



# SPARK

New York Yearly Meeting  
*The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)*

Volume 51, Number 4

15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003

September 2021



## Messages from Summer Sessions

### 2021 Epistle

New York Yearly Meeting

*What is an epistle? At their yearly gatherings, Quaker groups often write a letter describing their work and how Spirit has been moving within the group. This letter is an epistle. The epistle is designed to be shared with other Quakers and groups around the world. Please share it with your local meeting. You can read other epistles from yearly meetings and Quaker groups at [fwcc.org/world/epistles-from-quaker-groups-from-around-the-world](https://www.fwcc.org/world/epistles-from-quaker-groups-from-around-the-world)*

Dear Friends everywhere,

New York Yearly Meeting met for Summer Sessions July 24–July 31, 2021 (again on Zoom in this second year of the Covid-19 pandemic) and acknowledged the lands of the many First Nations we inhabit across New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Two hundred and fifty Friends were registered. Of these, 54 were first time attenders and 36, including 9 of the first timers, identified themselves as young adults.

For three weeks before we met in sessions, 47 interest groups attracted 230+ Friends and explored climate change, racism and anti-racism, spiritual accompani-

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### A Sanctuary Where Transformation Can Happen

Regina St. Clare  
Shrewsbury Meeting

It was a summer lush with 47 different interest groups, ranging from drill-down techie teach-ins, personal development pickin's, and deep-down serious Quaker themes. There was something for every adult; the kids were in Zoom burnout.

I attended about 15 interest groups, followed by a weeklong ride on the annual Summer Sessions train. Our annual meeting ran well and on track, with a sincere intention by the participating body of Friends to rise to the occasion and do its work. And it did. The week was a beautiful mix of mystical themes and action items—all with the spirit of John Woolman well intact. Racism and American Indian rights remain high on the agenda, even 400 years later.

Was Summer Sessions a sanctuary for transformation—a place set aside for a change from one thing to another? Like Jerry Reisig portrayed in the first day of Bible study, perhaps it could be a liminal space where transformation happens. Imagine two single people, walking down the wedding aisle,

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### Writing Your Own Obituary

Jan Philips  
Florida Ave. (DC)  
MM, sojourning at  
Ridgewood Meeting  
& Charlene Ray  
Morningside Meeting

How do you answer a question like “I’m looking for stories from NYYM’s July interest groups and Sessions. Would you be willing to write a short article about them for Spark?”—especially when it comes from Sarah Way? Especially when the interest group you offered was called “WRITING MY OBITUARY; SELF-PENNEDED NOTES FOR A (NEARLY READY TO GO) MEMORIAL MINUTES... FOR THE AMBITIOUS FRIEND?”

First we might say that it was a delicious way to spread a message of taking responsibility for ones own aging. And even more fun when you have a collaborator—we have to say that we, Jan Philips and Charlene Ray, had a ball working on this together, an opportunity to get to know each other better in a time of isolation. We were well prepared by Fred Dettmer and give full credit to Melanie-Claire Mallison for our virtual exploration and journey.

George Fox’s early charge to us is: “let your lives speak.”

Obituaries and memorial minutes are an important kind of

*continued on page 5*

### An Introduction to the Draft NYYM Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Faith Community

*Dear Friends,*

One of the actions faith communities can take in becoming actively anti-racist is to make a public statement of intention. For those connected to NYYM, the impact of such a statement would go beyond the words themselves, inviting each of us to consider deeply what this might mean for ourselves, our meetings, our communities, and our yearly meeting. In hopes that NYYM will be open to making such a statement of intention, a **Draft NYYM Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Faith Community** came to Summer Sessions 2021 for reflection and the initiation of

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## Notices

### New Members

**Marcia Clark** — Poughkeepsie

**Timothy Farley** — Schenectady

**Jon Mehlhaus** — Morningside

**Jeremy and Susan Shank** — Old Chatham

**Sara Sullivan** — Buffalo

### Births/Adoptions

**Peregrine Kai Haines**, born on June 16, to V. Isabelle Haines and Alexander Haines-Stephan, members of Mohawk Valley

### Transfers

**Irem Konur**, to Manhasset from Matinecock

**Martin and Adrian Vasilko**, to Manhasset from Matinecock

### Deaths

**Glen Bibler**, member of Brooklyn, on May 11, 2021

**Barbara Brice Carey**, member of Albany, on April 17, 2021

**Norma Christie**, member of Rockland, on February 18, 2021

**Shelley Cochran**, member of Rochester, on July 14, 2021

**Veronica Crandall**, member of Unadilla, on August 3, 2021

**Thomas Findley**, member of Chatham-Summit, on April 18, 2021

**Edith Holley**, member of Brooklyn, on June 14, 2020

**Barbara Louria**, member of Chatham-Summit, on November 18, 2020

**Donald Louria**, member of Chatham-Summit, on July 26, 2021

**Renda McCaughan**, member of Wilton, on July 26, 2021

**Paula McClure**, member of Montclair, on July 28, 2021

**Mary Medlar**, member of Unadilla, on March 18, 2021

**Nancy Smith**, member of Hudson, on July 11, 2021

**Vincent Smith**, member of Chatham-Summit, on May 20, 2021

**Frances Sokol**, member of Butternuts, on February 4, 2021

**Daisy Westra**, member of Brooklyn, on August 30, 2021

## Around Our Yearly Meeting

### NEWS

#### What does "NYYM" mean?

NYYM stands for New York Yearly Meeting, which represents all the Quaker meetings within New York state, north New Jersey, and part of Connecticut. NYYM facilitates communication between meetings and organizes gatherings of Friends a few times a year.

#### Invitation to World Quaker Day 2021

**October 3, 2021**

[www.worldquakerday.org](http://www.worldquakerday.org)

You are invited to World Quaker Day, the annual event from Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) where we celebrate Quakers around the world, on Sunday, October 3, 2021. Our theme: Resilience and Hope: drawing strength from our Quaker faith. Get ideas and resources on how to celebrate from the website: [www.worldquakerday.org](http://www.worldquakerday.org)

#### Do You Receive the Weekly NYYM Email Update?

Each Friday an email newsletter from NYYM is sent out to over 1600 people. Are you one of them? The newsletter gives you timely updates on NYYM and Quaker-related news, upcoming events, and opportunities (like jobs and grants), and features sections for young adults and children/families. To subscribe, email your name to [walter@nyym.org](mailto:walter@nyym.org).

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### NYYM Fall Sessions

**ONLINE, December 3-5, 2021**

Save the date! More info will appear online and in the November issue of *Spark*.

#### Powell House Workshops

Powell House is the retreat and conference center for NYYM. Visit [poho.org](http://poho.org) to see the full list of upcoming events. Save the date for **Dwelling Deep: a Contemplative Retreat**, January 14-17, 2022

### EVENTS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

The Young Adult Field Secretary, Marissa Badgley, continues to support and organize gatherings, workshops, and worship designed for young adults (ages 18-35-ish) but open to all. Visit [nyym.org/yaf-calendar-2021](http://nyym.org/yaf-calendar-2021) for all upcoming events.

#### Upcoming Powell House conference:

#### REVEALING TRUTH

**October 22-24, 2021, for young adults 18+ (not in high school)**

The pandemic has peeled away parts of our life that we may have previously taken for granted. During this weekend, we plan to dive into conversation about what we've discovered during this process of peeling away layers of our lives. We will talk about the seeds of truth and love that we've found, as well as the grief and sorrow we've experienced. We will of course also play games and enjoy gifts of light and love we bring to one another. Find this conference at [poho.org](http://poho.org) to register.

### EVENTS FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

#### Upcoming Powell House Youth Conferences

*Register for conferences at [poho.org](http://poho.org).*

**Using All Parts**, 6-8 Grade

November 12-14, 2021

This conference will focus on crafting and building with anything and everything we can possibly use. An old rickety chair destined for the dump could be refashioned into a miraculous invention with the right creativity and handiwork! Or maybe you're interested in designing a sculpture of your favorite story using paper and cardboard from the recycling bin! We plan to discuss our use and reuse of material items as we build on each other's imagination in physical space.

**WINTERSONG 2021**, 9-12 grade

December 10-12, 2021

Our usual wintertime celebration will be held at limited capacity this year. As such, we are inviting just

9th to 12th graders. Even with a smaller group, we plan to let our light shine as we join together as a community.

There will be deep small group discussions, interesting workshops, and many more delights to share!

### ONLINE WORSHIP

Many of the local (monthly) meetings in the New York Yearly Meeting area are holding online or hybrid online-and-in-person meetings for worship every week. Visit [nyym.org/online-worship-opportunities](http://nyym.org/online-worship-opportunities) for the full list. Other Quakers organizations are also

continuing to offer online worship.

#### Powell House Online Worship Fourth Saturdays at 6:00 p.m.

Powell House holds a meeting for worship via Zoom on the fourth Saturday of each month at 6:00 p.m. For info on how to join, contact Regina at [regina@powellhouse.org](mailto:regina@powellhouse.org)

#### Friends General Conference (FGC)

FGC maintains a list of online worship opportunities at [www.fgcquaker.org/resources/online-worship-opportunities](http://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/online-worship-opportunities)

#### Pendle Hill Worship in the Barn

Members of the Pendle Hill community gather in the Barn for worship every day from 8:30 to 9:10 a.m. Connection information is at [pendlehill.org/explore/worship/join-us-online-for-worship-in-the-barn/](http://pendlehill.org/explore/worship/join-us-online-for-worship-in-the-barn/)

#### FWCC's Worldwide Worship List

Friends World Committee of Consultation (FWCC) has compiled a list of meetings holding worship online around the world: [fwcc.world/kinds-of-friends/online-worship](http://fwcc.world/kinds-of-friends/online-worship)

### OPPORTUNITIES

#### NEW! Quaker Parent Mutual Support Groups

Please share with Quaker parents and families! These groups will meet

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for six months, starting roughly in mid-November, for one hour every two weeks. The purpose is to provide Friends who are currently parenting children with a space for mutual conversation and support.



This year, the project is co-sponsored by New York Yearly Meeting, Friends United Meeting, and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting,

but ALL Quaker parents are welcome to participate, regardless of location or affiliation. Parents can register here until October 31: [tinyurl.com/QPMSG21](https://tinyurl.com/QPMSG21) Questions? Email Emily Provance at [eprovince@hotmail.com](mailto:eprovince@hotmail.com).



**NYYM seeks a Children, Youth, and Young Adult Community Director**

Are you looking to be in a role where you can experience community and support others in community building? Are you passionate about contributing to the lives of young adults and children? Are you committed to nurturing your spiritual community and helping others do the same? The New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is looking for an empathetic self-starter to curate and manage implementation of programming for children, teens (and the families of children and teens), and young adults (ages 18-35) among Quaker meetings in New York, Northern New Jersey, and Western Connecticut. Please see the entire job listing at [nyym.org/job-posting-CYYACD](https://nyym.org/job-posting-CYYACD). Apply by September 30, 2021.

## Echoes of the Past Come Alive at the Penington Friends House

Todd Drake  
Brooklyn Meeting

Late at night in the summer of 2020, standing in the backyard of the Penington Friends House in Manhattan, the city was eerily quiet due to the Covid pandemic. Echoing off the tall surrounding apartment buildings, you could hear the faint sound of people chanting “Black Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter.” That summer of protest deeply moved the residents of the Penington. While being extremely Covid careful, most of us still found ways to participate in the BLM movement: some marched, some documented participants with photographs, some gave out water to passing marchers. One march even went right up 15th Street in front of our building, our hastily put up BLM signs and flags bringing smiles to those passing by.

Our community, including residents, the board, and staff, began reading and discussing the BLM movement. Todd Drake, a manager, and Jimmy Manocchio, a long time resident and illustrator designed a BLM mural with input from our Jawad Rayan. Everyone in the house including board members painted the mural one summer night.

While immediately cheered by many passing by, the mural seemed like a beautiful cover to a book in need of a new chapter. The first chapter belonged to Penington’s

founding board members. This included Phebe Thorne who was a plain Quaker who envisioned the Penington as a safe home for youth moving to the city. She left money in her estate to set up a free residency at the house. Mariana Wright Chapman was another early board member. She and her husband were vigorous advocates for the rights of slaves and women. During the Civil War they were both active in the Underground Railroad. She led Suffragette organizations at the state and national level and was called many times to speak in Albany before the legislatures by Governor Theodore Roosevelt.

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### Editor’s Note

Please read the messages from Summer Sessions and share them with your meetings — especially the anti-racism statement on page 5.

A weekly NYYM email newsletter is sent every Friday; see past issues at [nyym.org/weekly-updates](https://nyym.org/weekly-updates). To receive the email, send a message to [walter@nyym.org](mailto:walter@nyym.org).

You’re invited to submit your writing or images for future issues of *Spark*.

**Upcoming Spark themes: November: Intergenerational Communication.** How can we listen and learn from other people, no matter our ages? What has been misunderstood? Have you successfully transcended the barriers of age? How do we overcome stereotypes and artificial differences and truly see each other? Please write about your experience.

Do write! Deadline for the November issue is **October 1**. Send article, letter, photo, poetry, and drawing submissions to [communications@nyym.org](mailto:communications@nyym.org). Please limit yourself to 400-600 words.

You can also send news or events to that email address so they can be shared in the weekly NYYM email or in the next *Spark*.

Find NYYM on **Facebook** (NewYorkYearlyMeeting), **Twitter** (NYYMTweets), and **Instagram** (newyorkyearlymeeting).  
—Sarah Way, NYYM  
Communications Director  
[communications@nyym.org](mailto:communications@nyym.org)

## Police Reform New Paltz Meeting

*The attached is a letter about police that Friends in New Paltz labored faithfully over for a number of months. It was approved for distribution and the clerk was directed to send a copy to be considered for publication in Spark.*

As members of the Religious Society of Friends we believe in the dignity and worth of every human life. We seek the best in ourselves and look for the best in others. We strive to treat our neighbors equally and with honesty, fairness, and respect, whatever their walk of life, whether we agree with their views or not.

We consider ourselves responsible for caring for our nation, our communities, and each other, including those who work in New Paltz to keep the peace. We oppose violence in any form. These are the same values and attitudes we would like to see in the local police and in our community. We urge that community officers be deeply schooled in ways to solve conflicts without violence.

We are profoundly disturbed to know that nationwide the police kill three people a day—a number that hasn’t changed in recent years, despite all the attention on police killings (as reported in the NY Times, 4/17/21). A disproportionate number of the victims are people of color. Similarly, people of color are incarcerated at a much higher rate than whites. Violence and injustice can only create more violence.

We are heartened to know that the town of New Paltz has passed a plan in accordance with suggestions from the Police Reform and Reinvention Committee that includes community oversight of the police as well as antiracism training. We are eager to see the implementation of these changes. We welcome and support them.

—New Paltz Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

### Donate to NYYM

Visit [nyym.org/donate](https://nyym.org/donate) or mail a check to the yearly meeting office at 15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003. Thanks!

This is one of a few different ads Shrewsbury Meeting has run over the past few years, most recently in the *Two River Times*, a local weekly newspaper in the Red Bank, NJ area.



# Messages from Summer Sessions

## 2021 Epistle

### New York Yearly Meeting

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ment, and many other ways to live into our testimonies.

The Sessions Committee made the decision not to offer programming for children and youth during our summer sessions based on Zoom fatigue among our young Friends in 2020. We missed our children, and we will be sending out a mailing of activities for youth and families in the yearly meeting over the next few weeks.

Our Bible study, every morning of the week, helped us explore sanctuary as the place where God dwells, in the First Testament as a physical place—where Jacob wrestled with his angel, the burning bush that Moses saw, and the movable Tabernacle—and in the Second Testament as living water within us.

We examined our theme, “Becoming a Sanctuary Where Spirit Dwells,” especially as it relates to our work toward becoming an anti-racist faith community. Our plenary speaker, Emily Provance, told us that “To embody sanctuary is to rest in the overwhelming presence of God.” But she warned that true sanctuary is not always calm, well-behaved, and safe; being searched by the Light is a wrenching experience. Are we ready to learn and to be changed? To reach beyond what’s comfortable? We need to keep reminding one another that “We all live by grace.”

White Friends felt that discomfort as we all were challenged to search for a way to confront patterns of oppression and micro-aggression, which White Friends may not even recognize. How can we “call each other in” to faithfulness to our ideals with justice, mercy, and love? Our Clerk warned us that “we” can be a dangerous word, and she encouraged us, when we hear something that hurts us, to tell the body Ouch, to let the assembled Friends know that there was an injury. In the same way, we could say Oops to acknowledge our own hurtful words or deeds. Some Friends later shared their pained concern that this practice might damage our community.

Steve Mohlke, our General Secretary, told us that he sees some progress toward inclusivity: our “Pay as Led” program makes it easier for everyone to attend Summer Sessions; this year all the clerks of our Meeting for Discernment were young adults; we say “white Friends” when that’s what we mean, instead of “we.” He gave us a new goal: 100 Friends from around the yearly meeting to attend a weekend of deep anti-racism training.

Our State of Society report this year told us that our vulnerability can bind us together and ended with a question: “How will we grow into the future?” This is difficult work, and where we are right now doesn’t feel comfortable. We were encouraged to practice “shame resilience”—acknowledge the micro-aggression we have committed, feel the shame, and get over it.

Our Meeting for Discernment, a full day of worship with queries about our experience of sanctuary, included written responses from our worship groups among incarcerated men, who told us their experiences in this year of pandemic.

We approved a minute to urge the Government of Japan not to release highly radioactive water into the Pacific from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

We approved a minute in support of the Truth and Healing Commission for Native Peoples, which confronts our complicity (as a nation and as Friends) in the atrocity we called “Indian Boarding Schools.”

After we heard the epistle from the General Meeting of Friends in Mexico in English, one of our members read the epistle to us in Spanish *con mucho gusto* and told us how vividly it rekindled her memories of her time among Quakers in Mexico. The epistle spoke of their loss during the pandemic and reminded us of the plight of Latinx migrants.

Diane Randall of Friends Committee on National Legislation talked about the difficult but exciting work of connecting over time with people she disagrees with and her appreciation for the nurture and support she has received by travel-

ing and worshipping among Friends during her decade of service with FCNL.

Two afternoons were spent looking at racism among us and how to become an anti-racist community. These sessions searched us and our practice and challenged many of our assumptions about ourselves as Friends. They helped prepare us to consider in our monthly meetings a proposed statement of this intention: “As a yearly meeting we commit to work toward becoming an actively anti-racist faith community. May we be faithful.”

With the loving assistance of God and one another we seek to be faithful, remembering that we all live by grace.

In loving Friendship,  
Elaine Learnard, Clerk  
New York Yearly Meeting



## A Sanctuary Where Transformation Can Happen

Regina St. Clare  
Shrewsbury Meeting

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accompanied by music. At the end of the aisle they join in a ceremony with an official to exchange vows, rings, and kisses and receive official blessings and confirmations. Then, the two will become quite different—spouse, parent, and lineage carrier. Was our Friends’ summer sanctuary a place where we could change our form or our habits, and become someone better than when we arrived?

Did I/we provide the sanctity needed to make the needed change true, real and sustainable? Was my change from the inside out... the outside in... all-enveloping? Yes, no, and maybe.

Only once before, 40+ yrs ago, did I attend the NYYM Summer gatherings. Now at 86, being almost 16 years in the Shrewsbury (NJ) Meeting and 16 months in the Zoomsbury COVID clan, I knew only two people at Summer Sessions who I’d met at an ARCH Zoom in April.

I was delighted to begin my interest groups with Cai Quirk singing and chanting, which was



## BECOMING A SANCTUARY WHERE SPIRIT DWELLS

designed to seem like we were in a vibrant choral group, while singing our hearts out on mute. At other interest groups I advanced my Zoom skills, listened deeply and patiently to worship sharing and workshops, and experienced affinities with the one and the many. I often felt both elderled and accompanied, in the most positive ways—so much to learn, so many to love, so much to clean and clear—a kind of spiritual decluttering.

Two key sanctifiers of our liminal space were the gifts and disciplines essential for transformation. Each of us has God-given gifts. It takes transformation for them to be awakened, used, and developed. In her plenary, Emily Provance gave us a needed gift of sanctity. Please watch the video of her talk online (search for “NYYM Videos” at Youtube.com.) During business meetings, Elaine Learnard, as NYYM clerk, made me feel as though I was in the Supreme Court of Justice, on Heaven’s side.

My week ended in a breakout room with Steve Mohlke. It felt like I was out in the back yard with Mr. Rogers in his garden of magic and delight.

The Zoom experience is likely to be with us forever, even though face to face is so special. If it weren’t for Zoom, we could not have done

*continued on next page*



all of this. Because Zoom enables us to accomplish so much, with more to come, may we be willing to embrace all that it can do, and use it to accomplish the greater tasks we face, which we could not do without Zoom and Friends.

Thanks to Fred Dettmer and the Tech Team. 

## Writing Your Own Obituary

Jan Philips

Florida Ave. (DC) MM/  
Ridgewood Meeting  
& Charlene Ray  
Morningside Meeting

*continued from page 1*

storytelling, a way of tapping into our roots, roots we share as Quakers and roots that tie us to a wider world. Understanding the journey of a Friend is often a reflection of the life and times of a broader society. The stories we share of the life we live are the vibrant and vital strands of a treasured quilt. The fabrics we weave tells the trials and challenges that when made available can enlighten, empower, soothe, comfort, and connect the generations.

The Living Spirit within Friends is the story that doesn't die when the body stops. We moved beyond: name, birthplace, occupation and listing of service committees, to asking Friends: "describe the family you created, who is your tribe? Who are the people who vanished during your life and how did that influence you? Who are the people who supported you by making you feel safe, loved, cherished? How have you been tested by Friend's testimonies?"

We were completely astonished (and delighted!) that some 50 folks signed up, signaling a surprising degree of interest, and raising the question 'Why?' and "what next?"

We planned for our Interest Group to be hands-on, with participants preparing their own obituaries while laying down an outline for their eventual memorial minute. We might have created more space for interaction—but we purposely did not. A virtual follow-up is planned for Thursday, September 30, 2021, 7:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

In the words of Bob Hope, 'thanks for the memories.' 

## Introduction to Draft NYM Statement...

*continued from page 1*

an extended period of discernment.

This draft statement was created by a task group which formed nearly a year ago. This multi-racial group of more than a dozen Friends spans over 50 years in age and includes people from various monthly meetings and the three yearly meeting committees — Ministry, Witness, and General Services — that coordinate the other committees' work.

Over the coming year, you and your meeting are invited to focus on how you can truly become an anti-racist faith community, and discern what that will mean for you and your meeting. The task group is sharing queries and resources that you may find helpful. You can find these resources at [nyym.org/anti-racism-statement](http://nyym.org/anti-racism-statement) or by requesting a copy from the office at 212-673-5750.

Your meeting will be asked to share your challenges and successes in doing this work. There will be opportunities to participate in Anti-Racism trainings as well as opportunities to discuss your progress with Friends throughout New York Yearly Meeting.

The draft statement will return for consideration as a Minute on Becoming an Anti-Racist Faith Community at NYM Summer Sessions in 2022. The draft is below.

*In Friendship,*

*The Anti-Racism Statement Task Group*

## Draft NYM Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Faith Community July 5, 2021

As Quakers, we place our faith in the Living Spirit and seek to live in ways that recognize the value and dignity of all life and each person. Friends' faithfulness is rooted in continuing revelation, in being broken open by the power of the Spirit calling us into new ways of living. New York Yearly Meeting believes that we are being called to a profound kind of change, to create a vision and experience of collective liberation.

Race has no scientific or genetic basis and was invented to divide and turn people against one another for the purpose of exploitation. Notions of racism and white supremacy permeate our society, our communities, and ourselves, undermining our faith that there is that of God in everyone.

New York Yearly Meeting acknowledges that Quaker communities have often perpetuated racist practices while at the

same time many Friends opposed racism over the years. Some New York Yearly Meeting Friends enslaved Black people, benefited from migrant labor, or taught at or supported Native American boarding schools. By contrast, other Friends struggled to end the institution of slavery or establish civil rights for everyone. Both individual Quakers and meetings in New York Yearly Meeting have caused great harm by remaining complicit in racist systems, historically and today.

Friends of Color have spoken up over the years about being marginalized and devalued by white Friends. One Friend wrote "I experienced joy in being in community with Friends ... but also pain when Friends did not have a clue that their behavior was often hurtful and racist." White Friends, who see themselves as good people committed to equality, often feel offended when told that their behaviors are racist or that Quaker policies and practices oppress Friends of Color. We cannot avoid the reality that there are people who are oppressed, not merely out in the world, but also within our faith community.

Many practices and norms in American Quakerism are rooted in white supremacy. White Friends

may be blind to oppression and racism that happen within our community. White Friends often do not notice when Friends of Color are passed over for service or positions of leadership. White Friends may reject what a Friend of Color says because they prioritize their own comfort over what the Friend has to say. These kinds of person-on-person racism are embedded in the structural racism that permeates American society as well as the Society of Friends.

**As a yearly meeting, we commit to work toward becoming an actively anti-racist faith community.**

Living into this commitment calls us to develop new insights and practices for what it means to be an anti-racist faith community. We are united in our longing to heal from the harms of white supremacy and our grief that racism is an obstacle to authentic community in the Yearly Meeting and beyond.

We recognize that words without action accomplish little. We commit to naming and taking tangible actions to transform the culture of our yearly and monthly meetings and ourselves as individuals to more fully align with Spirit in liberation, justice, and joy.

*May we be faithful.* 





# Messages from Summer Sessions

## Becoming a Sanctuary Where Spirit Dwells

Emily Provance

Fifteenth Street Meeting

*The following is an excerpt from the plenary talk given by Emily at NYYM's Summer Sessions 2021. You can read the entire plenary at Emily's website, [quakeremily.wordpress.com/2021/08/07/sanctuary/](http://quakeremily.wordpress.com/2021/08/07/sanctuary/) You can also watch a video of the plenary at the NYYM Videos YouTube channel.*

What does it mean—to be, become, sanctuary?

First off—it's about embodying God's law, not church law. Just like in physical sanctuaries, it is so incredibly easy to mix up God's law with church law, or with other versions of human law. It is so incredibly easy to find ourselves saying, "I rejoice in you except if... I will always love you except if... We honor that of God in you but only as long as..."

Those provisos, those except ifs and only as long as-es, are the places where we start creeping into some kind of modified human law rather than resting in the overwhelming presence of God. To do this is profoundly human, so we naturally find ourselves doing this sometimes. But we can be something else. We can reach for real, divine sanctuary.

Grace. When Kelly Kellum became general secretary of Friends United Meeting, he brought into the FUM offices the phrase, "We all live by grace." When somebody on the team screws up—misses a deadline, forgets to do something, knocks over a glass of iced tea on the stack of agendas, Kelly says, "We all live by grace." I've seen this in action. It often draws laughter, but it also defuses the situation. Everybody in the room has heard the phrase applied to their own mistakes: "We all live by grace." Everybody in the room is reminded that we all make mistakes, that we all rely on the forgiveness of God and our fellow human beings, and there's this moment in which everybody relaxes, and while there might still be a problem, something that actually needs to be solved, the feelings of guilt and recrimination

aren't there. "We all live by grace." This is embodying sanctuary.

Mercy. There's a Quaker boarding school in Britain with a small percentage of students from other countries, some of whom are still learning English. Their reading ability often lags several grade levels below their peers'. So the school librarian keeps two special shelves of books, carefully chosen, that are interesting to teenagers but written at a level accessible to struggling readers. These shelves are completely unmarked and unobtrusive. When she encounters a student who might benefit, the librarian says, "Let me show you a place where I keep some of my favorite books. I think you might like them." And so they have books they can read. They can go to the library like any other student and find a book to read for pleasure—and their peers don't know, so there's no risk of embarrassment. This is embodying sanctuary.

There's a Friend in Kenya who I won't name in this story, and you'll see why in a minute. She told me once about being awakened in the middle of the night by a call to her cell phone. At the other end was a voice that said, "We are Ugandans. We are fleeing our country. If you do not help us, we may be killed by morning." She did not know these men. She did not know how they had obtained her phone number. But she did know that Ugandans accused of homosexuality were subject to death. She made arrangements to meet them and hide them and found a safe place for them to go next, and she did this at risk to herself, knowing that if she were discovered, she would at least experience severe social consequences in her own community. This is embodying sanctuary.

There's a rural meeting outside Belfast that had the same caretaker for sixty years. She lived on the meetinghouse grounds and cared for the buildings and property from 1955 until 2015. When she finally, in her eighties, could not physically do the work anymore, she moved a half-hour's drive away to a home for the aging. The meeting hired a new caretaker but added into its weekly division of tasks, every week without exception, someone to fetch Susan and bring her to

meeting and someone else to give her lunch and then drive her back. It is not a large meeting. This is done without fuss. Of course they will care for Susan. This is embodying sanctuary.

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I want to read a story from the book of Judges.

Jephthah then gathered all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead struck them down because the Ephraimites had said, "You Gileadites are fugitives in Ephraim, living in the territories of Ephraim and Manasseh."

(In other words: the Gileadites were living on land that the Ephraimites had claimed. The Ephraimites were persecuting them for it, and now the Gileadites were fighting back.)

The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a fugitive from Ephraim would say, "Let me cross over," the Gileadites would ask him, "Are you an Ephraimite?"

(In other words, the Gileadites had decided not to allow the Ephraimites to cross the Jordan River. But they couldn't recognize the Ephraimites on sight, so they had to check the identity of each person trying come through.)

If he answered "No," they told him, "Please say Shibboleth."

If he said, "Sibboleth," because he could not pronounce it correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. So at that time 42,000 Ephraimites were killed.

The Gileadites were checking for an accent. If you could say "shibboleth" the way the Gileadites did, then you were safe. Sanctuary. But if you couldn't, if you pronounced it "sibboleth," like an Ephraimite, you were murdered immediately.

Because of this story, the word "shibboleth" actually entered English vocabulary. A shibboleth is a signifier. It's a way that we figure out very quickly who we believe somebody to be: are you a welcome Gileadite, or are you a dangerous Ephraimite? When we engage with someone, we often listen for shibboleths. Do they use the right phrases? Display the right memes or bumper stickers? Drive the right cars? Wear the right shoes? Do they bring the right food to the potluck?

We do this. This community, New York Yearly Meeting. We do this. We do this to each other.

It's one thing to expect one another to change, to have those moments of broken heartedness, to be present for one another in the moments when the Spirit of God is throwing the moneychangers out of our sanctuaries. To know that we all need repentance. To hold hands through that. Sometimes to speak prophetic truth to one another. To know that we have been exclusive. Racist. Homophobic. Chauvinist. Ablest. Destructive. We have fallen short, individually and collectively. We have sinned. I am so grateful that we know this and are working toward being better.

But it's another thing when we allow the process of being searched by the Light, of broken heartedness, of repentance, and of genuine change of heart to be replaced by a set of shibboleths: right words, right clothes, right cars, right foods. None of those outward signifiers is bad, but as Margaret Fell would say, if we require them of one another and of those entering our communities—if it becomes about the shibboleth and not about the change of heart—then that is a silly, poor gospel.

Sometimes, we withhold sanctuary based on someone's failure to say shibboleth. I see Friends in New York Yearly Meeting do this with Quaker jargon. I see us do it with political and sociological language connected to liberalism. I see us do it with whether people own either a hybrid or an electric car. I see us do it with whether people eat vegan and unprocessed foods. I see us do it with the strategies that people use to raise their children. I see us do it with what someone shares on Facebook. We look for shibboleths, and either explicitly or implicitly, we make clear that those who don't say shibboleth will not receive our love, our mercy, our grace.

Just to be really clear here: when we have taken the time to know someone well, when we have worshipped with them, listened to them, learned what's in their heart, and when we have a divine leading to engage with them, we might say—as John Woolman did when sitting with enslavers—"Friend, I am concerned for thee." We speak the truth within divine sanctuary.



We don't subscribe to "peace, peace, when there is no peace." Truth telling, coming from a place of love and relationship, is a part of divine sanctuary.

In contrast, to shibboleth is to make a judgment about someone based solely on outward signifiers and then to refuse to extend divine sanctuary to that person. If you do not say shibboleth, I do not extend to you mercy and grace.

That's not sanctuary. A sanctuary welcomes in everyone, including—perhaps especially—those who've done wrong. That's the entire point.

If I place any conditions around my willingness to embody sanctuary for you—when I require that you behave or speak in some specific way, or else I will not grant you mercy and grace—then I am building a barrier around the sanctuary I have tried to embody. Suddenly, just as there is in a physical sanctuary, there is an inside and an outside. And this is a real problem, because as long as sanctuary is conditional, those who want to stay in are imprisoned. Suddenly, there are boundaries on what you can do or say, and if you make a mistake, you find yourself on the outside.

Not on the outside of God's love. That's not possible. But on the outside of what someone is calling a sanctuary.

If the sanctuary we embody is really divine sanctuary, nobody can ever be kicked out. This is both glorious and terrible news. I can never refuse you mercy and grace. No matter what you've done, I hold open for you the possibility of repentance. Remember, that is different from saying I have to accept everything you do. This does not mean that I can't say "no" or "stop." Prophetic truth-telling and protection of the vulnerable will sometimes require that I say "no" or "stop." But I do it knowing you are still a child of God fully worthy of unconditional love. I do it in the context of relationship. I do it because I love you, not because I want to condemn you. I do it in the hope that you may be searched by divine Light, which will break your heart open and change you. And I don't do it because you didn't say shibboleth.

Let's remember, too, that we



A painting of the Auditorium at Silver Bay by Reb Mackenzie

are inside our own sanctuaries. If we start dividing the world into those worthy of sanctuary and those unworthy, we are ourselves in danger of becoming unworthy. We might violate our community's shibboleths and find ourselves outside the sanctuary. Maybe you're even afraid that you might place yourself outside the sanctuary, that there are certain things you could say or do or think or feel that would cause you to believe you are unworthy of love and mercy and grace.

You are worthy of love and mercy and grace. You cannot earn it, and you cannot un-earn it. We are all worthy of divine sanctuary. Not "peace, peace, when there is no peace," but a sanctuary without walls where truth comes with love and no sin is without the accompanying promise of the availability of repentance.

There is nothing anyone can do that makes them unworthy of divine sanctuary.

There is nothing our enemies can do that makes them unworthy of divine sanctuary.

There is nothing our friends can do that makes them unworthy of divine sanctuary.

There is nothing you can do that makes you unworthy of divine sanctuary.

It is so tempting to look at this world and think that the pathway to the Kingdom of God on Earth is to win. It is so tempting to identify sides, those who are with us and those who are against us, to believe that we can rearrange the power

dynamics so that the "good" side, the "right" side, has the power, and then everything will be all right. Not that we think that's going to be easy. But it's tempting to believe that this is the right strategy. We will just overpower the wrong, at the ballot box, by protesting, with emails to our representatives. There's nothing wrong with using any of those pathways, especially to speak prophetic truth, but these techniques will never get us all the way to the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Friends' experience tells us that the divine Light changes hearts. We are searched by it; we are convicted by it; we are brought to repentance by it. It is not our job to overpower our enemies, to win so that we can establish a different system of human laws. It's our job to love our enemies, to extend divine sanctuary to them, and to our neighbors, too. In the end, it is Spirit that makes the change, and what we can do is hold open that possibility for everyone by modeling mercy, grace, and prophetic truth accompanied by unconditional love. We can invite the world to transformational repentance, one person at a time, by extending to everyone divine sanctuary, where Spirit dwells. 



## Echoes of the Past Come Alive at the Penington Friends House

Todd Drake  
Brooklyn Meeting

*continued from page 3*

Anna Rice Powell and her husband, who were also both members of the first board at the Penington, were antislavery advocates and fought for prison reform, the rights of women, and Native Americans. Her husband, Aaron Powell, was "consecrated by Sojourner Truth" and lectured in the American AntiSlavery Society. Anna also promoted health care for prostitutes and other women in prison.

But what chapter could we write today as a mostly white institution? The idea of giving all we had to offer, our home and ourselves took form as a residency dedicated to addressing racism. Initially proposed by Todd Drake, the Penington's director of Outreach, Drake shared the idea with the board of directors and the residents. Everyone embraced the idea, recognizing the potential it had to help the cause and to transform the Penington and help the wider Quaker community.

Bayard Rustin, the important but little known Quaker Civil Rights activist who advised Martin Luther King Jr. and who attended the 15th Street Meeting, located next to the Penington, came to mind as an inspiring role model. His life matched many of our community's own members' passions for the arts, social activism, and seeking to live by the Quaker principles of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship. Todd reached out to Walter Naegle, Bayard's surviving partner and the person who has done the most to ensure Bayard's legacy. Walter also supported the idea while stressing that the selected artist or activist embrace the non-violent, inclusive, approach so central to Bayard's life work.

With board support, it was decided that the house would offer a year's free room and board to a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person

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# Other Writings from Friends

## Echoes of the Past Come Alive at the Penington Friends House

Todd Drake  
Brooklyn Meeting

*continued from previous page*

of Color) artist or activist. Their only requirement was to complete a project designed to address racism in the United States and to share that project with the wider Quaker community. A Quaker BIPOC selection committee was formed to select applicants with the strongest proposals.

After many meetings and interviews the committee selected Desmond Beach, a powerful African-American visual artist from Maryland. The house residents had the final interview to make sure the recommended resident could successfully live in a collaborative setting.

We will always remember that final interview. Desmond sat in the Penington's parlor beneath the new beautiful, hung, portrait of Bayard Rustin that had been gifted to the house by Walter Naegle. Desmond's warm and open heart won over the house almost instantly. After the interview ended a social media reminder photo popped up on our phones. It was a photo of the house painting our BLM mural exactly one year earlier. A new chapter had been written.

Desmond was approved by the residents and will move into the Penington to begin his work in late September of 2021. His project will involve creating a mixed media art exhibit and performance that pulls from historic and contemporary imagery, the intent being to bring healing to the African-American Community. He will share his work and this healing event with the Quake community as well.

The first year of this residency has been funded by the Bayard Rustin Fund, the Penington Board, New York Yearly Meeting, New York Quarterly Meeting, Brooklyn Monthly Meeting, and individual donors. You can make a donation to fund future residencies by going to our website: [www.penington.org](http://www.penington.org).



Desmond Beach, the first Bayard Rustin Resident at the Penington Friends House.

Please reach out to us if you would like to make a large donation.

You can Google "Desmond Beach artist", to see examples of his amazing art or you can go to [www.desmondbeach.com](http://www.desmondbeach.com). Be sure to follow the Penington Friends House on Instagram, too, at [@penington\\_friends\\_house](https://www.instagram.com/penington_friends_house) to stay up to date with his progress and for opportunities to experience his art.

Questions about the residency can be directed to Todd Drake at [outreach@penington.org](mailto:outreach@penington.org).



## Game

Terence P. Ward  
New Paltz Meeting

*This is a piece of fiction inspired by the experience of worship.*

It was about half an hour into the silence when the thought entered his mind, and when it did, his blood felt like it stopped flowing for just a moment.

The conflict was obvious, of course: he was supposed to say something according to the rules, but there was another set of rules operating here, and it wasn't at all clear under those rules what the protocol for this kind of situation would be.

Had this ever even happened before?

He was sure that an experienced friend would know, but this wasn't the time to ask. They were right in the middle of the worship meeting—the weekly gathering in silence to wait, to listen, to be in the light. He'd come to find this comforting since the first time he had quietly slipped in, just a few minutes after the meeting had begun, and then just as quietly tiptoed out about twenty minutes later, far short of when the meeting had concluded. Although light on his feet, he'd felt like his every movement was a deafening crash as he'd left the building that morning.

A few weeks later, he'd come back. That time he'd been early, and when he poked his head in the door, no one was in the meeting room. The benches were as he'd remembered them, arranged four deep in a lozenge shape, so that every person seated in the room was facing the same central area. Cushions were scattered two and three to each of the hard, wooden benches, so those with bonier derrieres would not be distracted by the inevitable aches. There was nothing in the center of the room, which was fine, since the people who would be seated on the benches would spend most of the time with their eyes closed.

But the benches were completely empty, and he wasn't entirely sure what to do, so he went back to his car and sat. He'd been brought up Catholic, after all, and in the Roman Catholic church there was a long tradition of taking cues from the person seated in front of you: when to stand, or sit, or pull out the kneeler, or find the page for the next hymn. Quakers didn't exactly stand on ceremony, but he was much more comfortable not being the first one to enter the building. He went back to sit in his car, and act like he wasn't there to participate, while of course waiting for an opportunity to do that very thing.

This was his sixth meeting for worship, and he'd actually gotten up the courage to stay until the end the time before last. This was his second meeting in a row, in fact, which was made much easier by their convention of sharing names afterwards. He could fix on a friendly face (they really all had friendly faces, so it wasn't so hard to do that part), and pay attention to that person's name.

It always made it easier to have a conversation, knowing the other person's name.

By now he knew some of the rules, or expected behaviors, at meetings. One did not simply blurt out whatever comes to mind. However, he also knew that integrity was valued, and did that not mean complying with the rules of the game? When one thinks of the game, one announces that one has lost the game. Anyone in earshot would thus be reminded of the game—which is the only way to lose it—and have to in turn announce their own loss. It sends a briefly disruptive ripple of memory through a group. Was that itself a message? How does one know when something rises to the level of a message?

What would a Quaker do? He looked around at them. Some appeared lost in thought, others swept up in rapture, a few seemed bored and one older person was definitely sleeping. Were they all in worship? What they would do, he realized, was to worship. He settled body and mind, the weight of his body seeming to press a bit more on the cushion beneath him, and his mind quieting in response. He sat with the understanding that he had lost the game. Gradually, he was able to release that conscious thought and settle more deeply into worship, with awareness of the little sounds of bodies shifting, withdrawing, along with the sense of time passing. An awareness of something deep in the body—perhaps in the spirit—became manifest. It was something like a thrum or a buzz, but without sound or vibration. It excited his spirit, but did not move his body.

The thrum grew within, expanding to complete him, radiate from him. With the intensity came the understanding of it as words. He felt his heart surge. He felt his breath quicken. He felt his leg muscles tense, and suddenly he was standing, eyes wide, mouth opening to draw breath, and then to speak.

"If losing means surrendering to spirit," he heard himself say, "then we should all strive to lose the game." He sat down, heart pounding, as the message released his body and the bench welcomed its return.

