

Celo Friends Meeting Minute on the Uplifting Racial Justice Committee Approved 2.23.2020

Let us be enraged about injustice but let us not be destroyed by it. –Bayard Rustin

Celo Friends acknowledge that regardless of our good intentions, white Americans will never fully understand the suffering - past and present - of African Americans. We seek unity of purpose among all SAYMA Friends in the pursuit of racial justice.

Celo Friends embrace the principles of nonviolence. We cherish the statement from SAYMA's *Faith and Practice* that reads, "We recognize that violence can manifest itself in words as well as deeds. As Friends, we endeavor to bring all aspects of our lives into harmony with this testimony." And so, we have been dismayed to learn that Friends of color have experienced some meetings as unsafe places because of the words and deeds of some white Friends, and we champion the vision of the Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) committee, which reads as follows:

SAYMA-URJ envisions a Yearly Meeting community where every Friend of color feels welcome. We see a SAYMA community where the divine Light within every Friend of color is affirmed, their unique history, spiritual journey and lived Truth is honored, where our messages and concerns are heard and respected with due consideration. We see a SAYMA community where Friends of color are empowered to build close spiritual Friendships, appreciation, love, and support for the weighty responsibilities we carry as people of color, embodying Quaker Testimonies, within and outside of the Religious Society of Friends.

After three years it does not appear that progress has been made toward the fulfillment of this vision. In fact, it has been well documented that new, rancorous divisions have opened up among white Friends, among Friends of color, and between white and African American Friends. The vision statement explicitly looks forward to empowering Friends of color within the SAYMA community. And yet we observe that SAYMA Friends of color are not participating in the URJ committee. We are particularly concerned by unloving speech and existing posts in social media containing personal attacks against Friends that are antithetical to Quaker testimonies and at odds with what SAYMA Friends envisioned when the URJ committee was formed.

We do not feel that it is useful to assign blame for these results. After reviewing the SAYMA documents addressing the formation of the URJ committee, we must all humbly acknowledge that in several aspects Friends made mistakes while forming the committee, and we believe that the only way forward is to suspend future funding for the URJ committee until there is assurance of the following:

- That the six original approved goals for the committee be revisited and, if necessary, new goals be approved by SAYMA during a meeting for worship with attention for business.
- That most of the members and attendees of the URJ committee are participants in SAYMA monthly meetings and/or worship groups and are thus guided by SAYMA's *Faith and Practice*.
- That as part of restoring a culture of respect to SAYMA, there is an end to personal attacks—both in person and online—which are antithetical to Quaker testimonies. We further ask that all such past attacks be removed from the SAYMA website.

Neither Friends of color nor white Friends have been served by releasing our collective selves from following Quaker process. Having been forged by generations of Friends, the process of waiting on God's will to direct our steps identifies us as Friends and holds us to that identity. While we may disagree with one another on many things, it is fundamental to Quaker belief that when we seek God's will, all together in worshipful silence, we will find unity of spirit.