

Dear Jesse,

February 25, 2021

The Growing Diverse Leadership Committee of Baltimore Yearly Meeting offers many thanks for the remarkably powerful letter “for reflection and action” addressing the subject: “On Blackness and BYM” that you sent to those with whom you felt that you had worked closest and other “immediate chosen” family.

We hear you.

We acknowledge that BYM has harmed not only you, but many other Black People in our community. We can only imagine how many others have been harmed that have not come forward. Your courage is commendable, and particularly acknowledged by other Black friends. It is imperative that our community respond.

We also acknowledge that the organizational structure of BYM lacks accountability and thus affords minimal protection to those in our care. Often no one is held responsible for causing harm or for failing to take steps to prevent similar harm in the future.

We appreciate the time you took and spent sifting, sorting, listening, and loving. All the while, you were adjusting, beginning, ending, and continuing; amid emotion and confusion plus wishing, planning, saving, and deciding.

There is more. You tell us of hearing music, feeling pain, glorying in opportunity. But then, you came to understand that “way” was not open as you had hoped and could not be when your heart, head, gut, and spirit are not in sync (aligned, as you named it). At least your heart was not aligned for now. Even for family. Even for what you have been building. And loving. Still loving....

The profession you have made and are making into your identity is just too fraught right now, right here. It is marred in a manner unsuitable in your current circumstances because it is specific to a given place, family, and set of cultural contradictions that manifest in individuals, a Quaker organization, and Quaker values until that combination has become unbearable.

Diversity is what is at the heart. What passes for its practice at BYM is so out of alignment with what is required that it is, effectively, not being practiced and is missing. Diversity requires understanding of and belief in “that of God in everyone.” Its absence, especially given Quaker rhetoric, is too much to hold, especially when it has become personal and becomes lost due to characteristics you cannot change. That point is made still sharper and more painful when we of BYM can change our portion and do not choose to do so. A choice we make by refusing to become educated so we understand the pain we are imposing on people who love us, like you.

You tell us that you experience us “as a spiritual, Quaker organization [that] often leans on its intentions rather than direct action.” Our wish fulfillment efforts won’t cut it. Grown-ups should understand this. And we must recognize that wishful thinking leads to blaming the victim when those with power don’t get our way. And that is wrong spiritually, morally, and logically, no matter how much we declare that our intentions are good. Plus, we even found a way to compound that,

by placing Dyresha and you in antagonistic roles with you being asked to “correct” and “fix” her while Dyresha was being punished for making the “wrong” choice when she was forced to select one job and to do it as her supervisor/boss wanted. Thanks are owed to both of you for how well you ran Catoctin Quaker Camp. We must learn about choosing and being grown-ups from what you two did, the character you each showed and that you showed as a team.

It is imperative that we as the Growing Diverse Leadership Committee rebuke the idea that intentions alone are adequate. Instead, we demand actions and outcomes.

We as a committee plan to work with the rest of BYM to adequately address your concerns. Here are several steps we will take in the next 90 days to respond. We will:

- Investigate a program evaluation/diversity audit, including a recommendation for funding sources.
- Lead BYM in revisiting our Anti-Racist Declaration in such a way that every staff member, committee member, and other members of the BYM community have an opportunity to understand its spirit and application in a practical way.
- Advocate for the Anti-Racist Declaration being applied in such a way that it results in a more racial diverse staff and leadership positions, including, but not limited to, Supervisory, Search, and other Committee Clerks
- Continue to raise with CPC the issue of what happened to and with the camper at Opequon. Since we have yet to receive a satisfactory answer to this matter, we will continue to press the issue with Brian Massey, Camping Program Manager.

We want to honor your boundaries around discussing this issue further. Would you like to hear about our progress and conclusions, or would you like to stay away from any follow-up and updates? If you choose not to respond at all, we understand, and will take that as a desire to opt out of that conversation moving forward. Please know that if you select that option, we will be willing for you to re-open discussion with us at a time of your choice.

We appreciate your metaphor of family and share it. You are our brother. We hold you in love and in the Light.

Peirce Hammond, Clerk
BYM Growing Diverse Leadership Committee