

Acting General Secretary's Report Twelfth Month 2020 Called Interim Meeting

Much has happened in the Yearly Meeting office since my last written report for the Ninth Month 2020 Called Interim Meeting. The highlights include:

- The search for the next Camping Program Manager was initiated, with over 120 applications received. With the wonderful support of the interview committee of Sam McCormick, Betsy Roush, Guli Fager, Dyresha Harris, and Robert Finegar, we narrowed that list to first 40, then 12, then 4 candidates. At the time of my writing this report, we are not yet ready to announce who has been hired. However, it is my hope that I will update this report in person at Interim Meeting to introduce Jane Megginson's successor.
- The difficult decisions required to bring the 2021 budget into balance in a way that is conservative but hopeful about what we can do as a community were made, and approved.
- The 2020 Yearbook finally went to the printer just after Thanksgiving. I expect that we will be able to mail copies to those who will be receiving printed volumes shortly before Christmas.
- David Hunter and volunteers have prepared the Infirmary at Catoctin Quaker Camp to be able to be rented out over the winter. We have had a surprising level of interest in the Caretaker's cabin since it began to be listed on AirBnB, and we look forward to similar popularity with the Infirmary.
- Mary Braun and the Development Committee have become even more busy than usual. The Winter Appeal letter may already have arrived in your mailboxes, and you probably have received information about #GivingTuesday and the challenge grant. If you enjoyed the staff's Thank You video last week, the credit goes to Mary and Sunshine. It is through their work and the support of everyone that the Yearly Meeting has been able to work through the challenges of 2020. Mary's imagination and innovation in finding new ways to inspire all of us to support the Yearly Meeting in 2021 will continue to be key to our being able to move ahead.
- Khalila Lomax and members of STRIDE have begun a series of discussions with the rest of the staff to better educate all of us on what the program has been doing in recent months and how they are beginning to plan for 2021. This is an exciting idea that I know all of the staff are benefiting from. In the future, we are going to look at having each member of the staff do something similar. With all of the changes that every program has faced, this framework creates a new opportunity to share our work with each other.
- In the last few weeks, Sunshine Klein has led the first Junior Young Friends conference, the second Young Friends conference, and a Friendly Adult Presence training. Both the JYF and YF conferences were virtual, but they are finding new ways to build and support their communities despite not being able to be physically together. The Young Friends who registered early for the conference even had boxes of brownie mix and other treats delivered to their door!
- Jane Megginson and the Camping Program Committee have continued to work on planning for the 2021 camp season. This is always a massive project that requires dedicated work in more "normal" times. For 2021 we face a seemingly infinite range

of possible scenarios depending on what happens with the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions range from “will there be camp at all” to “will any campers come” and so many more. They have taken the opportunities of the unknown to consider new ideas including introducing a sliding scale for registration fees similar to the Pay as Led being considered for Annual Session. We think that a sliding scale will make coming to camp possible for more families inside and outside the Yearly Meeting. Many of these decisions will have to be finalized very soon, and we hope to be including the new Camping Program Manager in those choices.

I mentioned the approval of the 2021 budget in my list of highlights, because it absorbed much of my time and energy since September. It is also a useful reference for looking back at what has happened in 2020 and what the Yearly Meeting is looking forward to in 2021. We learned in 2020 that assuming things would work out if we just kept doing what had always worked in the past isn't a good system. We learned that it is sometimes easier to make a promise to ourselves than to actually live up to the implications of that promise, but that failing to keep the promise can have severe and long lasting results.

In the past, we have approved budgets that included promises of fund-raising that then weren't kept. The 2021 budget is the result. Similarly, in the past we have promised ourselves, and most importantly our younger (or newer even if not chronologically younger) Friends that everyone is equal, that we try to always act with integrity, and that we are in community with everyone else. In recent months we have heard members of our community express pain and anger. Some reported feeling excluded and ignored as things were happening to react to the closure of the camps and the Yearly Meeting's fiscal crisis this spring. Others described feeling that they felt less equal because of issues of membership that didn't seem to fit with our deeper testimonies. Yet others have questioned our willingness to live up to the promises we have made to ourselves in being an anti-racist community.

I believe that when Friends approved budgets with bigger promises of financial support, they thought they were acting with good stewardship. I also believe that when decisions were made and actions taken in the last months that no one intended to cause the pain and anger we have seen. A Young Adult Friend who I deeply respect has been talking with me. I shared my certainty that none of the sources of pain being reported were intentional. They used the analogy of having your toe stepped on by accident and noted that the fact of the accident doesn't remove the pain of the sore toe. Their analogy makes a point. But it fails to go to the next step, that we must first apologize for the unintended harm, and then work to learn to not do it again.

Our entire Yearly Meeting community has seen that we can find new solutions to difficult problems when it is needed. We learned how to worship, do business, and build community while physically apart from each other. Many have begun thinking about how to adapt our traditional practices from non-pandemic times to include the benefits of the new solutions even when many of us are able to return to being together. We are beginning to apply that same energy to find new solutions to our deeper problems. The Faith and Practice Committee has been asked to consider the meaning of membership in the modern day. The Manual of Procedure Committee has been asked to consider the implications of the provisions of our procedure in light of our commitments.

The Camping Program Committee is rethinking many elements of how the camps operate. The Youth Programs are finding new ways to serve our children who can't be together.

All of these changes, and so many more, are needed and important. But we must learn from what we have heard in the recent months. Through the hard work and generosity of many Friends, the Yearly Meeting isn't in the kind of crisis we faced last spring. We have the time to do what should have been done then, but wasn't. We must include everyone in the conversations and decisions to come. When someone says they feel ignored or excluded, we must make sure that we take the time to hear them and make sure they know they have been heard, and valued. The Yearly Meeting can grow and become the valuable connection that we all desire only when every person knows that they are loved and accepted.

During Eleventh Month 2020 Interim Meeting, there was a discussion that grew out of the proposed new job description for the General Secretary. Included in that discussion were a number of very kind comments about Friends' appreciation for my service over the years. I want to thank everyone for those comments, and for all of the other messages of support that I have received in recent months. They mean a great deal to me. Another element of that discussion was suggestions that the search for the next General Secretary be delayed. I didn't speak during the meeting, as it felt inappropriate at the time. But I want to be clear that I am fully in support of the current plan to proceed with the search process immediately. Whomever the next General Secretary is, they deserve the opportunity to be fully engaged in the conversations and discernment that the entire Yearly Meeting need to have. Doing the search now while we are just beginning our work gives the new General Secretary the best chance to succeed in their service.

The discussion last month emphasized the general desire for a "truly open national search process." This desire, and many of the deeper feelings that were raised, should be part of an understanding of the wider changes that the Yearly Meeting is being asked to consider. The General Secretary Search Committee being proposed is made up of Friends who have a range of experience of our community. They need the guidance, and support, of us all as they take up their work.