

Introduction to the Apology to Afro-Descendants Presentation to Fall Sessions

Hello Friends!

Ministry Coordinating Committee is bringing the Apology to Afro-Descendants today for discernment and approval. Copies were available at the registration table along with some background information compiled by the European American Quakers Working to End Racism Working Group. I trust you have had a chance to read over those documents.

This Apology has been many years in the making. The original version was written by the European American Quakers Working to End Racism Working Group, better known as EAQWERS, printed in SPARK in January 2008 and displayed on the Black Concerns table in the summer of 2008 and 2009 where more than 90 Friends signed it indicating their approval.

In January of 2010 the Apology was given to the Task Group on Racism which is under the Ministry Coordinating Committee. At that time the EAQWER group was not in the Yearly Meeting structure and it seemed best to move the Apology through the Ministry Section of the Yearly Meeting. The Task Group brought the original version to the Ministry Coordinating Committee in the summer of 2010. There were mixed responses with several Friends approving it as read and others concerned with where it might be leading our Yearly Meeting. It was referred back to the Task Group for further work.

The Task Group worked on the Apology at its next three meetings and brought a new version to MCC in the summer of 2011. After some discussion and several changes MCC approved the Apology with one Friend standing aside. MCC also approved sending the Apology to Monthly Meetings for their consideration. It was read on the floor of Yearly Meeting prior to being sent out, but was not brought to the body for approval at that time.

The Task Group on Racism and MCC are deeply appreciative of the work that Friends have done within their monthly meetings to engage with this issue. We acknowledge that meetings created time in their busy schedules to consider this Apology and appreciate that this work has brought us closer as a yearly meeting family. In their discernment meetings either were undecided about the Apology or endorsed it. MCC did not receive reports of any meeting minuting opposition. Meetings that notified us that they approved the Apology are Albany, Binghamton, New Brunswick, Rahway-Plainfield, Scarsdale, Schrewsbury, Syracuse, and Wilton.

Some meetings referred the Apology to their peace and social action committee; some held after meeting discussions with those who were able to attend; some reported that they had not considered it; and some were led to write their own.

The latter group includes Albany and Rahway-Painfield. Manesquan Meeting wrote their own Minute on Racism with regrets for Quaker participation rather than an apology. The EAQWER group also continued to work on it. The Task Group considered each of the suggestions they received but could not include all of them in the minute.

The most consistent objection came from Friends who are uncomfortable with the word "apologize". We received several thoughtful versions from individual Friends "regretting" our actions as Friends but the Task Group felt strongly that expressing regret falls short of apologizing. When we apologize we admit wrong doing, accept responsibility, and express remorse. All of these are important if we are to begin healing from the effects of slavery on all of us. The Task Group incorporated some suggestions from one of our prison worship groups and wording from a minute on racism we received from Manasquan Monthly Meeting.

We are grateful for everyone's participation in this process and thankful for the time meetings have taken to labor with this issue. It is clear that this is not a perfect document in letter, but we trust and believe that it will open the door in Spirit to better understanding and further healing in the future.

The Task Group reported to MCC on the progress of the Apology throughout 2012 and brought a revised version back to MCC at summer sessions in 2013. MCC approved that version with one small change. That is the version we are bringing to you this morning.

Read the Apology!