



SPARK

New York Yearly Meeting

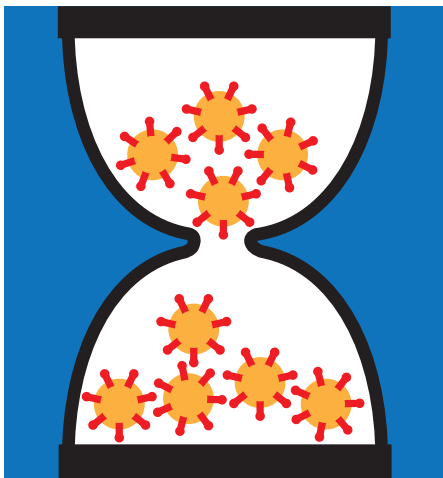
The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Volume 51, Number 2

15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003

March 2021

One Year of COVID-19



Graphics by Sarah Way

March: One Year of COVID-19

Yohannes "Knowledge" Johnson

Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting

With no real opportunity to meet with or in some cases even see one another to pass along a few words of encouragement and faith, the Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting submits that the state of our Meeting is still strong, in spite of not having had a worship service since March 2020. The suspension of all programs has brought to the forefront how important our volunteers are to us and the service they provide in the furtherance and development of our spiritual growth.

A member of my care committee from Bulls Head Oswego Monthly Meeting shared with me that one must have a balance between

continued on page 6

Observations of a Front Line Worker

Richard Morgan
Conscience Bay Meeting

I've worked rotating shifts in the hi-tech field on Long Island, NY, for over 40 years. I am privileged to be working at all and able to support my family during a time when millions of others cannot. On the other hand, by being around many others each workday, I run the risk of being an asymptomatic spreader of the virus (even while wearing my personal protective equipment (PPE), masking, and social distancing). The Serenity Prayer is my daily credo in these times: to carefully and conscientiously focus on my work, treat others as I would like to be treated, and let go of the rest.

Around April of 2020, after dark in an area of Suffolk County NY with little light pollution, I noticed a wondrous panoply of stars, normally obscured by air pollution and now boldly visible due to the 50% reduction in car traffic. The better traffic level, star visibility, and daily white puffy clouds normally unheard of in the New York City Metro area were about the only bright spots in an otherwise bleak time of economic health and human devastation.

I feel for the tens of thousands of small businesses—restaurants in particular—who have been crushed by the pandemic, along with the

continued on page 5

Opening Up to Transformation

Callie Janoff
Brooklyn Meeting

During the closing plenary at Coordinating Committee Weekend, January 31, 2021, Callie Janoff shared the following message, sparked by these queries: What is structural bias? What is the relationship between our structures & processes and who is welcome to participate in NYYM?

I noticed this weekend that almost no one that I heard in committee meetings or in my small groups talked about the pandemic. It just didn't come up. I noticed this because by the end of the day I was feeling pretty down, feeling alone, and like I hadn't been as faithful as I could have been. And then I reminded myself of something that I've needed to hear many times since last March: you survived. You didn't die today. Having COVID last year, and losing so many precious people to this disease, this has become a very real and totally reasonable baseline goal: survive today. I need to admit to you that it wasn't until June of last year that I really appreciated how real this baseline goal has been for my black and brown neighbors EVERY day in America for the last four hundred years, not just every day of a global pandemic.

And once I'd really heard that and seen that, I couldn't un-hear or un-see. I began to see things differently. Being stuck at home and seeing everything through a screen helped with this, actually. Not that I liked it; but it was a different way

continued on page 5

All are welcome at
Spring Sessions
APRIL 9-11
See page 7

Blessed Beginnings The Patterns of Light and Dark

Trish Eckert
Farmington Meeting

Adapted from a message given to Farmington Friends Meeting on January 10, 2021.

In Genesis, the Biblical song of creation, God causes light to shine in darkness, separates the waters from the dry land, and brings forth plants and animals, creatures of sea and sky, and creeping things. God also pronounces a blessing on all that God made, saying, "And it was good." Each day, evening and morning, God's Word sounded forth and created. Each day God saw what had been made and called it "good."

I imagine many of us are feeling unsettled and anxious,

continued on page 6



One Year of COVID-19

pp 4-7

Upcoming NYYM Sessions pp 7-8

Notices

Transfers

Matthew Hubbard, to Jericho from Westbury

Jack Patterson, to Bulls Head-Oswego from Morningside

Laurel Brill Swan, to Rochester from Hartford (NEYM)

Deaths

Sara Baker, member of Fifteenth Street, on February 14, 2021.

Eleanor (Penny) Brome, member of Purchase, on January 22, 2021.

Sue Clark, member of Albany, on January 20, 2021.

John Fischer, founding member of New Brunswick, on December 5, 2020.

NEWS

State of the Meeting Reports Due Soon

Please write and submit your State of Meeting report by **April 19, 2021**. Read about the State of Society process, suggested timeline, and this year's queries at nyym.org/content/nyym-state-of-society-reports

Experience Programmed Worship with Farmington Meeting

Farmington Meeting has been holding programmed worship over Facebook Live. Friends who usually attend unprogrammed worship may enjoy experiencing programmed meetings. Access messages (written and video versions, including queries) at Farmington's website (farmingtonfriendsquakermeeting.com) and clicking on "Meeting Archive."

NYYM Prayer List

A Prayer List is sent out periodically by email to subscribers offering the names of Friends who have asked to be prayed for, or of loved ones for whom Friends have requested prayer. Consider being a recipient of prayer, and/or subscribe to offer intercessional prayer by contacting prayerlist@nyym.org.

News from Bethpage Meeting

Bethpage Meeting held worship on the grounds outside of its meetinghouse until the weather grew too cold to continue. Their historic

Around Our Yearly Meeting

meetinghouse needs repair and fundraising is ongoing. Bethpage has had some success raising money from their community through the village mayor's newsletter. When Bethpage was worshipping outside, open to all, strangers sometimes dropped in, curious about what was going on. Jayant Singh said, "Our silent meeting pattern is appealing to non-Quakers—like Indian sadhus meditating in the Himalayas." They hope to meet over Zoom until the weather warms up again.

Challenging Racism

Friends General Conference has posted a three part series, written by Carolyn Lejuste and David Etheridge, called "Becoming an Anti-Racist Quaker Meeting." Is it enough for one to believe they are not racist or is it imperative, as the author Ibram X. Kendi states in *How to be an Antiracist*, that we actively work to end racism? Start with Part 1 at www.fgcquaker.org/resources/becoming-anti-racist-quaker-meeting-part-1-preparation

ONLINE EVENTS

NYYM's Spring Sessions

The NYYM community gathers together each spring. This year's Spring Sessions will be held **online on April 9-11, 2021** and everyone is welcome. See page 7 for more.

Events for Young Adults

The Interim Young Adult Field Secretary, Marissa Badgley, continues to organize a schedule of virtual get-togethers, workshops, and worship designed for young adults (ages 18-35-ish) but open to all. Visit bit.ly/NYYM-yafcal1 for all upcoming events and opportunities!



Powell House has gone virtual!

Powell House, the retreat and conference center for NYYM, offers **virtual workshops**, using the Zoom conferencing technology, on a donate-as-led basis. Go to poho.org to see the full list of upcoming events at Powell House, as new events are being scheduled all the time.

Upcoming virtual workshops: **Continuing Revelation: A Quaker Model for Living Joyfully in Turbulent Times**, with Lu Harper and Anne Pomeroy, **March 27,**

2021. We will explore an evolving model of continuing revelation for individual Friends and Quaker communities joyfully living into change in turbulent times. During the retreat, we will consider a spiral model of continuing revelation to help guide us on our journey. This model offers us a new thing, a path through the wilderness into a renewed world.

Powell House Youth Program is Holding Online Conferences

www.powellhouse.org/youth-program
Upcoming virtual youth weekends:

Rest, Renew, Refresh, for 6th-8th Grade, March 26-28. What makes you feel relaxed? How do you like to unwind when you've been feeling stressed? At this conference we'll explore different ways to relax and unwind through creative art projects, soothing guided meditations, fun and silly games, and more.

Many Hands Make Light Work for 11th-12th Grade and Young Adults, **May 14-16**. Taking care of ourselves can feel hard, especially in a pandemic. We all have skills to share and knowledge to learn from one another. Our hope for this weekend is that everyone can walk away feeling a little more self-sufficient in their daily lives. Expect interesting skill-share workshops, creative small group discussions, and of course fun games with good friends.

Earthsong 2021, for 7th-12th Grade, **May 28-30** (*Please note that the date of this conference will likely be moved into June or July if it allows us to gather in person.*) Join us for a weekend of fun and celebration! This is the time of year to celebrate our seniors as they get ready to



Joy Meikle and her puppet buddy, Aura, look forward to connecting with young Friends at their weekly Meeting for Feelings.

go out and do good in the world. We will also celebrate our whole community and the love we've shared throughout the year. There will be workshops, games, crafts, a fancy dress-up dinner, and a boisterous cabaret.

Friends General Conference (FGC) Year-Round Youth Program

As the pandemic continues, FGC is offering several year-round virtual programs for youth so we can stay in community. Visit fgcquaker.org/connect/gathering/programs-and-events/year-round-youth-programs

Family Devotionals for Younger Children

These daily Zoom (videoconference) calls are designed for adults and children participating together. The audience primarily in mind is kids in elementary school and preschool. We'll have singing together, a story, and a query. We'll have a chance for some discussion, either as a whole group or in virtual small groups. Devotionals are offered every weekday morning at 8 a.m. ET and every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 7 p.m. ET. Find the link to register at quakeremily.wordpress.com/connection-in-a-time-of-covid-19/familydevotionals/

SPARK (ISSN 00240591)

New York Yearly Meeting News
Published five times a year:
January, March, May, September, and November by

New York Yearly Meeting
Religious Society of Friends
15 Rutherford Place
New York, NY 10003
212-673-5750
info@nyym.org
www.nyym.org

Editor: Sarah Way
communications@nyym.org
Editorial Board:

NYYM Communications Committee

Spark deadlines are the first week of the month preceding the publication month. Permission is granted to reprint any article, provided *Spark* is acknowledged as the source.

Periodicals Postage Paid
at New York, New York
Postmaster: Send address changes to:

SPARK

15 Rutherford Place
New York, NY 10003

NYYM Staff

Marissa Badgley: yafs@nyym.org
Chad Gilmartin: web@nyym.org
Callie Janoff: arch@nyym.org
Steve Mohlke: gensec@nyym.org
Walter Naegle: walter@nyym.org
Helen Garay Toppins:
office@nyym.org
Sarah Way:
communications@nyym.org

Meeting for Feelings

Meeting for Feelings meets each Friday morning at 10 a.m. ET. It's a safe space for young Friends to learn about and understand their emotions. Joy Meikle and her puppet buddy, Aura, look forward to experiencing connection, peace, and fun with fellow members of their Quaker community. This offering is designed for ages 3-5 yrs old, but all ages are welcome. For more info and to register, visit nyym.org/content/meeting-feelings.

FGC Consultation: Spirit and Community in Online Gatherings

April 17, 2021. Over the past year, we have all learned a lot about how to gather online as a community and how to find ways to allow Spirit to move us. Let's share what we've learned and hear a panel discuss their best practices for on-line worship, business meetings, and community building. Find this event at www.fgcquaker.org/connect/events

Friends General Conference's 2021 Gathering

Online, June 27-July 3, 2021. Early registration is **April 15-29**. View details at www.fgcquaker.org/connect/gathering

NYYM Summer Sessions

Online, July 25-31, 2021.

See page 8 for more information.

ONLINE WORSHIP

Many of the local (monthly) meetings in the New York Yearly Meeting area are holding online meetings for worship every week. Visit nyym.org/online-worship-opportunities for the full list.

Powell House Online Worship

Saturdays at 6:00 p.m.

Powell House, the conference and retreat center for NYYM, holds a meeting for worship via Zoom every Saturday at 6:00 p.m. Contact Regina at regina@powellhouse.org for information on how to join.

Friends General Conference (FGC) Online Worship

FGC offers general worship on Saturdays at 9 p.m.; for People of Color, worship on Wednesdays at 1 and 8 p.m. and worship sharing on Tuesdays at 5 p.m.; and a weekly Meeting for Worship for Friends of European Descent Confronting Racism and White Supremacy on Fridays at 12 p.m. Find all details and links at 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/

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

OPPORTUNITIES

Residency at Penington House for BIPOC Doing Anti-racism Work

The **Bayard Rustin Residency** at Penington Friends House will provide up to one year of room and board to a person who has a strong project to address systemic racism and has a need to be in New York City for up to one year. The residency is envisioned as an ongoing ladder to empowerment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) working to create a culture of anti-racism and intersectional equality in the US. Applications for the residency will be accepted until **March 31**. Visit www.penington.org/rustin-residency/ or call Todd Drake, Director of Outreach, at 212-673-1730.



Young People in our Yearly Meeting: A Vision

NYYM Youth Committee & Powell House Youth Directors

We want our young people to have a home in our yearly meeting and a sense of having internalized shared values—around a nonviolent approach to conflict, around decency, around authenticity—regardless of whether they remain Friends as adults. We want our young people to be grounded in Friends' history, faith and practice, and have a language to describe them. We want them to have experience being guided by the Spirit, both as individuals and in community. We want them to have experience of their own gifts and leadings that they can step into as adults. And we want them to do all of these things in a community that cherishes them and their families at all stages of life.



Editor's Note

We, the people all over the world, have spent a year under pandemic restrictions, avoiding other people and wearing a mask whenever we leave the house. That's a year of feeling constant fear and grief about illness and loss. A year of disruption to school, to jobs, and to families. Disruption can create openings. Changes that used to seem impossible suddenly seem less so. Let's not let this chance to make big, positive changes slip away.

One of the changes I made early on was to increase the frequency of NYYM's email newsletter to once a week. If you aren't receiving it, but would like to, please email walter@nyym.org.

Please consider submitting your writing or images for *Spark*. Share your ministry with the yearly meeting.

Upcoming *Spark* themes:

May: Eldership. Have you served as an elder? Quaker "elders" sometimes hold a meeting or individual in the Light and in prayer. Members of Ministry & Counsel committees can be considered elders. They are sometimes called upon to "elder" Friends when guidance is needed. Though "elder" suggests a person of older age, Friends of any age can serve as elders. Have you been an elder? What was your experience? Do you have a story about eldering someone or being eldered?

Please do write and share. Deadline for the May issue is April 7. Email article, letter, photo, poetry, and drawing submissions to communications@nyym.org. Please limit yourself to 400-600 words.

Also, send your news or events to me so they can be shared in the weekly NYYM email or in the next *Spark*.

Find NYYM on **Facebook** ([NewYorkYearlyMeeting](https://www.facebook.com/NewYorkYearlyMeeting)), **Twitter** ([NYYMTweets](https://twitter.com/NYYMTweets)), and **Instagram** ([newyorkyearlymeeting](https://www.instagram.com/newyorkyearlymeeting)). Wishing you hope and a happy spring.

—Sarah Way, NYYM

Communications Director
communications@nyym.org

Report from the New York Quarterly Meeting Concern for Quaker Living Working Group

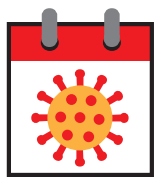
New York Quarterly Meeting contains all the meetings in New York City.

The Concern for Quaker Living Working Group (CQL), under the care of the Ministry and Counsel of the New York Quarterly Meeting (NYQM), recognizes and appreciates that our entire community is enhanced and dependent on our oldest Friends. We seek to enable older Friends who want to remain in NYC to do so, rather than having to locate elsewhere.

Exploring how NYQM Quakers might help provide for the care, housing, dignity, and well-being of our oldest members, we came to appreciate that people of other age groups and diverse backgrounds share many of the same issues, thereby enriching our purpose. Furthermore, we seek to enable our meetings to broaden Quaker life to encompass a caring community that extends spirituality to explore all our life experiences, including death. Broadening our views and sharpening our vision, we continue to support our older Friends, and the uniqueness of each person, within the context of a pluralistic community.

Over the more than four years we have been meeting as an open group of NYQM, we have visited a variety of properties and organizations offering housing services that include older persons (Kendall-on-Hudson, Isabella Geriatric, Fellowship Community, Friends in the City), we have sponsored workshops (Housing, Being Mortal), and researched and engaged a variety of community services (University Settlement, Friends Life Care). During our NYQM Jubilee, we hosted some social opportunities including a GroupMuse (informal chamber music) and Meetings for Eating. We helped to organize a Meeting for Grieving one Memorial Day in our cemetery. And during the pandemic we began to meet weekly for simply checking in. We have been considering how housing changes disrupt community, and that when made to accommodate changing healthcare needs, they are made when we most need community.

continued on page 8



One Year of COVID-19

Diana

Solange Muller
Bulls Head Oswego

I thank James O'Barr for his editorial contributions to the original story.

—Solange

On March 17th of last year, I was awakened in the middle of the night by intense pain, shooting through my body. It felt like sharp knives cutting into my muscles. The pain continued until the morning, allowing me only fitful, unrestful sleep. When I finally pulled myself out of bed, I craved even more than usual that first cup of coffee, one of the pleasures of my day. But the rich dark brew had no smell, no taste. Something was seriously wrong. As a health care provider it didn't take me long to think Covid 19. I immediately had a test done, and two days later the results came back positive. A scary moment, even for someone as privileged as I am.

How did I get infected? There were many possibilities, of course—in March, we were not yet routinely wearing masks at the Community Health Center in Peekskill, where I work as a nutritionist.


One day, before my diagnosis, I saw Diana, an Ecuadorian woman who is one of my patients, in the hallway. I approached her and gave her a big hug. After we caught up a bit, she said, "Doctorita, I must come see you."

Alas, she never did. Not long after, I learned from her *comadre*, the woman whose son Diana was godmother to, and her closest friend, that she had died of the Corona virus. She had no family in Peekskill, and it was left to an uncle who lived in Queens to claim her body. Her *comadre* had not been allowed into the hospital to be with Diana as she lay dying. When she took her last breaths, she was alone, and so far from her family in Ecuador. She was 49 years old.

Diana taught me to listen closely to a person's life story, and to listen without judgment. When she came to see me, she was often very tired, and seemed unable to implement the changes I had recommended to improve her health. We often refer to such a patient as "non-compliant." Once, during a visit, I asked her to tell me more about her life. She had worked as a nurse in Ecuador,

but could not make enough money to help support her family, her father and her brother. So she emigrated to the United States and settled in Peekskill, where there's a large Ecuadorian community, and every day she would travel to Queens to sell Ecuadorian products, mostly perfumes. She sent money home and kept little for herself, which may be why she always looked somewhat disheveled. But she was resilient and strong and hopeful, and lived solely to take care of her family in Ecuador. The money she sent home helped her father build his own house, and her dream was to return and take care of him in his old age. As I listened to her, the professional veil that kept me from seeing Diana whole began to lift.

Diana's *comadre* once showed me pictures of her son's Confirmation ceremony—Diana, his godmother, standing proudly with him. She was beautiful and glamorous and happy, and had such a glowing smile on her face as she embraced her godson. I am so grateful to have seen that photograph, because the only picture I had of Diana in my memory was that of an exhausted, unhealthy woman just hanging on. Now, those images are woven together with her story to show the beautiful and complex weaving that she was.

Diana taught me the importance of listening deeply and being fully present to those I serve. She transformed the way I "see" patients as I listen to their stories, their fears, struggles and hopes. She helped me bring my faith more fully into my professional practice, so that I remember to seek not just diagnoses and treatments for my patients, but that of God in them. Just so, I hold Diana's memory in the Light of God's love. 

A Year of Renewal

Robert Renwick
Morningside Meeting

The queries for this issue of *Spark* asked, "Do you have a story from this year? Is there anything you've learned?"

I wonder, "How have I been affected by a womb-like space of semi-isolation?" I have been reborn.

I notice
vivid
touches of
beauty
all around
which had somehow
previously been
overlooked.

I have gained a renewed sense of who I am. As I walk my Dachshund, Karl, along Riverside, I find myself chanting "I am discovering who I am. I am remembering who I am." I've been stopped in my tracks. I notice vivid touches of beauty all around which had somehow previously been overlooked.


This has transpired largely, if not entirely, because this year has afforded an unprecedented experience of daily morning online worship at the Pendle Hill Barn, supplementing other weekly or occasional meetings for worship elsewhere, often with kindred spirits from around the globe. There has been regular worship sharing around thought-provoking queries with friends, old and new.

The gift of that online worship has been supplemented by the many other wonderful spiritual/educational/cultural events on the internet. Offline, I've returned to some of the long neglected authors who've enriched my life, catching up with the work they've done in the past decade or so. At the moment it's Alexandra Fuller. Barbara Kingsolver is next on my list.

It's also been a time of paying careful attention to those simple guidelines—mask up, wash hands, stay those six feet apart. Even having received that jab-in-the-arm vaccine I'm determined to maintain those practices until the danger is past.

The trials of this year have deepened my resolve to participate with zest in ferreting out my own racism and working toward its elimination as I can. I want

to help advance the strides I've seen in other movements of liberation and not allow myself any sense of discouragement. It took a Stonewall, a tearing down of Bastille walls, a march across an Edmund Pettus bridge, and now we have relentless TV coverage of a pandemic urging me to engagement. I'm upping my tepid efforts toward combatting the economic and social injustices which cripple us. I repent of my complicity in the rape of Mother Earth. I'm much less content to sit idly by.

Thank you, *Spark*, for those questions and for sitting me down at my keyboard. 

One Year of COVID


Anna Root
Saratoga Meeting

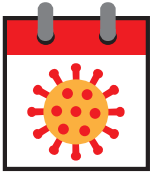
A big complaint about the world today is how technology such as computers and smartphones have overtaken and replaced the dependable newsprint and relied-upon writing skills of old.

But the upside during the past year of social isolation is learning that technology can really minister to us. Instead of putting ourselves at risk by travelling, we can dial into events that normally we would not be able to attend. We can even socialize via Zoom. And because we can learn and communicate through live video we no longer need to read or search out news on our own. All we need to communicate now are our eyes, ears, thumbs (or fingers), and voice. The technology of spell-check makes even dictionaries unnecessary.

Instead of spending our hard-earned money on a vacation to gather with Friends, we can donate our money as a means to reach out and help people.

Online, I have attended weekly meeting for worship, Friends General Conference's Annual Gathering, NYYM's Summer and Fall Sessions, and Friends Committee on National Legislation's Annual Meeting, all of which I would not have gone to in person due to family or conflicting events. And all by phone without a computer.

Change can be good and can nurture us spiritually! 



Observations of a Front Line Worker

Richard Morgan
Conscience Bay Meeting

continued from page 1

well-being of their workers, managers, and owners. Thousands of NYC Transit workers have died due to COVID. How can a person “social distance” in a rush hour subway? What of the special-needs student whose needs are unmet by online learning and Zoom meetings? Or that of students whose internet connection is wimpy compared to their peers?

The pandemic has opened my eyes to decades of neglect of the United States public health system in favor of short term profits for Wall Street and wealthy folk. However I agree with Dr Fauci that “in a pandemic, nobody is safe until EVERYBODY is safe.”

I have a great deal of respect for the national responses to COVID of South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. Unlike the US, all three have a universal and comprehensive, single-payer, national health care system, which makes a more focused response possible. In addition those countries have an ethos of “WE” instead of “ME.” People in these countries mask up not to protect themselves but to protect the other person, whose mask wearing in turn protects YOU.

Finally, I respect the many European countries, such as France and Germany (whose populations are considerable: 60 and 80 million, respectively), where the govern-

ment pays the rents, mortgages, and wages of ALL citizens during the pandemic. This support enables people to isolate without the added stress people have in the USA, where we are forced, by cruel default, into the no-win choice of either earning a living or staying healthy.

We can and must do better. 

Opening Up to Transformation

Callie Janoff
Brooklyn Meeting

continued from page 1

to see. By this time we were beginning to really lean in to producing the virtual Summer Sessions. And again, Friends, I need to confess to you: Summer Sessions was brutal for me, and for many of your NYYM staff, and for a lot of you who participated in organizing and producing Summer Sessions. By my estimation, Summer Sessions took the equivalent of about 30-40 people working almost around the clock for at least a month to pull off—most of them unpaid.

And it was in that context, at the end of a very long, very intense month of work, that I heard two important messages, from younger Friends, and from Friends of Color. From younger Friends I heard the message that they desperately needed our support, and that many had found that support through the mentorship project that was born at the Summer Sessions of 2019. For them participation in NYYM didn’t look like the work of serving on an existing committee; it looked like building mutually nurturing relationships that deepened their connection with Spirit. From Friends of Color I heard the message that our structures and processes tend to exclude them, and that they must exhaustingly work around structural blind spots, White-centered cultural norms, and internalized biases to participate in Quaker spaces.

And all of this listening made me wonder: is producing a two week virtual Summer Sessions really how we want to spend our resources? Just imagine what Friends could do if 30 to 40 of us, working around the

clock for a month, spent that time developing ways to support younger Friends. What would make it possible for us to do that? Imagine if the same efforts we took to pull off Summer Sessions were marshaled to the cause of dismantling systemic racism, structural bias, and internalized bias in our spiritual home.

What could we accomplish?

The way that most Friends participate in New York Yearly Meeting is through working. I heard it many times in committee meetings yesterday: our work, the work, my work. Lots of working. I know many would make a case that it is through work that we worship and build community, and I agree that it is one way. But to me this is a narrow way to understand worship and community. Because if participation is based in work, it is best suited to those who do not have to work for pay due to age, retirement, affluence, privilege, life circumstances, or additional resources. Those who do both the work of the yearly meeting and must also work for pay, often draw on other resources, burn out, feel inadequate, do with less, or struggle to maintain other aspects of their lives.

Because participation in our yearly meeting as it is currently structured is primarily based on work, and because it is primarily a particular type of work, we exclude from participation most Friends who are not able to work to participate. **This is structural bias.**

The gifts we carry and our ability to exercise those gifts are often shaped by our cultural, social, racial, economic, family, age, sexuality, and gender circumstance. Even though as a religious society we aspire to organize ourselves according to the values of equity, equality, and justice, we live in a world where power is assigned to and held by those who, through circumstance, belong to a privileged caste. This inequity shapes every aspect of our world and permeates our reality. It makes it difficult to unlearn what we have been taught to expect from ourselves and from each other. **This is internalized bias.**

Our structures, like Coordinating Committee Weekend, are ripe for transformation, like an egg just ready to crack open. And it is already transforming. We had sequential rather than concurrent

coordinating committee meetings—will we ever want to go back to the way we did it before? I hope not. I think some of the structural changes we have made this year have benefited us, even as

What if we could spend as much energy on

recognizing

and

celebrating


the gifts we carry

as we do

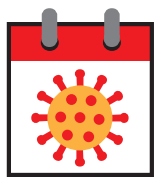
assigning them

to a task?

we have been forced to make them by the pandemic. And now that I’ve seen a different way to do it, I can’t and frankly don’t want to unsee it! And now I see the possibilities of transformation everywhere. What if our yearly meeting was less focused on building relationships through work and more focused on just plain old building relationships? What if committees weren’t our primary opportunities to know each other? What if we could spend as much energy on recognizing and celebrating the gifts we carry as we do assigning them to a task?

We create and maintain our structures and processes and we have the capacity to transform them. It isn’t someone else’s to do; it is ours. I pledge to you that I will do what I can in the corner of the NYYM that I support and nurture. It is not easy for me. I am attached to familiar structures, I don’t want to lose them, and when I do, I grieve them. It is not easy, but it is also not work. It is metabolization, it is transformation. So I want to invite you to join me. I have a query for you: Where do you see yourself in our structure? Where do you see an opportunity to transform it? 

The pandemic has
opened
my eyes
to decades of
neglect
of the United States
healthcare
system



One Year of COVID-19

March: One Year of COVID-19

Yohannes "Knowledge"
Johnson

Green Haven Prison
Preparative Meeting

continued from page 1

doing, being and listening; that life is a balance of many aspects and that one should try to weave them together in a manner or fashion that helps support one's spiritual path and level of contentment. I treasure these words and strive to make them work for me and become a part of my daily life. Towards this end I have joined, in Spirit, the Bulls Head-Oswego mid-week meeting and the Sunday Meeting for Worship, and a worship with a concern for prison ministry on Friday evenings. As I enter into the silence as I sit in my cell, I strive to include all of our Green Haven members in my prayers in solidarity with our collective worship.


In spite of the turmoil we may find ourselves faced with as a society, on this local level we have some very good news. One of our members of our prison preparative meeting was released in December 2020 and is currently amalgamating himself once again with the greater community. Another member is scheduled to re-appear before the parole board with a very good opportunity to be released. And this writer has had his most recent medical check-up and is reportedly in good health. The only downside is our struggle to answer the following question: how does one maintain spiritual community in a time without the space or place to meet physically, converse and worship together? Our answer is we do as we can.

We also look forward to 2021 being favorable with the possibility of the courts revisiting a prior ruling and ultimately granting our ability to co-host and/or co-sponsor Quarterly Meetings in that, while procedurally correct, the respondents rendered the procedure to be followed unavailable due to a lack of the respondents adherence to their own rules.

In closing, we also take pride

How does one maintain
**spiritual
community**
in a time

**without
the space or place to
meet
physically,
converse, and worship
together?**

in and fully accept the Apology to Afro-Descendants issued by the New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) as being, in the words of the Yearly Meeting, "... a step towards healing and trust, and that more openings will follow as we strive with DIVINE assistance to discern what we as Quakers are called to do to bring about justice and reconciliation in our beloved community." 

Covid Virus 2020

Pastor Benjamin H. Shaw
Unadilla Friends Church

These notes were taken from a letter sent to the members of Friends Church in Rogers Hollow, Unadilla, New York from Pastor Benjamin H. Shaw.

In January 2020, what was to happen was the furthest from our minds. At Friends Church our hopes and dreams for an open house and old home day to celebrate the long years of ministry in Rogers Hollow, along with the completion of major renovations at the Community House, were shaping up. Of course all of these things were canceled.

At the end of March and early February our lives took a complete turnabout. The dreadful Corona virus, miscues between government and medical experts, and political opinion threw our nation into complete turmoil for which it was ill-prepared. In the beginning there were those who believed the

pandemic was real and those who did not believe it was real. We now know that the threat and reality was and is real.

There is a quote that essentially says, "In the midst of chaos comes opportunity." All the restrictions brought on by the virus invites the question, "What can be done and what opportunities are there available?"

From March 4th thru November 4th weekly letters and emails were sent to our church family.

On June 24th, after several months with no church service, the first ever at Friends Church drive-in-service was held using a FM transmitter, and was well attended. In October we returned to the church for our worship service, with social distancing. The service continues to be broadcast on FM93.3 to our parking lot for those who feel uncomfortable coming into the church. We will continue to broadcast via the FM transmitter as long as necessary.

One interesting tidbit is that the neighbors can also listen to the service in their living rooms.


Unfortunately the past year has been very difficult for many of our church families. We are all living in some state of fear. Where can we find comfort and hope? Let us turn to a few verses in the book of Isaiah Chapter 40 and 41. Chapter 40 conveys comfort for God's people and Chapter 41 describes God as a helper.

**Do not fear
for
I am
with you**

**Do not be
dismayed
for
I am
your God**

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

I took you from the ends of the earth; from the farthest corners I called you. I said, "You are my servant"; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. **So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**

In times like these it would be easy to give up hope, but giving up hope does not solve the problem. There is a Gospel song entitled, "I've Been Here Before" that I cannot print because it is under copyright restrictions, but the theme is, as we look ahead into the storms of life and feel like we are being attacked, we don't have to worry because we've experienced storms before, we don't have to face the storms alone and we will be O.K. God will intervene and settle the storm; we don't have to face the challenge alone which brings us back to Isaiah 41; **so do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.** 

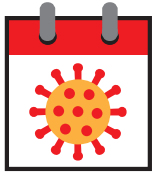
Blessed Beginnings The Patterns of Light and Dark

Trish Eckert
Farmington Meeting

continued from page 1

overwhelmed and tired, as we continue to face the realities of COVID and the countless challenges that have intensified in the wake of the virus. We are immersed in chaos and it is difficult to step back and gain perspective or predict how things might unfold. In response, I've spent a lot of time reading and praying and reflecting.

In "The True Patterns of the Universe," Brian McLaren writes, "Creation reveals wisdom through its patterns. It reveals wisdom



One Year of COVID-19

about its source and purpose and about our quest to be alive . . . if we are paying attention.” He also notes that we struggle with how to interpret these patterns and he points out that, “If we had only our worst experiences in life to guide us, that might be our conclusion.”

In thinking about all that is unfolding around us and the turbulence we experience in the midst

Goodness runs wild

— I like the sound of that. It seems that

everything else

runs wild, so why not


goodness?

of transitions and the unknown, I reflected on the story of creation in Genesis. If we are mindful about being part of God’s good creation—and each of us is part of God’s creation—then with all that feels random and chaotic we can center down into the knowledge that even if we can’t perceive the sequencing of things, there is a universal pattern that undergirds everything. As McLaren observes, “The universe is God’s creative project, filled with beauty, opportunity, challenge, and meaning. It runs on the meaning or pattern we see embodied in the life of Jesus. In this story, pregnancy abounds. Newness multiplies. Freedom grows. Meaning expands. Wisdom flows. Healing happens. Goodness runs wild.”

Goodness runs wild—I like the sound of that. It seems that everything else runs wild, so why not goodness? Our world, this life, our days are often filled with paradox and confusion and turmoil. How do we hold on to what is meaningful and life-giving when there is grief

and death and disorder surrounding us?

In thinking about blessing, gratitude, creation, and light, I strive to understand our roles as individuals and the responsibility we each have in creating the world around us. Just as God creates and proclaims it good, we have the opportunity to create alongside (or co-create) with God. The song of creation in Genesis reminds us that we are not in charge of creation and we do not create anything on our own. We are invited to work with the Source. Neither standing back and letting things happen nor stepping in with a heavy hand to try to control the final outcome is desirable. How can we be partners with God in the ongoing work? Imagine what the world could be like if we were each focused on multiplying newness, growing freedom, expanding meaning, flowing with wisdom, and bringing about healing.

God separates creation into elements that can interact and relate to one another. What is the light without the darkness? What is the darkness without the light? They are in relationship with one another—and God created the entire cosmos in the same relational manner. Ultimately, we need both light and dark. The complexities and paradoxes are part of what makes up God’s good creation and we are all called to be part of it. 



Upcoming NYYM Sessions



EVERYONE IS INVITED TO NYYM Spring Sessions April 9-11, 2021

For updated information and to register, visit


nnyym.org/SpringSessions2021

You can also call the NYYM office to register: 212-673-5750

Come be with Friends at Spring Sessions. Come to worship, come to work, come to visit over a virtual meal. Hear from the committees that help to keep NYYM running, make Quaker witness visible, and support vital ministry. Hugs and handshakes will be possible again, but until then, we are united in work and love and worship and we will use the shared virtual space to its fullest. **Please let me know if there is something you want the yearly meeting to address and you don’t know how to bring it forward. Email me at clerk@nnyym.org or call the NYYM office.** More details of the agenda will come as they are available. I look forward to seeing you.

—Elaine Learnard, Clerk of NYYM

The yearly meeting will gather online on April 9-11 for business and for worship. Friends are invited to attend any or all of the events on the schedule. Meet other NY/NJ/CT-area Quakers and experience Quaker practice in action! In addition to meetings for worship and business, there will be “social meals”—meal-time meetings either focused on a particular topic or open for socializing.

Register at nnyym.org/SpringSessions2021. **You must register in order to receive the Zoom links.** If you want to receive the advance documents for business meeting in printed form, please call the NYYM office at 212-673-5750. 

Spring Sessions Schedule

April 9-11, 2021

Friday, April 9

7:00-9:00 p.m. Meeting for Worship and Sharing

Saturday, April 10

8:30-9:30 a.m. Meeting for Worship

9:45-11:45 a.m. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

12:00-1:00 p.m. Social Meals—both programmed and unprogrammed options

1:30-2:30 p.m. Meeting for Worship

2:30-4:30 p.m. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

5:00-6:30 p.m. Social Meals—both programmed and unprogrammed options

Sunday, April 11

Sunday’s meetings may be cancelled if business is completed on Saturday.

The morning is unscheduled so that folks can join their own meetings.

1:30-2:30 p.m. Meeting for Worship

2:30-4:30 p.m. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

Three times a year, for a weekend each in fall and spring and for a week in summer, New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) Friends gather to worship, conduct business, and form a community together. NYYM is the organization that gathers together the Quaker congregations in New York State, northern New Jersey, and southwestern Connecticut. These sessions are open to anyone in the NYYM area who is interested in Quakerism and experiencing Quaker community. We will meet via Zoom until it is safe to gather in person again.



BECOMING A SANCTUARY WHERE SPIRIT DWELLS NYM SUMMER SESSIONS 2021

Summer Sessions is July 25-31, 2021

Summer Sessions will be online

At the January 23 meeting of the Sessions Committee, it was agreed that NYYM Summer Sessions will be held virtually. This decision was not made rationally by the will of the committee, but, I truly believe, by the presence of the Spirit in the meeting. It was made in the conviction that the Spirit was among us and led us to this decision. When the clerk reflected back what she was hearing, although there were tears and unhappiness, a mantle of peace came over us.

There are a number of reasons why we decided not to plan for an in-person gathering in July. Although many are optimistic that most Friends will be vaccinated by then, we really cannot be sure. Will healthy younger adults be vaccinated? How about children? Will Friends be willing to register without assurance that it will be safe for them and for other Friends?

As one Friend asked, how will we feel if even one person who came to Silver Bay got sick from exposure there? I know that those of us who look forward to Summer Sessions are very, very disappointed. We had hoped that we would be done with this pandemic by Summer 2021. And maybe we will be, but we cannot be sure.

I ask that Friends hold us in the Light as we work to set up a schedule for Summer Sessions. That is a work in progress, but there was a general agreement that we would only meet for one week. Following the example of other yearly meetings, and wishing to spare Friends Zoom fatigue, Sessions Committee may schedule activities outside of those seven days. A final schedule and registration information will be in the next issue of *Spark*, in May.

Dawn Pozzi

Clerk, Sessions Committee 

Call for Facilitators for Summer Sessions

The Sessions Committee is seeking Friends who are willing and able to facilitate these activities:

- **Cafe Night** — a spectacular, intergenerational talent show starring YOU. Friends sign up to sing, tell stories and jokes, play music, dance, act... while also raising funds for the Sharing Fund, which supports many of the yearly meeting's witness activities, and for Powell House, the NYYM retreat center.
- **Interest groups** — a good way to introduce yourself to a topic or to dive deeper, to learn and to share, and can consist of a presentation, slide show, film, discussion group, or other activity.

- **Meals with Meaning** — mealtime presentations and discussions on a topic, both programmed and not. Participants are encouraged to bring a meal!

- **Playful intergenerational activities** — for Friendly people of all ages. Can we play online games together? Get together in a Zoom room and be silly? Maybe we can interact in an ongoing way, not limited to a specific time? Think outside the (digital) box!

If you are interested in any of these opportunities, please contact Dawn Pozzi, clerk of Sessions Committee, at Quakerdawn@gmail.com. An online form for Interest Group and Meals with Meaning proposals will go live on the NYYM website soon.

Report from the New York Quarterly Meeting Concern for Quaker Living Working Group

continued from page 3

Currently, we are actively exploring three questions:

1. What expertise do we need?

Given the wide range of existing geriatric social services and providers, would NYQM benefit from having a resource person on call as many churches do? With some support from CQL, 15th Street Meeting has recently signed a contract with University Settlement for a geriatric

social worker to be available on an hourly basis at \$35/hour. 15th Street has some immediate needs. We are eager to see how this kind of arrangement works.

2. What needs do we, as a quarter, have?

With support from NYQM M&C and a donation earmarked for CQL, we have engaged Dan DeBrucker, our social work intern from Columbia School of Social Work, to deliver a quarter-wide needs assessment. His survey and follow-on focus groups are under way. With supervision from Callie Janoff, we hope to prioritize and perhaps simplify the dizzying array of issues.

3. How can we age in place?

When a beloved person/family

moves in order to have more or different care or support, they lose a vital web of support and we experience profound loss. The conviction that we Quakers can do better was the formative concern for CQL and continues to be the most important strategic concern of the committee. How can we stay together as we age? To create a cluster of Quaker housing, we have considered a variety of options: buying several units in existing apartment buildings, joining with groups (Greek Orthodox congregation, St. Vincent's Services) to build housing. One option has combined a commitment to social justice (low income, senior housing), community involve-

ment, and Quaker housing. A suggested prototype developed for 112 Schermerhorn would reposition it as a mixed-use property with community space for the Board of Education or other similar use, low-income senior housing, and perhaps 20 units for Quaker housing. Fully aware of the income value of this property, any proposal would guarantee/replace any income lost during construction. We plan to have a request for a feasibility study to take to the NYQM Trustees soon.

Questions and suggestions are welcome! Contact Elizabeth Gilmore at elizbgilmore@gmail.com. 