

To: Celo Friends Meeting

From: Jennie Boyd Bull, SAYMA Representative

Re: Report on SAYMA Yearly Meeting, June 16-19, 2022

Date: June 24, 2022

Summary

I attended the full SAYMA Yearly Meeting in person at Warren Wilson College, from Thursday evening opening worship through Sunday lunch. I participated in three Meetings for Business, two workshops and worship-sharing groups, two evening plenaries, a Finance budget meeting, delicious meals and conversations, and Opening, Remembrance, Uplifting Racial Justice, and Closing meetings for worship. The theme was “Seeking Spirit In Each Other,” the first in-person SAYMA Yearly meeting since 2019. We all wore masks indoors, except when eating, and enjoyed the beauty of the Warren Wilson campus unmasked. Bob McGahey (Clerk), Geeta McGahey (Finance Committee), Gred Gross (Celo Friend), and I (SAYMA Rep), attended from Celo Meeting. I’m grateful that Gred joined us; his guitar-playing and singing at the Saturday evening Singalong was a delight. The following report summarizes my personal response to these events.

I was delighted that about 150 Friends gathered in person, joined by 20-30 Friends on Zoom. Many families and numerous SAYF young people attended, bringing joy and hope to our Yearly Meeting. The power of personal connection was evident throughout the weekend, as we laughed together and shared in small groups. I was struck by how much personal presence supports connection and suggest that some of SAYMA’s conflict over the past two years was amplified by our virtual distance.

SAYMA affirmed all positions presented by the Nominating Committee, so SAYMA now has new co-clerks, a recording clerk, and more for the next two years. The budget for 2022-23 was approved, with the addition of a paid bookkeeper to support the treasurer. We approved a Racial Justice Training Program sponsored by Angela Hopkins with Friends Committee on Racial Justice for the coming year. Representative meetings will continue, the next scheduled for October 29. While there was conflict during business meetings, I’m happy to report that SAYMA is alive and well and thriving, as a way opened to move forward together. The following report presents my personal experience of the Yearly Meeting and is not a minute. Visit the SAYMA website at www.sayma.org for minutes and more information.

Meetings for Business (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings)

Monthly meetings were well represented. We welcomed guests Jim Cayson (FCNL), Wayne Finegar (Quaker House), Angela Hopkins (FCRJ) and Avis McClinton (Abingdon Meeting, PA). The Naming Committee met four times in May and June and presented a Nominating Committee of Julia Ewen (ATL), Morgan Murray (AVL), Pat Gally (Berea), Annie Black (Ckvl) convenor, and a Young Adult (to be decided). The committee will also add representatives from monthly meetings.

Nominating Committee

Chuck Jones (Chat.) presented Friends to fill the following positions, all of whom were approved at the Saturday Meeting for Business:

- Co-Clerks: Daryl Berquist (Birmingham) and Margaret Farmer (AVL)
- Recording Clerk: Blake Burr (Memphis)
- Treasurer: Kendall Ivie (WKVL) one year
- Assistant Treasurer: Katie McAfee (Chat., YAF) two years
- Finance Committee Clerk: Karen Morris (ATL), Members: Steve Olshevsky (Berea), Geeta McGahey (Celo), Anne Williams (WKVL)
- SAYF Steering Committee: Jennifer Dickie (ATL), Kelly Adkins (Memphis), Chris DeBeer (Swannanoa), Erin Rosetta
- Yearly Mtg Planning Comm: Jennifer Dickie (clerk), Laura Lane, Hank Fay, Karen Morris, Steve Livingston.
- Faith & Practice Handbook Clerk: Wood Bouldin (Charleston), adhoc review committee with Melissa Priest and Star Smith.
- Peace and Social Concerns: Hank Fay (Berea)
- AFSC: Taylor Brelsford (WKVL)
- FCNL: Jane Hiles (Birmingham), Susan Penn (Memphis)
- Earth Justice: Charlie Wilton (Berea)
- FWCC: Geeta McGahey
- Epistle Committee: Jackson Napier (Berea YA), Star Smith (Paul Cuffee), Carol Nickel (WKVL)
- Ministry and Nurture: Annie Black (CookVL), clerk.

Finance Committee and Budget

Kendall Ivie, acting treasurer, reported on the \$51k budget, with 62% of assessments received as of 5/22. All Wider Quaker Organization donations have been sent. See SAYMA website for complete report.

Geeta McGahey, acting Finance clerk, presented the Sept 22-23 budget, which adds \$3,600 for a bookkeeper to support the treasurer. Assessments have decreased by \$4k, with Swannanoa's withdrawal. Expenses have increased, with the bookkeeper stipend and a \$5k contingency fund added. No funds were allocated for URJ, but set-aside contributions of about \$900 will be released. The Finance Committee held an open meeting on Saturday afternoon to receive input, and the budget was adopted at the Sunday Meeting for Business, as presented. The budget will be posted on the SAYMA website.

Ministry and Nurture

Annie Black, clerk, reported Swannanoa Meeting left SAYMA and Brevard worship group was laid down. Monthly meetings experienced resilience and creativity in response to COVID and First Day schools suffered. The Committee found unity on the Atlanta Minute on Reparative Justice and Reconciliation and asks SAYMA to continue to address it with diligence in monthly meetings and as a yearly meeting. "The letter kills, Spirit gives life."

SAYF and JYM

Jennifer Dickie (ATL) clerk reported that SAYF met in-person in Atlanta and conducted three FAN training sessions, providing stipends for YAFs and FANS to attend SAYMA. Henry reported on the March Celo and April Memphis SAYF retreats, with the largest graduating class ever at SAYMA.

Laura Lane, clerk of JYM (ages 2-12) reported that 11 families participated (4 new), with 16 children and 2 babies. Playcare for 2 to 5-year-olds will resume next year. JYM proposes family retreats in Asheville and Atlanta in the coming year.

Racial Justice Training Program

SAYMA approved a voluntary Racial Justice Training Program for 2022-24, facilitated by Angela Hopkins (FCRJ), Star Smith (Paul Cuffee)) and Shannon Smith (Berea). An invitation letter will be sent to monthly meeting clerks and reps, and documents will be posted on the SAYMA website. The goals are learning Quaker process, training in Critical Race Theory, and organizing support groups. Beginning this summer,

Shannon will organize free small affinity groups, some regional, to meet either virtually or in person for support. Then SAYMA and monthly meeting leadership will be given priority to receive a formal “pay as led” workshop training as facilitators. Half-day training modules will include “What is Racism/White Supremacy,” “Anti-Racism Audit,” “Quaker Social Change Theory and Anti-Racist Praxis,” and more.

Plenaries (Friday and Saturday Evenings)

Max Parthas, Paul Cuffee Abolitionist Center

Max and his wife Tribal Raine, a descendant of Quaker Paul Cuffee, are members of the Paul Cuffee worship group and head the SC Abolitionist Center, dedicated to removing wording from the 13th Amendment of the U.S. and state constitutions, which abolished slavery “except if duly convicted.” These words have been used legally to maintain “chattel slavery” of incarcerated people of color for generations, and today the U.S. has the largest prison population in the world. Since 2010 the Abolish Slavery National Network, founded by Angela Davis, has been working to remove the clause from state and U.S. Constitutions, and Max is campaign coordinator. Utah, Nebraska, Colorado, and Rhode Island have removed the clause. In 2022, legislation for removal is on the ballot in Tennessee, Alabama, Vermont, Oregon, California, and Louisiana.

We viewed a trailer of the film, “Benjamin Lay: The Irrepressible Prophet,” documenting Lay’s fight for abolition among Quakers, originating with slave-holding Quakers in Barbados in the 1700s. Although Friends abolished slavery in 1871, today involuntary servitude based on race and class is big business in for-profit prison systems globally. For example, G4S, a for-profit prison and security company, is the largest employer on the continent of Africa. Black men comprise 40% of the prison population in the U.S., double the number in Africa, although only 4% of the US. Population. One in three black men are expected to spend time in prison before they are 30 years old. See ACLU June 2022 report, “Captive Labor.” <https://www.aclu.org/news/human-rights/captive-labor-exploitation-of-incarcerated-workers>

- Max invited us to educate ourselves on the issue at www.abolishslavery.us. See Abolish Slavery fact sheet (attached).
- Lobby state and U.S. representatives at www.endtheexception.com. The U.S. legislation currently has 93 cosponsors.
- Max and Tribal host a weekly radio program. See www.abolitiontoday.org, with music and poetry. Max and Tribal are spoken word artists with

www.maximumimpactpoetry.com. Tribal closed with her poem "Lost Voices."
I'll share my copy of *Ink-Stained Rivers: Blue Blood for a Red People*.

Angela Hopkins, Friends Center for Racial Justice (FCRJ)

After watching a slide show on justice and love that presented each person as a flower with roots, stem, and petals, Angela asked us to share on the following queries in small groups of 8-10:

- *How do my personal roots manifest as petals?*
- *As Quaker community, how do our roots manifest as petals?*
- *How am I embodying what I say, value, and believe?*

The open-hearted sharing across meetings inspired community.

Worship-Sharing and Meetings for Worship

After Meeting for Business on Friday and Saturday mornings we gathered in the same small worship-sharing groups to respond to the following queries. I found these times a welcome opportunity to process and relax from SAYMA business:

Friday:

- *What gifts do I bring to Yearly Meeting and what gifts can I receive from others?*
- *How is my life nourished spiritually through my connections with people in Yearly Meeting?*
- *How do I bring my spirituality into the world?*
- *What feelings come up when I wonder where the road leads in Yearly Meeting?*

Saturday:

- *Remembering a time when I grappled deeply with an issue with someone, how was I able to overcome this challenge and find the Spirit within them and in me?*
- *How do I ground myself in Spirit while seeking Spirit in others?*
- *What spiritually transformative experiences have I had through relationships with others?*

Worship for Remembrance

On Friday evening we gathered for a Worship for Remembrance, during which Friends shared about the lives of Friends who had died in the past two years. I personally found this one of the most powerful moments of the weekend for me, as we celebrated their lives and mourned their absence. Celo Friends read obituaries and shared about four beloved members of our community: Herbie Walters, Denny Fernald, Robert Johnson, and Liz Golibart.

Open Worship with SAYMA URJ

On Saturday afternoon, Star Smith led an open worship inviting response to the following statement and queries:

- *The U.S. is a rogue white colonialist settler state founded on violence.... How does it feel in my body to sit with and accept these historical truths?*
- *How do I embody what I value and believe?*

I found this worship especially healing, as I acknowledged the slave-holding on both sides of my family history and how to confront what I've avoided much of my life.

Workshops

Nine workshops were offered after lunch each day. I participated in two.

Cai Quirk workshop, "Queer Restoryation: Weaving New Narratives"

Cai, currently at Pendle Hill, is a nonbinary poet and photographer. See <https://caiquirk.com/upcoming-events/> and Quaker Speaks. They spoke with us virtually about "Beyond Pink and Blue," presenting the rainbow of color as a spectrum of equality and a metaphor for gender, moving gender from a binary either/or concept that harms us all to a rainbow vision beyond appearance. They asked us to contemplate "What color is my gender?" and share in dyads, then in tryads to share "What is me beyond stereotypes?" Several young people attended the workshop; I was inspired by listening to their stories.

Kofi Adams, "Sound Healing Meditation"

In the outdoor pavilion, Young Adult Kofi Adams led a diverse group of young and old in Qigong movements, then resting on our backs to listen to his bringing us sounds of flute, drum, harp, didgeridoo and more. I found it a very meditative and relaxing session after the intensity of morning business meetings--much appreciated.

Other workshops offered: Colonizing (Tom Kunesh), Expanding Meeting for Worship (Wood Bouldin and Hank Fay), Advocacy (FCNL), Discerning Spirit (Pat Galley), Mini Kites (Chuck Jones), Responses to Ukrainian War (Quaker House), Peace on our Plates (Charlie Wilton)

Conclusion

Sunday morning Meeting for Business concluded in time for a Meeting for Worship. Bob McGahey was commended for his two years as clerk, the Yearly Meeting Planning Committee for an excellent in-person meeting that brought us together in Spirit, and the Nominating and Finance Committees for their support in moving us forward together. I personally am grateful to both Bob and Geeta for their faithful

and patient presence with SAYMA over the past two years and wish them well-deserved rest as they continue their participation with SAYMA.