

Acting General Secretary's Report Third Month 2021 Interim Meeting

We are one-day shy of being exactly three months since our last gathering to consider the business of the Yearly Meeting. In that time, many things have happened that have changed the work of the staff, the Acting General Secretary, and the entire community. There is an urgency for us to consider how to rise to these new challenges and opportunities.

Staff updates:

At the Twelfth Month 2020 Called Interim Meeting, I had the pleasure of introducing **Brian Massey** as the new Camping Program Manager. I am pleased to say that he has done a fabulous job stepping into a big job just as we opened registration for the 2021 camp season with a whole new sliding scale for fees and all of the uncertainties of the ongoing pandemic. Not only has Brian navigated these challenges, he has also successfully led the effort to find a new director for Opequon Quaker Camp. He and **Jared Wood**, the new Director, are working to develop new procedures for Opequon to help the community develop and grow.

Mary Braun brought 2020 to a fabulous close as she will detail in her own report today. She rightly gives credit to everyone who gave their support to the Yearly Meeting to help us successfully weather the financial challenges we faced in 2020. Her unending energy, innovative ideas, and constant optimism was the driving force behind that success. And in the middle of trying to close out 2020, she worked with Brian to develop an unprecedented winter campaign asking the camping alumni to support for the sliding scale. The generosity of that community has been another sign of support for our leap of faith.

Khalila Lomax finished 2020 with the second successful series of the 21-day Challenge and then jumped into 2021 and the accelerating work of supporting the STRIDE camper and their communities in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and the District throughout the pandemic. At the same time, they are working to generate excitement for camp and developing new ways to prepare the campers for the camp season.

Sunshine Klein continues to support our middle-school and high-school students as they try to build their community without the ability to gather together for conferences. The JYFs met together in January (and are meeting again next weekend) and the Young Friends had their LoveCon last weekend. Sunshine is working with Brian to find new ways to proselytize the Youth Programs to camp families this summer and we know that everyone is looking forward to the day they can all be together in person.

David Hunter and many volunteers completed the work of updating the Infirmary at Catoctin Quaker Camp and we are now pleased to have it generating income in the middle of winter. David has been working with Brian to identify what work will need to be done at the camps to recover from not being open in 2020 as well as what changes need to be made to assure that our campers and staff will be as safe as possible during the 2021 season. In the middle of all of this, he also led the search for a new Caretaker at Catoctin, and we are thrilled that **Dylan Phillips** will be joining us in the middle of March. Dylan's energy and excitement for the camp will be a great addition.

Harriet Dugan continues to work hard to single-handedly master all of the skills and jobs of our financial department that have required two people to manage in the past. In February she took on the work of preparing our records for the audit that will be starting this week. What is always a challenging project was made doubly complex since the Yearly Meeting skipped the 2019 audit last year, so she has had to prepare two years of records and reports.

Finally, in December we marked our appreciation for the work of Administrative Assistant **Laura Butler**. We were sorry to have to see her leave her service to the Yearly Meeting at the New Year, but I am thrilled to report that she has found new employment. We miss her in the office and wish her all of the best. At the end of January, we said good-bye to **Jane Megginson** as she ended her service to the Yearly Meeting. She is also greatly missed.

Departure of Jesse Miller as Director of Opequon Quaker Camp:

On January 3, Jesse Miller sent an email resigning as the Director of Opequon Quaker Camp. In addition to this, Jesse took the time and energy to share deep and painful thoughts about his experiences over many years with the BYM Camps. A copy of Jesse's letter has been provided as an attachment to this report, and many Friends across the Yearly Meeting have had the opportunity to read and reflect on it over the past two months.

Jesse speaks mainly to his experiences with our camps, the part of our community that he grew up in and where he became a valued and beloved leader. Personally, I was excited for him and for Opequon Quaker Camp when he was named as the Director of the camp for the 2020 season. I am certain that his wisdom, passion, and sensitivity for that community would have been a gift. All of us, especially Jesse, were robbed of that opportunity by the closure of the camps last spring. Jesse's wisdom and passion can be seen in his letter, even as he brings forth painful and worrisome comments about his experiences with us.

Since Jesse's letter was received, I have had the privilege of participating in conversations among the Camping Program Committee, the Camp Property Management Committee, the Growing Diverse Leadership Committee, the Supervisory Committee, and others about the concerns that Jesse raises. While some of the specific events Jesse relates have required specific and direct response, the systemic issues he describes cannot be solved quickly. In all the conversations I have listened to, I have heard Friends mirror the pain and sadness that I felt. But I have been heartened by how many Friends have then taken the next step of recognizing the duty the entire Yearly Meeting has to take the opportunity that Jesse, and others, have given us.

We have heard many times in the past months of the need for the entire Yearly Meeting to consider how we have failed to live up to our promises to be an anti-racist community. We have heard it from the Young Adult Friends, from the Young Friends, from the STRIDE community, and now from a leader of our camping program. Friends are recognizing the power of the messages from these Friends, and we are beginning to seek ways to make the real and necessary changes to live into our promises.

As examples of the responses I have seen, I have attached copies of letters from the Clerks who give guidance and structure to our Yearly Meeting, and from the Growing Diverse Leadership Committee that were sent directly to Jesse himself. Additionally, on the agenda for Third Month

2021 Interim Meeting there is a request from the Supervisory Committee to increase its membership which would allow more Friends to participate in the work to guide and advise the General Secretary and staff. There is also a report from the Youth Safety Policy Working Group on their discernment that the obligation of making a safe environment for children goes well beyond “just sexual abuse.” They are looking at how to seek to develop processes to help prevent “emotional harm from any source.” The camping program is working with Brian and the Directors to deepen and strengthen the policies and training for all camp staff, including work grant volunteers, to improve their ability to create and maintain the safe space we promise our camps will be.

In the coming months I am certain that we will hear about more work being done by others across the Yearly Meeting. There is a rising energy and commitment to be better than we have been, to learn from our past mistakes, and to support new leadership at multiple levels of the Yearly Meeting who are dedicated to finding new solutions. Jesse ended his letter by saying “I still believe in BYM. I still believe in the mission.” We owe him, and everyone in our community who has been harmed by our mistakes, to do the hard work needed to justify his belief in us. It is work for everyone, in every worshipping community, in every committee, at every camp.