Annapolis, as a representative to Friends Committee on National Legislation

Phil Henning, Valley, as a representative to Friends General Conference Central Committee

Karie reported that the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) has invited each yearly meeting to send one representative to the Plenary that will be held in South Africa in August 2024. BYM has four representatives to FWCC, and they have chosen Jason Eaby to be the one who will attend. This decision does not require approval from Interim Meeting, since Jason has already been approved as a representative to FWCC. We thank him for his willingness to serve.

**I2023-33. Search Committee**. Meg Boyd Meyer (Stony Run) reported. She announced that Jim Riley (Hopewell Center) has agreed to serve a third two-year term as BYM Treasurer.  Terrance McCormally (Herndon) has agreed to serve another two year term as Assistant Treasurer.  Friends APPROVED both of these nominations with gratititude.

**I2023-34. Camping Program.** Brian Massey, Camping Program Manager, presented the Annual Report. He expressed his deep appreciation for the support the camping program receives from BYM Friends. He reviewed some statistics. Attendance at camps this past season averaged nearly 90%, which is a healthy number, although down from last year. Almost 20% of this year’s campers came from Quaker families. Almost 40% of families paid the full cost. The end of season survey found that campers were generally well satisfied this year, and that satisfaction among camp staff has risen. This is encouraging news, but more remains to be done.

In response to a question, Brian spoke about how important it has been to have Dyresha Harris serving as a full-time director. Having full time staff is essential to running a camping program in today’s world. The complete report is attached.

**I2023-35. Camp Property Management**. David Hunter, Camp Property Manager, presented the Camp Property Management Annual Report. He spoke of the 100 American chestnut trees that are now thriving in the woods at Caroctin. He spoke of efforts to control the ash borers that are killing trees. He reported that construction on all of the new cabins at Catoctin has now been completed. They are beautiful and will serve our campers well. David spoke of the planned move of Opequon Quaker Camp to Rolling Ridge Conservancy. The move of Opequon’s physical assets to Rolling Ridge is nearly completed, and camp will open in its new location next summer. David expressed his deep appreciation to the Quaker family who has rented a portion of their land to Opequon Quaker Camp for many decades. Their support has been invaluable. He spoke of the enormous impact of the BYM Camping Program on young people over the years. He spoke of the wildfire in Madison County. It is not likely to affect the Shiloh property, but it has caused great concern. He explained that the name “Opequon” comes from the creek that runs through the farm where the camp was established. It has become a treasured name over the years, and will move with the camp to its new location. Friends expressed deep appreciation for David Hunter’s service as Camp Property Manager.

**I2023-36. STRIDE**. Rachel Carter, STRIDE Coordinator, presented the Annual Report.

They have been with the program since May, and described it as a wonderful experience. They spoke of the pre- and post-camp survey of STRIDE campers that was done this year. STRIDE intends to do a similar survey every year to assess how the program is doing, and to identify issues that need to be addressed. The feedback has been very positive. Over the past several years, STRIDE has strengthened its connections with the families of campers and is serving its campers well. Rachel urged BYM Friends to find out more about STRIDE, and volunteer to help. The report is attached.

Sarah Gillooly thanked Rachel for their leadership in STRIDE, and expressed deep appreciation for the gifts they have brought to the work. Rachel has a gift for strategic thinking, and great sensitivity in communicating across cultural differences. They envision how STRIDE can be transformative for the entire camping program, and work to make that vision a reality.

**I2023-37. Development Committee**. Barb Platt and Arthur Boyd presented the report. Barb Platt thanked those who have contributed so far, and urged Friends to send in their end-of-year donations. She announced that a group of generous friends are establishing a matching grant to match new and increased donations received by December 31. Friends are asked to take this message back to their home meetings and encourage Friends to increase their giving, or start giving to BYM. Arthur Boyd spoke of the effort to raise the funds necessary to move Opequon Quaker Camp to Rolling Ridge. He reviewed why the move was necessary, and how the new site was chosen. It is an excellent site. Over the next two years, we expect the cost of the move to be around $700,000. As of now, we have raised over $100,000. The Development Committee is planning a major fundraising campaign, and will be reaching out to local meetings to encourage Friends to participate. Information about how to contribute is on the BYM website. Barb Platt thanked Barbara Wille for her invaluable service to the Committee as interim Development Director.

**I2023-38. Treasurer’s Report.** Jim Riley, Treasurer, presented a report on BYM’s financial position as of September 30, 2023, and a statement of activities for the first nine months of the year. Total expenditures for the first nine months of the year have exceeded contributions by about $200,000. Our reserve fund is still above the established guideline. The report is attached.

**I2023-39. General Secretary’s Report**. Sarah Gillooly, General Secretary, presented their report. They will be making an offer to a candidate for the Development Director position within the next week or two. Barbara Wille will stay on for a time to help with the transition. Sarah spoke of how three of the nine BYM staff members are going through a time of crisis in their personal lives, which has weighed on the hearts of the entire staff. They asked Friends to hold the staff in our prayers. They spoke of ongoing efforts to address the harm of racism within BYM and the BYM staff. They described recent travel, including a visit to a thriving worship group at the Collington Life Care Community in Mitchellville, MD.

They spoke of our new approach to updating *Faith and Practice*. Instead of doing a complete revision, the Faith and Practice Committee is revising one section at a time. Since it would be cost prohibitive to mail out copies every time a section is revised, we will be making the current version available on the BYM website, and printing and mailing out copies of the most recent version as they are requested by meetings.

Sarah spoke of how BYM will be facilitating background checks for those working with youth. They also spoke of a change in how BYM will record membership statistics. Meetings will be asked to provide information on total membership, and on average attendance at meeting for worship without regard to membership. They described changes in how the Yearly Meeting handles audits, payroll, and insurance. There appear to be real advantages to getting camp insurance from one company, and church insurance from another. This will raise the total cost slightly, but will give us better tailored coverage. Sarah explained that they will not be able to devote any attention to strategic planning at the present time, but will return to it as soon as possible.

They reviewed the details of income and expenses in the camping program. Revenue for the year is down somewhat. It is likely to rebound when Opequon opens in its new location next year, but Sarah is going to be working with Stewardship and Finance to review the 2024 camping budget to see if it is realistic. A Friend expressed appreciation for the new format, which makes financial reports far easier to understand. Sarah spoke of how our camps provide a ministry of Quaker spiritual formation to campers who are mostly not Quaker. They thanked the camping program for this ministry. Friends expressed deep appreciation for all that Sarah Gillooly brings to BYM from their deep spiritual center.

**I2023-40. Yearly Meeting Clerk’s Update**. Steph Bean, Yearly Meeting Clerk, presented their update. They reviewed highlights of work done during Annual Session and spoke of how committees and working groups have settled in to their work for the year. They spoke of how stretched we all are in terms of our personal energy resources, and reminded us to help and care for each other as we care for ourselves. Friends thanked Steph Bean for her wonderful work as clerk of the Yearly Meeting.

**I2023-41. Reproductive Justice Working Group**. Katherine Cole (Herndon) presented the report. She described the history of the working group. She noted that BYM has not approved a minute on reproductive justice since 1979, and read an excerpt from that minute.

The Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends opposes any U.S. Constitutional Amendment which would outlaw abortion.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is advised that in recent months steps toward dialogue have been taken by persons with differing positions on the abortion issue.  We urge concerned Friends and Meetings to take part in and nurture this process.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends recognizes and reaffirms the basic commitment of Friends to the sacredness of life as well as the quality of life.  We do not advocate or encourage abortion as a desirable method of birth control.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that in some extremely unfortunate circumstances a woman might find abortion the least undesirable of several tragic options.  The responsibility for making such a decision ultimately rests with the pregnant woman herself.  We affirm every pregnant woman’s right to safe and effective medical care throughout her pregnancy and the birth.  When abortions are performed, safe and professional medical procedures should be assured.

Katherine spoke of how the Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe v. Wade has made it important for us to revisit this issue. She presented a minute on reproductive justice prepared by the working group for a first reading.

Minute on Reproductive Justice - October 2023

Reproductive Justice Working Group

Friends believe that God, or the Inner Light, dwells within each of us, and that by centering into stillness, we can individually and collectively listen to that inner voice and become clear about next steps to take. We support each person’s right to seek and follow this inner voice and hold such leadings with loving concern for the individual.

The decision to have, or not have, children is an intimate, personal one, to be held lovingly in the presence of the Inner light . Baltimore Yearly Meeting is neither for or against abortion, but supports each person’s right to choose, following the leadings of the Inner Light as they apply to their particular life situation.

Through our process of discernment, The Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends opposes laws that restrict access to contraception and abortion. We support the right of all persons to make decisions involving their own reproductive health.

We recognize that decisions regarding reproductive health are personal and may be difficult due to the person’s life circumstances. These include decisions to prevent pregnancy, to become pregnant, to abort a pregnancy, or carry a pregnancy to term.

We oppose those who spread false medical information regarding abortion and contraception.

We believe in supporting those who make reproductive healthcare decisions that we might have made differently due to our own spiritual leadings, health and family circumstances. We respect those who hold religious views different from ours, and whose practice of religion differs from our own, as well as those who choose not to practice any religion. However, we oppose efforts to impose religious views on others.

We are aware that, in the United States, persons who are in the global majority are adversely affected more than others when laws are enacted that restrict access to contraception and abortion, and that they have higher rates of complications and death from pregnancy and delivery. Our Testimony of Equality, and our leading to become an antiracist body urges us to address and heal these inequities.

We seek and advocate for a just society that allows access to the full range of reproductive healthcare, and for a society in which children are protected from abuse and oppression, and have adequate food, housing, healthcare and education.

We believe that BYM Friends have discerned these beliefs through our process of seeking discernment in our Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business.

In response to a question, Katherine described how the working group has approached its task. It has met regularly, consulted with the Peace and Social Concerns Committee, and offered a number of workshops. The working group has received encouragement from several local meetings that have adopted minutes of their own. and would love to hear from more meetings about their concerns. Members would be glad to be invited to offer workshops for local meetings or other groups. Friends APPROVED having the draft minute distributed for further discernment, with a request that Friends submit their comments within the next few months. The minute will be brought back to Interim Meeting in March.

**I2023-42. Reparations Action Working Group**. Marcy Seitel (Adelphi) presented a report from the Reparations Action Working Group (RAWG). She noted that the working group’s goal for the year is to reach out to local meetings, to encourage Friends to think and talk about retrospective justice. It has become evident that Baltimore Yearly Meeting is not in a position to administer a reparations fund, and the working group is looking for alternatives.

In the interim, RAWG is asking Baltimore Yearly Meeting to make a contribution of at least $2,000 to the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama. This is a highly reputable organization that supports the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the US’s museum to memorialize our history of lynching, and does other excellent work. Marcy explained that acknowledging the truth of our history is an important first step toward repairing racial harm. Sarah Gillooly has assured the working group that making such a donation would be consistent with BYM’s new policy on contributions to outside organizations. Friends APPROVED donating $2,000 to the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama.

RAWG is also asking the monthly meetings of BYM to review the donations they give to their communities and consider whether enough funds are going to organizations that address the harms of racism and support the leadership of African Americans and Indigenous groups. We will provide a list of organizations you might want to consider giving to. The report is attached.

**I2023-43. Stewardship and Finance**. Linda Pardoe (Patapsco) presented the report. She introduced Xan Whitt (Roanoke) as the new apportionment manager for BYM. Xan Whitt gave a report on apportionment payments received so far. He thanked John Yost (Eastland) for helping him to move into his new position as apportionment manager.

**I2023-44. Announcements**. Rich Liversidge (Sandy Spring), Clerk of Trustees, presented the following announcement.

“BYM’s Trustees are responsible for legal matters that involve the Yearly Meeting.

I want to report that a legal complaint has been filed that names BYM as a defendant. The complaint involves allegations of sexual abuse of a child twenty-five years ago. The child was a student at a local Quaker school in the area. That school is not affiliated directly with BYM. That means the school is not Sandy Spring Friends School or Friends Meeting School in Ijamsville.

The complaint was brought under the new Maryland Child Victim’s Act of 2023, which just went into effect. That law extends liability beyond Maryland’s previous statute of limitations.

Based on what I know at the present time, I personally believe at least some of the allegations to be credible, and our hearts go out to the young woman. BYM’s involvement, if any, appears to be extremely limited.

BYM provides spiritual support to the members and monthly meetings in the Yearly Meeting. BYM staff and volunteers nurture and help our youth develop and mature through our camps and other activities. We value the children in our care and do everything we can to keep them safe. The thoughtful and sensitive activities of our staff working with our youth, as well as our Youth Safety Policy, are testaments to that caring.

The Trustees review BYM’s Youth Safety Policy regularly, and we will be doing so again this coming year. I urge all Friends within BYM to familiarize yourselves with BYM’s Youth Safety Policy. The BYM Office can put Monthly Meetings in touch with resources to review your own youth safety practices – and we urge you to do so.

Sarah and I are working with outside counsel on the legal complaint that references us. We are the ones to whom any of your thoughts and questions should come.

This matter is still in its earliest stages. It will take time to see how the parties will move forward. In the meantime, I want you to know that the Trustees are taking this very seriously.”

By: Rich Liversidge, Clerk of the BYM Trustees November 11, 2023

**I2023-45. Closing**. The meeting settled into an extended period of waiting worship, and closed at 3:55 pm.