

General Secretary's Report to Winter Interim Meeting 2023

*i have done so much, so many tasks
but what has mattered most
has been the listening
to the thirsting dirt
to the spiraling wind in the wake of murmuration
to the drumbeat of ant feet moving abundance with a million hands
~ adrienne maree brown*

Friends –

Greetings from the desk of the General Secretary. I look forward to gathering with you, in body and in Spirit, at our Winter Interim Meeting on 25 3mo 2023. My written reports to you have been less frequent this last year, as the volume of work before me often precludes the quiet, contemplative time I need to gather my thoughts and update you. However, I hope to be more diligent in my written reports to you in 2023. My report to you today is organized within the categories of responsibilities included in the job description for the General Secretary. As always, my door is open, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Responsibilities for the Staff

All staff completed their 2022 Annual Reviews with their direct supervisor as well as their Annual Feedback Sessions with Supervisory Committee. This process was revised in 2021 to reflect current equity practices in management as well as staff feedback. If Friends have feedback about the performance of any staff member, they are kindly asked to bring that directly to the General Secretary or to Supervisory Committee.

The staff met for our annual retreat in December. We used our time together to develop a list of commitments to one another – a set of shared agreements for the ways we would like to function as a team. We felt tremendous gratitude for a hike under the full moon and for Patti Nesbitt and Anne Bacon for the blessing of their time and delicious meals as our retreat cooks.



BYM Staff Under a Full WV Moon

Mary Braun's last day as Development Director was February 15th. We are working with an Interim Development Director, Barbara Wille, a Friend many already know, through at least June 30th. Barbara can be reached at Development@bym-rsf.org. The search for the new Development Director will re-launch at the beginning of April. All searches at BYM use an equity hiring plan, developed from my training with The Management Center and additional ideas from the Working Group on Racism incorporated.

In March, Supervisory Committee approved the addition of a Business Associate to the staff team and forwarded their approval to Stewardship & Finance for consideration. If approved, the Business

Associate will provide additional support across the Yearly Meeting office with an emphasis on data entry tasks for finance, development, and camping program and property. While the position will include many general Yearly Meeting tasks, this position is proposed to be funded from revenue generated by the camping program.

Khalila Lomax's last day as STRIDE Coordinator will be March 31st. I am working to bring an Interim STRIDE Coordinator onto the team from as soon as possible through Labor Day, which will be done with approval by the Growing Diverse Leaders Committee and Supervisory. This will ensure our STRIDE campers, families, and Committee members have the support they need for the busy summer months. We are currently speaking to two possible Interim candidates –one a former STRIDE camper and the other a Friend who has worked extensively with youth programming. A full hiring process for the next permanent STRIDE Coordinator will begin over the summer.

As part of our shared work to address how racism shows up within our Yearly Meeting, Khalila and I developed a list of items for redress. We focused on changes that would be within the scope of the General Secretary's role. I would also encourage Friends throughout the Yearly Meeting to consider what redress for racism is within the scope of their role within our Yearly Meeting. You can check on the status of my commitments to Khalila [here](#). This document will be updated as progress is made.

Working with the Components of BYM

The BYM 2022 Yearbook has gone to the printer. It continues to be extremely difficult to produce this document without the assistance of an Associate General Secretary. For example, every business document and data submission - submitted by a total of 87 different bodies (Monthly Meetings + BYM Committees) – has to be compiled and then standardized into a uniform format before layout can even begin. The Yearbook was redesigned this year to lower the cost of printing and improve readability for Friends. We hope the redesign will also improve the speed at which we are able to turn-around the Yearbook in the coming years.

We have entered into the busiest season for most of our Committees – which will last through the conclusion of Annual Session in August. Working with Program Committee, Annual Session details are coming together, and I have just finished building the first draft of the registration system, simplified based on feedback from last year. The Spring issue of the *Interchange* is in production – though we are still accepting community news and articles. The issue, which will arrive to you in May, will have all the details you need about our 2023 Annual Session. I continue to work with the End of Life Working Group on their forthcoming publication of *A Tender Time: Quaker Voices on the End of Life*, which is being supported with a \$10,000 grant from the Friends Foundation for the Aging. I was pleased to join the work group that gathered up perspectives throughout the Yearly Meeting to develop the Camping Program Strategic Plan. In addition, I continue to work closely with various Yearly Meeting Committees on the proposal to relocate Opequon Quaker Camp to the Rolling Ridge Conservancy.



Camping at Friends Wilderness Center at Rolling Ridge Conservancy



During the late fall and winter months, I have been able to visit with a few Monthly Meetings. As we continue to explore the partnership with Rolling Ridge, I spent a lovely night camping at Friends Wilderness Center under the loving care of Kimberly & Carl Benson followed by Worship and second hour with Shepherdstown Friends. I was delighted by the vibrancy of the community at York Friends Meeting and met several new attenders who expressed their sense of “home” upon finding York Friends. My own gratitude to Harry Scott and Lamar Matthew for their kind hospitality. Dunnings Creek Friends Meeting graciously donated a bench to the Yearly Meeting Office, and I was lifted by the opportunity to not only worship with Friends while picking up the bench – but also to get an off-season tour of the Fishertown Quaker Museum. It is full of wonderful treasures – check it out! While

attending Nottingham Quarterly Meeting with Presiding Clerk Steph Bean, we enjoyed the opportunity to worship, participate in business, and hear about the moral issues of textile sustainability at Oxford Meeting House among Friends from across the Quarter. Linda Coates and John Yost were gracious hosts who also took us to visit the historic Meeting Houses and burial grounds at Penn Hill and Eastland Preparative. My seminary studies also gave me the occasion to shadow a Friend in her work as a chaplain at the Virginia State Correctional Facility for Women near Richmond. The greatest gift of my job is visiting among Friends – to hear your joys and concerns and seek Spirit with you. I encourage all BYM Friends to consider visitation among Meetings – we are so many parts, but all one body.



Photos from L to R: Penn Hill Meeting House with Nottingham Quarter Friends; A quiet moment before Worship at York Meeting House; Visiting the Fishertown Quaker Museum with Dunnings Creek Friends.

A critical project happening behind the scenes right now is the conversion of the central BYM database. Our database houses all BYM membership information as well as the contact information for Friends across the Yearly Meeting and BYM’s donor files. Our existing database is now more than 10 years old, and the technology is outdated and extremely difficult to use. We are converting to StoreHouse - a “Church Management” system - that will have a number of modern features that will be helpful not only in the maintenance of accurate data but also in the function of our shared life – including a password

protected online Directory of Monthly Meetings, Monthly Meeting Clerks, and BYM Committee members and clerks. The Directories printed in the Yearbook each year are often outdated by the time they go to print, but an online, password protected Directory will allow for dynamic data. This project will take some time, as we currently have more than 20,000 individual entries to carry over from the old system to the new system.

Fundraising & Managing Resources

Trustees, Stewardship & Finance, and Development Committee all have ambitious agendas in the first half of the year, and I have been supporting them in a range of activities from consolidating old funds to developing the early draft of the 2024 budget. The books are now tentatively closed on the 2022 fiscal year, pending any revisions or corrections found in the annual audit, which is now underway. Our Finance Manager and I have been working closely with the Camping Program Manager to improve financial systems and create more simplicity for all in the upcoming camping season.

Friends will see a new budget format starting this year. The format, developed collaboratively between myself and our Finance Manager, “talks” with our accounting system and standardizes budget categories across programs and Committees. This new format will both allow for more timely and accurate internal financial reporting (while requiring significantly fewer staff hours!) and create more transparency and understanding among Friends about the finances of the Yearly Meeting.

With support from Adrian Bishop and volunteers from Supervisory Committee, repairs have been completed at the Yearly Meeting Office. You can read the details of those upgrades and repairs in the report from Supervisory Committee. Coordinating this work took many hours of my time in January and February. One remaining task, for which I am seeking volunteer support, is unpacking the contents of the on-site storage cube back into the



garage. In addition to the necessary repairs, we also took the opportunity to gather up some



benches and create a worship space in the sunny, main room of the BYM Office. I hope Friends will consider the Yearly Meeting Office *your* office! We welcome you to come for a visit or to use any of the facilities here, including the worship space, sunporch (great for

hybrid retreats), and the hospitality suite (available for overnight guests).

Photos: Left - New worship space at the Yearly Meeting Office – come worship with staff on Thursday from 12-12:30pm; Right - The new HVAC unit that will address allergens in the BYM Office. After 4 months without heat in the depth of winter, staff were delighted to take off our hats and coats at work!

Personal Reflections

As I round out a year-and-a-half of service as your General Secretary, Supervisory Committee asked that I share with Friends “how I’m really doing” in this report. This feels difficult to do succinctly, so I will simply share what I have said to the Committee in recent months: There are many part of my job that I love. It’s so good to work among Friends. I find myself in a flow-state when I’m doing the work of staff leadership and process transformation. The huge amount of work I am responsible for often feels unseen by the Yearly Meeting. I feel I am fairly compensated for the job I was hired to do. The job I actually do is significantly larger than the job I was hired to do. I am contracted for 35 hours per week but routinely work 50 hours each week and long to routinely have 2 consecutive days of rest each week (even if that is not Saturday-Sunday). The pace and volume of the job are affecting my physical health, my spiritual well-being, and my family.

Supervisory Committee also suggested I be forthright with Friends about systems for communication. Managing the volume of email I receive is quite difficult. Most of all, I feel guilty and ashamed about all the emails I simply cannot get to – I know this must be frustrating for Friends who never hear back from me. Here are a few ways we might work better together when it comes to email:

- I am unable to skim information out of emails on which I am CC’d. If there is something you would like me to see or do, please send an email to me directly and/or be blunt at the top of the email about what you would like me to see or do.
- If you have questions about budgets, finance, or reimbursements, please direct those to Finance@bym-rsf.org. Harriet will bring any items to me that she cannot address on her own.
- For Zoom links, website content, event registrations, contact information for Friends, Meeting Statistics, the Weekly Announcements, or the Interchange, please email admin@bym-rsf.org.
- If I have missed your email, please let me know! A “gentle nudge” to me via email or leaving a phone message with Lucy (301-658-6797) are always welcome if I’ve missed your email.

One of my core ethical practices is paying attention to how our Quaker values are, or are not, replicated within the structure, policies, practices, and habits of our Year Meetings. The large is a reflection of the small. In order to live in the world we seek, we must build every village, every neighborhood with that same attention to Love, to Justice, to Spirit and Truth. In my work as General Secretary, some of that construction work is tangible – administrative policies, financial transparencies, equity practices. But some of that work is less tangible – the work of caring, of doing the internal work to really see others, of holding all but Love and one another lightly. Some of my labor is visible to the wider body of Friends and some is not. I ask for your continued prayers for the clarity, humility, energy, and courage to fulfill my responsibilities with faithfulness to the beloved community.

Yours in service,

Sarah G.