

Yearly Meetings with 2016 Statements concerning Racism and Inclusivity in the Religious Society of Friends

Yearly Meetings: BYM, IYM, LEYM, NEYM, NYYM, OVYM, PYM, SAYMA

Baltimore Yearly Meeting

2016 Annual Sessions Epistle: “The ad hoc Growing Diverse Leadership Committee (GDLC) reminded us of the need to be intentional in growing our inclusiveness, which includes looking at ourselves and our practices that present roadblocks which many of us do not easily recognize. Although the opportunities are sometimes uncomfortable, we are guided by the GDLC to be courageous as we examine our Monthly and Yearly Meetings.

We were deeply saddened by the racist behavior of local police enforcement that was encountered by Friends of Color at the Friends General Conference Gathering. It heightened our awareness of how much work there is to do in removing obstacles to inclusion in our Yearly Meeting.

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Suggested change to our Vision Statement was brought forward by the Working Group on Racism report, in which a proposed paragraph on our aspirations to become a more diverse Meeting was added. Friends grappled with the connotations that certain words hold and, therefore, which ones would be best suited to accurately convey the sense of the body regarding diversity. Discernment on the matter led to strong feelings by various members of the community though an undercurrent of excitement could be felt by the body for the minute and the work done by the Working Group on Racism. Ultimately, the proposed addition was approved by the Yearly Meeting as, from it, a clear need to express class as an issue going forward was recognized.”

At 2016 Annual Sessions BYM made this addition to their Vision Statement, proposed by the Working Group on Racism and seasoned over the past year: “We Friends are of many skin colors, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, gender identities, sexual preferences, abilities, and stages of life seeking the Spirit’s presence in our lives, and in our life together. We aspire to include a greater diversity of Friends across all differences, recognizing that some of us have experienced oppression and marginalization in ways that others have not.”

2016 Spiritual State of the Yearly Meeting: “Meetings continue to yearn for greater diversity of income, race, age, and sexual orientation from their outreach efforts. Most Meetings welcome the possibility of growth and recognize that it may bring disquiet and adaptation.”

Illinois Yearly Meeting

2016 Sessions Epistle: Two years ago, under the banner of Joy: Still a Gift of the Spirit we focused our hearts and minds on becoming more inclusive. We sought information and determined actions challenging ourselves to become more inclusive around gender, sexual identity, race, and personal preferences and styles. Last year, under the banner of From Mystic Voice to Active Voice we focused our hearts and minds on actualizing our spiritual concerns for those both far and near. We sought information and determined actions, challenging ourselves to walk the talk. The joyful stories told during this year have been about our strides with inclusion, our strides with actualizing our spiritual concerns. Certainly, we are a work in progress; for, we are not always able to speak frankly about uncomfortable issues. We acknowledge this and continue on, ever more willing to risk asking, “So do you want to be my friend or do you want to be careful?”

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting

2016 Annual Sessions Epistle: In worship sharing we considered queries that Woolman might have asked: Am I learning how to be aware of my own implicit bias that may interfere with my ability to see that of God in every person? Am I mindful of how my lifestyle and my investments can contribute to the improvement of the human condition, or to the exploitation of others?

LEYM chose as their 2015 query: How might our Meeting support individuals and the Meeting as a whole in working to increase racial justice within our world? In what ways do we as a Meeting recognize white privilege in our own Meeting? What tools and practices do we use to foster awareness of our personal and corporate biases?

Detroit Friends Meeting puts it front and center for us: Profound spiritual and moral questions, including those of racism and white privilege, must begin with the question, “Where is it in me?” We can easily become philosophical and intellectual, but examining white privilege begins as a sometimes painful, internal search. Even those of us who have thought about questions of race and privilege for a lifetime continue to deal with this because white privilege is an invisible veil through which white people encounter reality. It often exists not through intent but through lack of awareness. We need to continually pull aside that veil.

New England Yearly Meeting

2016 Annual Sessions: Our hearts were touched when we heard the pain and honesty in the reports of the experiences of People of Color and other attenders at FGC Gathering. We felt the spirit move us to affirmation and action.

We are complicit in white supremacy. We at New England Yearly Meeting have been “colonized” by our white supremacist culture and fall short of our full potential as a gathered body of Quaker Meetings because of this colonization.

We commit to engaging in interrupting white supremacy in ourselves:

- within individuals
- interpersonally
- in our meetings
- and at all system levels of NEYM

To start this, we ask Permanent Board to explore an external cultural competency audit of New England Yearly Meeting.

We support Friends General Conference, an organization of which we are a part, in its efforts to interrupt white supremacy in its organization.

We commit to support fundraising by the New England Yearly Meeting FGC committee to raise \$4,000 from our membership and our monthly meetings by the end of 2016. These funds will be available to FGC towards the cost of an external cultural competency audit if FGC decides to have one conducted. If more than \$4,000 is raised, we direct the Permanent Board of NEYM to find use for the additional funds to support the work of interrupting white supremacy.

(Read more about NEYM’s laboring with the words “supremacy” and “colonized” here <https://neym.org/minutes/year/2016-sessions minute 2016-64>)

New York Yearly Meeting

2016 Sessions Epistle: We yearn for a more economically and racially diverse body. We actively await leadings that envision action to move toward that yearning, including discernment around the Pay as Led payment system. In Meeting for Discernment, Friends dwelt on the need for trust as leadings unfold: trust in one another and trust in The Source. We honored those who have cared for our Yearly Meeting, some of whom are stepping down after long service. As change comes to the Yearly Meeting, we consider what we wish to become. In this year of terrible racial violence, we were especially tender about barriers to community that arise from the persistence of racism: how difficult it is to expel the legacy of white privilege, how painful it is that so many Friends and potential Friends are kept from us by mass incarceration and an unequal criminal legal system, by money and time constraints. We marveled anew at the strength of spirit with which some Friends surmount these obstacles. Friends’ awareness of racism and privilege was amplified by more than one hundred New York Yearly Meeting Friends’ attendance at the Seventeenth White Privilege Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We rededicated ourselves to advancing a more equal society that recognizes that of God in every person. Our search for Truth as individual Friends and as a body demands that we seek to create a Blessed Community that is available to all. As Jesus instructed his followers at the end of a chapter we considered in Bible Study, ‘love one another, as I have loved you’ (John 13:34).’

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting

2016 Annual Sessions Epistle: We approved a number of new and revised sections of our Book of Faith & Practice, including sections on our testimonies of Integrity, Simplicity, Community, and Equality and a section on Listening to the Spirit. We worked faithfully together on the draft of the section on Equality in light of the inward work we are still undertaking to become more sensitive to racial injustice, and we felt divinely led in this process.

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Niyonu Spann spoke to us on "Trusting the Broken Heart" as a path of transformation to find our way to wholeness and healing. We learned that we must see beyond the illusion of the existing structures of oppression that separate us in order to truly acknowledge and appreciate one another. Through an exercise of speaking and listening in small groups, we were given a safe opportunity to be very honest about the pain we experience from the violence and division in our present world. Niyonu asked us to consider that to be truly inclusive and whole, we must open our arms wider, even when our hearts are breaking. When we lean on a deeper promise: God will assist us in being transformed and healed.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

2016 Annual Sessions Epistle: What is God calling Quakers in our Yearly Meeting to do next to end racism and white supremacy in the Religious Society of Friends and beyond? What will the blessed community look like in the future? How can we create a welcoming and inclusive space for all Friends? Just as the caterpillar struggles to transform into a butterfly, so we have struggled to understand and address the racism present in our yearly meeting.

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Throughout Annual Sessions we have talked, thought, prayed, and worshipped about how we will address racism and white supremacy. We disagreed; we protested; we were frustrated, angry, and discouraged. We are being held in the light and we seek its guidance. In all our conversations we made great efforts to speak our Truth with a goal of transforming ourselves and our yearly meeting. Our Young Friends testified that the phrase "people of color" did not resonate with them, to the extent that it should be changed.

The Undoing Racism Group presented a proposal for formalizing the structure, leadership, and governance of Undoing Racism Group in relationship with Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Using a tool, "Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Institution," we attempted to place our Yearly Meeting along a spectrum of structural racism. Many of our conversations about racism continued long into the night, in big and small groups, during meals, and in the hallways outside our formal sessions.

On Saturday evening, our keynote speaker, Dr. Tonya Thames Taylor, carried us to her grandmother's 5'x7' front porch, in Gulfport, Mississippi. From that porch, we heard lessons young tonya learned about resilience, the power of language, and encouraging one another – "when a situation arises, you recognize the pain and the struggle, but you don't let it rob you of your humanity". In her inspirational and challenging message, tonya drew from the Bible, African American history, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Henry David Thoreau. tonya

left us with a query: When you have a burning bush experience, how will you respond? How do you be subversive and transforming?

The Undoing Racism Group has asked us to envision a blessed community. We will continue our labors to discern how to move rightly toward achieving that end.

2016 Annual Sessions Young Adult Epistle: Our yearly meeting is holding a corporate anti-racism witness. At Annual Sessions 2014, Friends called to this witness came together to form the Undoing Racism Group. The YAF community is working to recognize and change the structures of oppression and privilege that we operate under, as is the rest of our yearly meeting. Some of us are actively involved in anti-racism work, and yet we often do not bring that work back to our YAF community. We are just beginning conversations about how to create more space for continued work to challenge racism within our community.

This year, the Undoing Racism Group offered a proposal to establish the group's role in the yearly meeting. During Saturday's business sessions, members of the Undoing Racism Group called on the clerk's table and the body to address where they fit in the new Philadelphia Yearly Meeting structure—business that was long overdue. Many Friends (literally or metaphorically) stood in solidarity with the Undoing Racism Group. Many members of our community were among the supporters of the call to amend the agenda and continue discernment. This clear leading of Spirit was shut down due to concerns about timing and process. We mourn our yearly meeting's unwillingness to sacrifice the agenda for the movement of Spirit. We recognize the challenge of agenda-building, while at the same time holding a concern for the ways that rigid time structures perpetuate privilege and white supremacy in our yearly meeting.

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We know that our yearly meeting has been laboring mightily with Spirit to listen deeply and come to a structure for challenging institutional racism that all of us can unite with. We stand with the Undoing Racism Group in its call to weave the work of anti-racist transformation into the fabric of every structure of our yearly meeting.

Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting & Association

2016 Annual Sessions Epistle: Our theme this year was "Unraveling Racism. Over the last year our yearly meeting's planning committee worked to create an opportunity for us to gather together around this theme. We are grateful to the committee and particularly appreciate the gifts of the Friends of Color who joined the committee. We explored our theme through plenary sessions, interactive exercises, workshops, small groups and worship sharing.

In our first plenary, invited speaker Vanessa Julye, Coordinator of FGC Ministry on Racism, laid out a systematic analysis of the origin and development of the structures of inequality and oppression in the United States. We understand the oppression of today has deep roots in history. On our second night together, a facilitated dialogue and interactive exercises allowed us to express and witness our differing life experiences and the effects of systematic racism. In these interactions, we witnessed and experienced the continuing hurt and damage of

racism along with the struggle to find reconciliation and understanding. We felt both the fierce urgency of this work and the need to be tender with each other.

During the weekend, we were brought to realize we have a long way to go to unravel racism, including within the Society of Friends.

Twenty-one workshops were held permitting Friends the opportunity for deeper exploration of topics, most of which related to the theme of unraveling racism. Workshops included healing the wounds of racism and oppression, mass incarceration and racism, and supporting African women through micro-lending projects.

In our business sessions, we considered proposals seasoned in our monthly meetings. We considered and approved the creation of the standing Committee on Racial Justice. This will provide a space at the yearly meeting level for Friends of color to come together and support each other, to educate the wider SAYMA community and to gather resources for education.