



SPARK

New York Yearly Meeting

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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January 2022

Hybrid/Blended Meetings

A note on terminology: "Hybrid meetings" is meant to describe a single meeting for worship that is held in person and via video or phone conference at the same time. The people online and the people in person are together in the same experience of group worship. Some people find the word "hybrid" too technical and off-putting, and prefer the term "blended" meeting. Both terms are used in this issue.

The Experience of Hybrid Worship (So Far)

Howard Nelson and
Claire Howard
Poplar Ridge Meeting

When the Covid-19 pandemic arrived, Poplar Ridge Monthly Meeting was fortunate to have technologically skilled people among us who were generous with their time. One in particular kept us afloat, setting up Zoom meetings week after week, month after month. Suddenly we were having meeting for worship via Zoom, and we were sitting at home looking at our meeting Friends on screens, in little boxes, as they sat in their homes staring back. The pandemic stretched out Time, and, along with the online lifestyle, it also did radical things to Space. Collapsed it, vanquished it—while at the same time there was the reality of being distanced. Suddenly we were a group that included people in different states, other countries. A great thing had happened: Even those who could not attend meeting, could attend meeting!

continued on page 5

A Resource for Hybrid Meetings: Portal+

Peter Phillips
Cornwall Meeting

When our meeting decided to regather physically several months ago, we investigated various ways to continue to include Friends seeking to worship remotely by our Zoom account. We started with a laptop, linked to the internet by a Friend's iPhone "hot spot," but it was hard for those in the meeting house to hear vocal ministry offered by those online, through the shallow speaker of the laptop. A Friend offered a speaker attachment and that helped a bit, but it was still awkward.

We then connected the laptop to a projector with an internal speaker. The result looked a bit overwhelming, like a matinee at the local AMC theatre. And the laptop microphone was very limited—Friends offering vocal ministry in the meeting house would have to walk over to the table holding the computer and speak to the screen, rather than to the meeting at large, turning their backs to the rest of us instead of opening

continued on page 7



We Belong to Each Other

Kathy Czekaj
Manasquan Meeting

"As God's messenger I give each of you God's warning: Be honest in your estimate of yourselves, measuring your value by how much faith God has given you. Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we have different work to do. So, we belong to each other, and each needs all the others." — Romans 12:3-5 (TLB)

When I read this passage, it brought to mind the fact that our Quaker meetings for worship, for business, and committee meetings

in Manasquan, New Jersey, have been taking place in person and on Zoom during the pandemic. At first, meetings for worship were separate—with some of us meeting via Zoom and others meeting outdoors at the meetinghouse in a circle of worship on folding chairs in the burial grounds, weather permitting. Now, thanks to the technological expertise of some in our number, we are in a "hybrid" mode, with some of us in the meetinghouse, fully masked, and others still joining in via Zoom with a microphone and a

continued on page 7



Hybrid Meetings

pages 5-7

Extended NYYM News Section

pages 2-5

Upcoming NYYM Sessions page 8



A Peace Walk of religious leaders across Harlem, December 1, 2021, part of the "New York Faith Communities Respond to Gun Violence" event. See article on page 3. Photo by Interfaith Center of New York's Hanadi Doleh.

Notices

New Members

Mary-Kay Belant—Syracuse
David Kirkpatrick—Bulls
Head-Oswego
Don Wildman—Croton Valley

Transfers

Beth Bugdaycay, to Brooklyn
from Morningside.

Deaths

Tommy Brown, member of
Ithaca, on October 30, 2021.
Dorothy Garner, member of
Quaker Street, on August 3,
2021.
Martin Jolles, member of
Ithaca, on September 11,
2021.

NEWS

NYYM Anti-Racism Statement

A draft NYYM Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Faith Community, written by a multi-racial and multi-generational task group, was presented at Summer Sessions 2021 for Friends' reflection and the initiation of an extended period of discernment. 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, or by requesting a copy from the office at 212-673-5750.

At several points over the next year, NYYM will offer the chance to participate in anti-racism workshops especially arranged for our yearly meeting. Please let the planning team know of your general interest by filling out the **Antiracism Training Expression of Interest** form, linked to here: nyym.org/anti-racism-statement.

Do You Receive the Weekly NYYM Email Update?

Each Friday an email newsletter from NYYM is sent out to over 1600 people. Past editions are available at nyym.org/weekly-updates. To subscribe, email your name to walter@nyym.org.

Read the expanded NYYM news section on pages 3-5 of this issue!



Around Our Yearly Meeting

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coordinating Committee Weekend

Online, Jan. 28-30, 2022
Coordinating Committee Weekend is a time set aside for all YM coordinating committees to meet. Join people from around the yearly meeting to hear about what's going on and how the work gets done. Be part of considering how the yearly meeting might use everyone's gifts and leadings and how each of us, all of us, can reimagine how we build this community every day. Registration will be online at nyym.org/cc-weekend-2022.

Winter Meetings for Discernment

February 25-26, 2022, online
Meetings for Discernment are periods of extended, waiting worship designed to discern leadings and strengthen connections in our yearly meeting. The Winter 2022 Meeting for Discernment will be held in three Zoom sessions on Saturday, Feb. 26. There will be a meeting on Friday evening for first-time attenders and anyone interested in eldership. On Saturday, there will be two sessions for extended worship on our query. The final session will be for reflection on what we've heard and experienced.

Query for Saturday morning and early afternoon sessions:

How am I being changed by the movement of Spirit? Are there ways I am resisting Spirit's promptings? How does my resistance point me toward that place where I embrace change, where I become changed? How am I being called to attend to the movement of Spirit within?

Corporately, in our monthly meetings and yearly meeting, where are our places of resistance to Spirit's call? How are we learning to become more imaginative and adaptive? How will we co-create a welcoming and resilient community where all will thrive?

For a detailed schedule and registration info visit nyym.org/mfd-winter-2022

Spring Sessions

April 1-3, 2022. See page 8.

Powell House Workshops

Powell House is the retreat and conference center for NYYM. Visit poho.org to see the full list of upcoming events and to register.

Friends' Decision Making and Clerking, February 4-6, 2022

This is a workshop for everyone who wants to deepen their understanding of Quaker decision-making. For clerks, it will be an opportunity to learn and sharpen skills. For others, it will be an opportunity to get better grounded in what Quaker decision-making is all about. It is expected that each person will leave the weekend with new energy and enthusiasm for participating in meetings for business, well grounded in both the theoretical and the practical.

FOR YOUNG ADULTS

New Children, Youth, and Young Adult Community Director!

Daniela Salazar Monárrez, young adult Friend, has accepted the new, full-time staff position of Children, Youth, and Young Adult (CYYA) Community Director. Daniela's planned start date is January 24, 2022. Many thanks to Daniela and welcome to this new position!

FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

New Children, Youth, and Young Adult Community Director! See above.

Albany Friends Young Peacemakers Week

Albany Friends Meeting is again planning to have our annual Young Peacemakers Week, from August 22-26, 2022, at the AFM Meeting-house. We welcome children in grades 2-8, from 1:30-5:30, followed by a simple meal shared with our families. Our daily activities will reflect our witness to the Quaker Peace Testimony, i.e., a commitment to nonviolence and reconciliation in all spheres of life. The theme will be addressed in typical camp activities such as arts and crafts, music, drama, non-competitive games, and nature-centered projects. There is no specific charge; instead we ask that people contribute whatever they feel is fair. We are looking for volunteers and paid staff, and welcome any applicants! For more information please contact Anita Stanley at 518-441-7722 or meridiancomm@earthlink.net.

ONLINE WORSHIP


Many of the local meetings in New York Yearly Meeting are holding

online or hybrid online-and-in-person meetings for worship every week. Visit nyym.org/online-worship-opportunities for the most up-to-date information.

OPPORTUNITIES

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)'s Spring Lobby Weekend, March 12-15, 2022

Spring Lobby Weekend offers young Friends and other young people the tools to be effective advocates and the opportunity to connect with others. This March 2022, hundreds of young adults will flood our nation's capital (in person again, we hope)! They'll learn about immigration policy and then—grounded in new knowledge, skills, and an understanding of Quaker values—they'll meet with members of Congress. The power of 500 young adults lobbying Congress to pass protections for undocumented immigrants can't be matched.

Spring Lobby Weekend gives young people an opportunity put their faith into action for the world we seek. You are encouraged to recommend Spring Lobby Weekend to the young adults in your communities. Visit www.fcnl.org/events/spring-lobby-weekend-2022 

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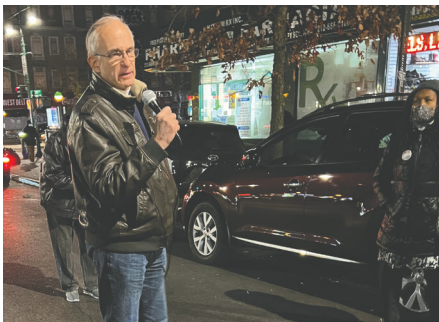
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Peter Murchison speaks at the “New York Faith Communities Respond to Gun Violence” event in Harlem, December 1, 2021. Photo by Interfaith Center of New York’s Hanadi Doleh.

New York Faith Communities Respond to Gun Violence

Peter Murchison
Wilton Meeting

I was invited by the Interfaith Center of New York to join a panel on Gun Violence Prevention as part of a day-long program in New York City on December 1st called “New York Faith Communities Respond to Gun Violence.” They contacted me in my role as NYYM’s Gun Violence Prevention Coordinator and part of the Witness Coordinating Committee. The day was an amazing and energizing experience. It was kicked off by Senator Charles Schumer and a keynote by Queens activist and internationally-recognized peacemaker Erica Ford. My panel was “Theologies of Non-Violence” and included the President of the Buddhist Council of New York.

For me, the highlight was the Peace Walk through Harlem. The faith leaders in the conference all met at the corner of 116th St. and Frederick Douglass Boulevard and walked down 116th, stopping at key sites and praying quietly and loudly in support of this neighborhood and engaging the local residents we met. Our stops included a number of historic churches, the Malcolm Shabazz Harlem Market, and several retail sites that had suffered from gun violence.

I ask all NYYM Friends to remember the terrible damage and trauma that gun violence brings to every community. If you want to take action, I will help you to consider what makes sense in your own meeting and community. I am available to assist at the monthly, quarterly or yearly meeting level. I can be reached at pdmurch@gmail.com.

Open Letter on Voting Rights

Poughkeepsie Meeting
Don Badgley, clerk

Dear fellow Friends,

We are deeply concerned about the many states that have already passed laws that will make it harder to vote. Our faith teaches us that all people have worth, and this leads us to stand against attempts to limit any eligible voter’s right to exercise their political freedom at the polls.

We are reaching out to Quaker Meetings to ask if you, our fellow Friends, will join our efforts to advance voter rights. The House of Representatives passed the John Lewis Voter Rights Advancement Act (HR 4) in August. This act does a great deal to address voter restrictive state laws, and we are urging our senators to advance this act. Without this legislation all other legislation we Quakers care about is in danger. Each of our states’ senators hold the future of this legislation in their hands.

In 1965 a now-deceased member of our Poughkeepsie Friends Meeting was among those non-violent Civil Rights protesters marching for voter rights across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL. We are saddened that this struggle still continues. Please join us by reaching out to your senators in support of the John Lewis Voter Rights Advancement Act (VRAA) and also in support of the Freedom to Vote Act (S.2747) which complements the VRAA. There could be no greater tribute to the life’s work of Congressman John Lewis and all those who paid so dearly to gain equitable access to voting rights. May the Light within ALL eligible voters be allowed to shine brightly as they participate in our democracy.

NYYM Calls for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

New York Yearly Meeting has joined faith institutions and faith leaders from around the world in a letter calling on governments to develop and implement a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. The call is being coordinated by the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT) Initiative, a coalition which includes

over 900 civil society organizations. Clerk Elaine Learnard and General Secretary Steve Mohlke signed the letter on behalf of NYYM as an interim action. Read the letter at fossilfuel treaty.org/faith-letter.

The faith letter was written by people from the Laudato Si Movement, Greenfaith, the Inter-religious Council of Kenya, Kairos Canada and Dr. Rowan Williams (ex-Archbishop of Canterbury). At the time NYYM signed, about 46 institutions and 145 individuals had signed the letter, including AFSC, Quakers UK, plus Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Christian and interfaith organizations. If you are a faith leader (pastor, religious educator, etc) you can also sign as an individual.

The faith letter is the most recent call coordinated by the FFNPT Initiative, and will be released in early 2022. Earlier calls came from 101 Nobel Laureates, from over 2500 scientists and researchers, and from parliamentarians (elected officials) from all corners of the world, following the lead of parliamentarians from “Least Developed Nations” who initiated the campaign in 2017. In 2020, cities and sub-national governments also began passing resolutions endorsing the treaty.

New Brunswick Meeting Sells its Meetinghouse

Jeffrey Aaron

New Brunswick Meeting

New Brunswick Monthly Meeting began as a worship group in 1927. It was accepted as a monthly meeting within Shrewsbury and Plainfield Half Yearly Meeting in 1954. The history from 1954 until 1984, when it purchased its building at its current location, is fascinating, but is too long for this column. Our history is available on inquiry.

In 1984, the meeting purchased the building at 109 Nichol Avenue, where it currently gathers, across the street from the Cook-Douglass College campuses of Rutgers University. The building was originally a duplex built around 100 years ago by the grandfather of meeting member Jeffrey Aaron, who was raised there as a child. Around 1956, one apartment was

continued on next page

Editor’s Note

This issue of *Spark*, the printed newsletter for New York Yearly Meeting Quakers, was created during an alarming surge in COVID cases due to the Omicron variant, which even vaccinated people are catching in large numbers. Future plans are yet again being thrown into doubt. It is difficult to stay hopeful, though the days will continue to grow brighter (since the winter solstice) no matter what. At press time, we are still hoping and praying to have Summer Sessions at least partly in person.

Upcoming *Spark* themes:

March: Quakerism in the

Future. Today is uncertain, so

let’s look into the future. What does Quakerism look like? What are your hopes or fears about Quakerism, the Quaker community, and the Quaker experience, in the next several years? Please share your thoughts on the future direction of Quakerism, whatever that means to you.

Spark accepts article submissions of 400-600 words, shorter news items and announcements, and photographs and artwork. Please do share your thoughts and talents with the rest of NYYM! Deadline for the March issue is February 1. Please email submissions to communications@nyym.org.

NYYM sends a weekly email newsletter. If you aren’t receiving it, but would like to, please email walter@nyym.org.

Please send in your meeting’s news so it can be shared in the next weekly email update or in *Spark*.

NYYM is on **Facebook** (NewYorkYearlyMeeting), **Twitter** (NYYM Tweets), and **Insta** (newyorkyearlymeeting). Stay healthy and safe.

—Sarah Way, NYYM

Communications Director
communications@nyym.org

Donate to NYYM

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

Around Our Yearly Meeting *continued from previous page*

divided into two small apartments, one upstairs and one downstairs. The meeting met downstairs, which was soon remodeled to make it fully accessible for members and visitors, although the children still needed to meet in the basement.

In 2011, a new, larger meeting room addition was completed which allowed for greater attendance and enabled first day school to meet on the same floor in the former, smaller meeting room.

Since that time, unfortunately, active New Brunswick Friends have declined in numbers and aged to the extent that the building maintenance and tenant responsibilities have become too great a burden. Friends decided to sell the building with the hope that we could rent back the same area that we currently use. We have succeeded in that effort, selling to the tenants in our larger apartment in a very amicable deal that includes a five year lease for us with three additional five year renewal options. We closed on the purchase on November 30, 2021, in a deal in which the landlords became tenants and tenants became the landlords.

We are glad that our tenant relationships have been handled with high Quaker standards so that tenants have been pleased with us as landlords. We anticipate that the new owners will treat us in a similar fashion. Friends are invited to visit us; our address and contact information will not change.

Pastor Trish Eckert Leaves Farmington

Trish Eckert has concluded her 4.5 years of service as the pastor of Farmington Friends Meeting. Trish is grateful for the welcome, accompaniment, and support she received from Farmington Friends. The decision to leave was a difficult one. She writes, "in the wake of COVID it became really clear to me that I needed to live closer to my grandchildren, so I'm relocating back to the midwest. I am sorry to be leaving NYYM." Trish is continuing to follow her leading by serving a Presbyterian church with a committed ministry to people without homes. "My social work career alongside my call to ministry

will combine in exciting ways in this new setting," Trish says. You can visit her new church online at www.tippechurch.org/

Report on Fall Sessions Business

Friends met over Zoom the weekend of December 3-5, 2021, to discern the yearly meeting's business and concerns. The budget for 2022 was approved, with an anticipated deficit to be covered by the operating reserve if needed; two Friends stood aside. Friends were again encouraged to consider the draft NYYM statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Faith Community, available on nyym.org/anti-racism-statement and in the September 2021 issue of *Spark*.

The NYYM Trustees reviewed the Lindley Murray Trust Fund, which is now considered a private foundation and is therefore required to distribute at least 5% of its value every year. Friends Fiduciary Corporation will serve as Trustees for the fund.

Fred Dettmer reported on the state of the Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting vs. New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, et al. legal case which asked for the resumption of Green Haven's Quarterly Meetings. The District Court and the 2nd Circuit denied the motion; NYYM is planning to petition the US Supreme Court for a writ of certiorari, which would order the judicial review of the lower court's decision.

General Secretary Steve Mohlke reported that Daniela Salazar Monárrez (Flushing) has accepted the position of Children, Youth and Young Adult Community Director.

Reports were also heard from the Powell House Directors and NYYM's Nominating Committee. The NYYM's application for a group 501(c)3 exemption from the IRS, conferring the YM's tax exemption to all monthly meetings, will be refiled in early 2022. NYYM's Ministry and Pastoral Care announced the transfer of a Friend's membership from a monthly meeting to the yearly meeting at large.

The clerk and general secretary reported on the interim actions they had taken on behalf of NYYM

since the last Sessions: signing onto a letter calling on every national government in the world to sign the Fossil Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty, and signing a Trade Justice Campaign letter urging the US Trade Representative to consider eliminating existing trade pacts' threats to climate initiatives.

Sessions Committee announced that Summer Sessions will be hybrid. The theme for NYYM's 2022 Sessions is "Being Changed, Living Faithfully."

Buffalo Meeting's Fundraiser for Afghan Evacuees

Sue Tannehill
Buffalo Meeting

Buffalo Meeting held a six week fundraiser this fall to purchase gift cards to Aldi for our incoming Afghan evacuees. As evacuees, these people do not have ready access to many federal programs intended for refugees. They needed and continue to need help from the community. We ran our fundraiser for six weeks, ending October 23, 2021. The generosity was amazing, with donations coming from as far away as Scarsdale. Together over six weeks we raised \$4,170.00, which translated into 167 cards for Aldi of \$25.00 each. Donations came in from many other meetings besides Buffalo and we are so grateful.

Individual thank you notes were sent to each donor based on the method used to donate. The gift cards are all being given to the International Institute which is one of the five organizations managing this huge task. The gratitude shown by our contact there is something I wish all of you could have experienced. If you want to learn more about the efforts going on in Buffalo for these evacuees, please go to www.wnyrac.org.

Powell House COVID Safety Guidelines as of January 1, 2022

I thought Friends might be interested in Powell House's new guidelines for its in-person events, both to help you decide your comfort level with attending an event and as a possible

model for other Friendly in-person events. This has been lightly edited for Spark. — Editor.

We have all been changed over the past 2 years; we are different mentally, physically, emotionally, SPIRITUALLY. We are operating in a different world, with different parameters and expectations. Please know that one of our main goals is to provide space to encounter and live into these changes as a supportive spiritual community. Powell House has always aimed to provide radical hospitality; that is now balanced with the objective of safety for each individual who attends an event. We look forward to reconnecting and celebrating our relationships with each other and the Divine, while utilizing the following protocols.

When you arrive, your temperature will be taken and questions about recent symptoms and exposure will be asked. Please have your vaccination record ready to be photographed; COVID vaccination IS REQUIRED as of Jan. 1, 2022. You will be given a "rapid test" to ensure that you are not sharing any virus particles. Then you will get your room assignment. You will have your own room for sleeping, if at all possible—exceptions for family group members, or those who have agreed to have a vaccinated roommate if necessary.

During a retreat, follow 2 of these 3 guidelines at any time:

1. Wear a mask—plan on wearing masks in all sessions indoors
2. Stay 6 feet apart from one another whenever possible
3. Be outside

Rooms utilized as group meeting space will be vacated and aired out for 15 minutes at the conclusion of each session. Hand sanitizer will be available in all public room entryways—please use it!

Meals: when below 40 degrees or in inclement weather we will be indoors at tables with no more than 3-4 people spaced out at each table. WE WILL SERVE YOUR FOOD. Please stay out of the kitchen! Only our staff will make coffee, do dishes, and serve food.

You will also be rapid tested on Saturday evening to help determine that you are not carrying the virus.

Utilize this advice from the Powell House youth program: communicate with the people



The Experience of Hybrid Worship (So Far)

Howard Nelson and
Claire Howard
Poplar Ridge Meeting

continued from page 1

This was a sea-change. We got used to it, sort of.

Eventually, and with much deliberation and discernment, we felt that in-person gathering was once again feasible, with safety precautions (masks, distancing, ventilation, vaccination), and a limited number of Friends filtered back into the meeting house. But of course, remote attendance continued. We had adopted a new mode of gathering; we had morphed (some might say evolved) into a hybrid meeting. Month by month, discussions were had about safety issues, but also logistical/ technological issues. A meeting which in the not very distant past had turned down a request to use video equipment at a wedding (it had something to do with Simplicity) was now talking about camera angles and what kind of microphone to buy.

How do we integrate those on Zoom into worship? Does the fact of being on camera have any effect on the experience of worship—both for those at home and those sitting in the benches? Does it mean anything to be physically present in a place anymore? Is silence different online? These were some of the questions that were faced.

One of us, Claire, says: Though I am grateful that we could continue meeting for worship through the pandemic, there has been much to adjust to and accept as necessary disappointments. Like foregoing our hymn singing together, being unable to see one another's faces, having difficulty hearing messages delivered from beneath a mask, and losing the simplicity and beauty of our meeting room to microphones, wires, laptops and the like. But after months of not meeting in person and only worshipping on Zoom, those of us who have returned to the meeting house are so thankful to

be together again. We are truly a blended meeting, with half still on Zoom and half coming in person. A year ago we endured a conflict over music; as one of the pianists at Poplar Ridge I declined to play because I felt the quality of sound on Zoom was so poor. Objections to this dearth of meditative piano music at our meetings for worship, however, did lead us to experimentation with technical equipment. At present we are using a mic at the podium for the speaker, a mic perched on a stool in the middle of the room for those who speak from the pews, a laptop operated by any one of our tech wizards, and a pre-amplifier. And we three pianists are playing again! Our meeting is committed to this new blended way of being, and I imagine this momentous change will endure beyond the current pandemic.

The other of us, Howard, adds: My wife and I raised our kids without TV in the house. We thought time spent sitting in front of screens wouldn't be good for them—or for us either, for that matter. How quaint that seems now. Of course, how the screen is used makes a difference, and what the content coming through it is. But when someone suggested installing a large screen in the meeting house, perhaps on the front wall, as a way of bringing the online attenders in, I recoiled at the idea. I love our blank walls, free of religious imagery, and I'd like them to remain free of screens. At present, we have a little camera perched on the piano, beaming the people in the meeting house out, and a computer behind the piano, where the Zoom attenders are sitting, so to speak. They can hear (usually) what is said in the meeting house, and the people in the benches can hear them when they are moved to speak. I notice that Claire used the word "experimentation." Early Quakers liked to use the word "experiments" to describe what they were doing. And I will use that word too. We are experimenting with hybrid worship. It's not perfect, but imperfection (I'm not sure this is a Quakerly thought) is part of life, and my sense is that it is going... pretty well.



around you and actively participate in building a culture of consent and communication around Covid-19:

- **Be Kind:** Treat each other lovingly, with an open heart and an open mind. Remember that we've all just been through a difficult time in our own ways.
- **Be Aware:** Make an effort to notice and adapt accordingly to the comfort level of the people around you.
- **Be Curious:** Meet people with curiosity as you learn about each other's perspective and comfort level. Ask questions to yourself and others as you seek to understand what is best for the safety of the group.
- **Be Brave:** Recognize and honor your boundaries, as well as the boundaries of others. Stand up for yourself and each other if those boundaries are crossed.

Blessings, Dennis and Regina Haag,
Powell House Co-Executive Directors

Oscar Mmbali Update: A Swiftly Growing Quaker Meeting in Belize City

Emily Provance
15th Street Meeting

Imagine a Sunday morning on the south side of Belize City. A young man is seeking a place to connect, wanting fellowship in the midst of busy-ness, needing a place of safety in a neighborhood often interrupted by gang violence. A quarter mile from the port, off a dirt road thick with trucks, is Belize Friends Center. He's heard of this place; his neighbor comes here and invited him once. A sign says "worship Sundays, all welcome," and he can hear laughter inside. So he opens the door.

Within, he discovers a room full mostly of men like himself—very young men, at least half still teenaged boys—who have gathered to sing, read scripture, and share silence. A few families and elders are present as well. They greet him warmly and fetch one more plastic lawn chair, and then it's time for church to start.

This pattern has repeated innumerable times since the summer of 2017, when Oscar Mmbali visited New York Yearly Meeting. Oscar, a Kenyan, was on his way to Belize to serve Belize

Friends Church as pastoral minister and community organizer.

Some of you will remember the presentations he gave, but I doubt that any of us imagined his ministry would blossom as it has. In his first three years, Oscar worked with the neighborhood community to organize an ongoing effort to reduce tensions between youth and police officers—a campaign that ultimately resulted in significant changes to the policing system in Belize—and to raise awareness about human trafficking in all its forms. During this time, the church grew exponentially, with so much of its membership comprised of teenaged boys that, eventually, the boys themselves took over many of the necessary leadership roles, with Oscar's guidance. The boys so frequently invite their friends to church that transportation for everyone has been a problem. When the pandemic began, Oscar and others at the center formed a feeding program for families associated with the church, providing food and basic sanitary products as the unemployment rate approached 70%.

This year, Oscar has been cultivating gifts of ministry in two Belizean Friends—Christopher Luben and Clifton Major—and has been supporting their efforts to receive formal training as virtual students of Friends Theological College. Because Christopher and Clifton are both locals, the church's community outreach efforts have been able to increase. Christopher often walks through the area, meeting neighbors, offering encouragement, and inviting people to church. Clifton, who is a police officer, is using his pastoral training to support victims of violence who seek help from authorities, and he's exploring ways in which he and others might establish ongoing healing ministries for those who need it.

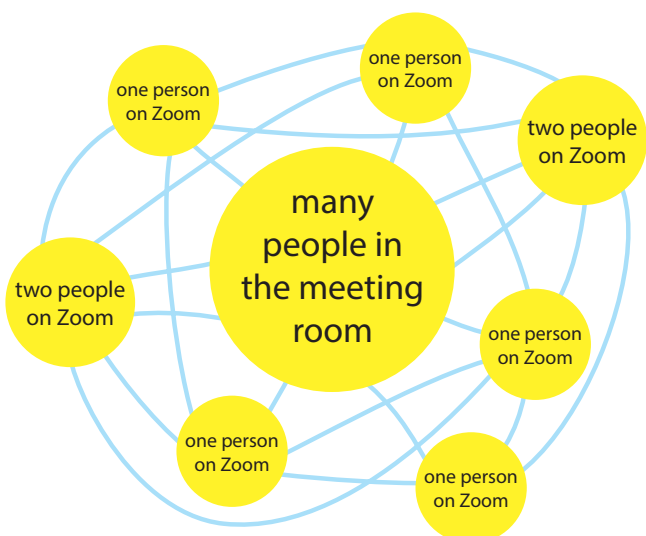
As a member of the Friends United Meeting board, I'm amazed every time I hear a report from Oscar. He is so attentive to, and responsive to, the needs of the community around him. You can learn more about Oscar and his work on the FUM website: www.friendsunitedmeeting.org/about-us/field-staff/oscar-mmbali Sign up to receive Oscar's monthly newsletter here: bit.ly/32EQCMG



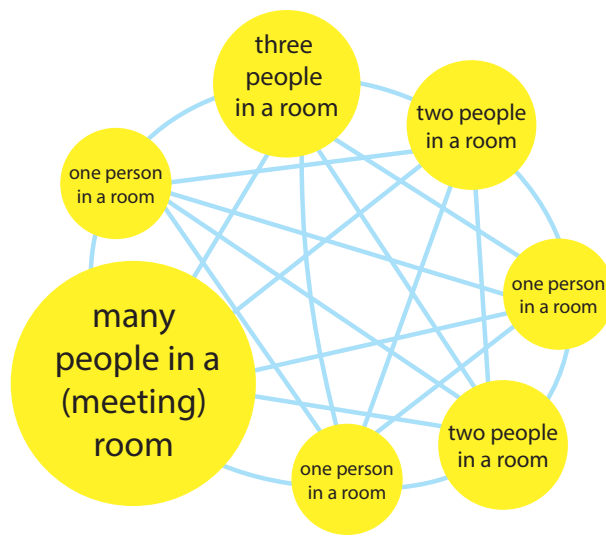


Hybrid Meetings

Consider two different ways of looking at a hybrid meeting for worship or for business.



Who is at the center? In this model, the meeting room is the center of the gathering. Other people connect to the meeting room via Zoom. The default experience is in person at the meetinghouse location.



Who is at the center? In this model, the meeting room is one of many rooms or "pods," containing different numbers of people, that are connected to each other via Zoom. No geographical location is given priority.

Needs and Recommendations for Hybrid Meetings

Adapted from *Needs and Recommendations for Hybrid Business 2021* by David Coletta, NEYM, david@colettas.org; techministry.info.

Which of the pictures above more closely resembles what you imagine when you hear "hybrid meeting"? Do we want to center the people sitting together in a room?

With this in mind, let's try visualizing a hybrid business meeting as a business meeting that has any mix of individuals and groups ("pods") attending as single Zoom squares. Some Friends may gather at the meetinghouse, following COVID protocols; some in informal pods of family or friends; and some by themselves.

All these pods will be at different levels of experience with participating in a hybrid meeting for business/worship, and will have different needs.

Needs of the Clerk and Clerk's Table

In a business meeting, the clerk, as well as anyone else at the clerk's table who is helping the clerk, needs to know who is asking to be recognized to speak, including which individual in a pod setting.

The clerk needs to be able to tell

that the person who is asking to be recognized is at the camera and ready to speak.

The clerks' table as a pod needs to be able to work together and talk with each other, both publicly and privately, in as comfortable and relaxed a manner as possible.

Needs of The Body As a Whole

The body as a whole needs to be able to tell who is asking to be recognized to speak at any given moment.

The body needs to be able to trust that technical difficulties have been planned for, and that there are people who are responsible for responding to these difficulties, so the body can be free to focus its attention on the worship/business at hand. Any amount of troubleshooting in business meeting is a huge drain of time and energy, and has the potential to erode trust.

The body needs to be protected from disruptions resulting from technical difficulties that interfere with worshipful business.

Needs of Each Pod

Individuals in a pod attending business meeting together need to understand what is expected of them: how to ask to be recognized, how to withdraw the request, how to prepare to speak, and so on. ("Understanding" is more than just knowing, and may also involve practicing.)

Individuals in a pod need to feel that their needs are being

considered and attended to, and be comfortable enough with the process that it is not a barrier to participation.

Conjecture: the people who come to a pod are less likely than average to want to use tech in the pod, i.e., that's why they bothered to come.

Recommendations for Meeting These Needs

If your pod is larger than three people—for example, a pod of people who have gathered at your meetinghouse—

- it should have a designated tech host with specific responsibilities. Your pod tech host should be a co-host of the overall Zoom meeting.
- it should have at least two devices logged into the business or worship meeting. One should be the device with the camera, and the other should be the pod's tech host's.
- Your pod will need to be attentive to feedback loops: only one of those devices should be handling audio at a time.
- Someone in your pod should be assigned the responsibility of bringing the camera and/or microphone to anyone who wishes to speak.
- Your pod should have a tech rehearsal in advance to work through the audio and visual details, make sure the physical space works (including being

aware of the path of the sun), and gain confidence that they have prepared adequately.



Closed Captioning Quaker Meetings

Excerpted from *Automatic Live Closed Captions in Quaker Meetings* by David Coletta, NEYM, david@colettas.org; techministry.info.

Providing automatic live closed captions in a meeting for worship benefits the quality of worship, makes the space more accessible to people who have difficulty hearing, draws attention to the value of inclusivity, and aids comprehension for people who process information visually more readily. When a meeting for worship is held online, automatic live closed captions may be provided by enabling the built-in closed captions offered by Zoom as part of a paid subscription. Zoom allows each participant to turn closed captions on and off, and optionally allows participants to download the closed captioning transcript for later reading.

Implications for Quality of Worship

Having automatic closed captions available does present some implications for the quality of worship. One question that is particularly important to consider is that, by default, participants in a meeting with closed captions turned on would be able to download a full transcript of the closed caption text of the meeting, which would include the Zoom names of the speakers along with whatever text the service was able to recognize from their speaking. That configuration can be changed in the Zoom back end to disallow downloading the full transcript. The Ministry & Council Committee or equivalent may wish to give some consideration to whether the privacy implications of that feature are worth the increased accessibility, and what kind of warnings would need to be given to participants so they can manage their privacy. If the feature of participants being allowed to download the transcript is disabled, the tech host could still download the transcript and make it available for legitimate purposes to anyone who requests it.



Other Privacy and Security Concerns

The way the captioning service works is that during a meeting with automatic closed captions, Zoom's servers are sending the audio and video from the meeting to otter.ai's servers, which are then performing automatic speech recognition on the audio stream in real time, and sending closed caption text back to Zoom's servers. It is reasonable to expect that meeting audio and video is being kept private during this process to the best of Zoom and otter.ai's abilities.

Participant Experience

From the point of view of a participant's experience, closed captions are turned off by default, and each participant would need to enable them explicitly in order for them to appear for that participant. It is important for accessibility to have some kind of visual indication at the beginning of worship that closed captions are available. The main way participants are informed about the availability of closed captions is that Zoom will pop up a message next to the "captions" button saying that closed captions are available.

The tech host can disable closed captions for everyone during a meeting if it is necessary for any reason.



Queries for Meetings Considering Hybrid Worship

New England Yearly Meeting

neym.org/hybrid-worship-and-gatherings

Things to consider before beginning a hybrid experiment in your meeting:

- 1. Purpose:** Why do you gather as a meeting? How might a hybrid offering support (or get in the way of) your meeting's core purpose or the purpose of a given activity?
- 2. Participation:** What does meaningful participation look like? Whether it's worship, business, fellowship, First Day School, or another activity, clarify what it means for someone to meaningfully participate. Is

meaningful participation possible for both online and in-person participants? What changes to practices or expectations might you need to make to fully include both modes of participation?

- 3. Capacity:** Switching to a new way of gathering takes mental and spiritual capacity. Does your meeting have the capacity to set up a new way of gathering at this time? Do enough individuals in your meeting have the capacity right now to grow new the new skill sets required to manage and facilitate worship and other activities in a hybrid format?
- 4. Impact:** How have your current and past ways of gathering impacted relationships within your meeting community? How might a shift to a hybrid experiment impact the community?
- 5. Access:** Who has had access to your current and past ways of gathering? Who has been left out? What access challenges will you need to consider if you shift to a hybrid model? How will this shift impact children, parents, the hard of hearing, those with limited mobility, those without internet?
- 6. Safety:** How will you maintain a sense of security for participants? What practices will you need to adopt to respond to disruptive or inappropriate behavior at hybrid gatherings?
- 7. Equipment and technology:** Will all participants be able to hear and see each other in order to participate? What tools will you need to effectively connect participants with each other and how will you orient Friends to them?
- 8. Continuing revelation:** As you continue to learn and grow through experimentation and exploration, how will you update your practices? What do you need from each other in order to take a risk together? How can the meeting community be a place where it is OK to give feedback and to make mistakes and learn together?



A Resource for Hybrid Meetings: Portal+

Peter Phillips
Cornwall Meeting

continued from page 1

to us all.

Using a flat top TV instead of a projector helped a bit. Connecting an omnidirectional microphone helped a bit. But the meeting house was looking more like a living room with a Sunday football game than a place of worship.

Then a Friend brought in a Portal+. This is a very simple device—a column about 24" high with a screen about 18" across. It connects to the internet without need for a laptop. It has a built-in microphone and a built-in speaker. It has a built-in camera that shifts its focus as people move in the room. It was easy for us to set up and to connect to our Zoom account.

Our Portal+ sits discreetly in the corner of the room. The adjustable microphone is remarkably acute and picks up whatever people say. The speaker and the screen both have remarkable fidelity, and the speaker volume is also adjustable. It is manufactured by Facebook and is available for purchase for well less than \$200 either through Facebook or through Amazon. The device does require a Facebook account to be set up, but a member volunteered their account for this use.

Our meeting is still feeling its way to unity with respect to hybrid worship. However, I believe that we have found, on occasions when we do worship both in person and remotely, that the Portal+ is a very effective solution. Meetings whose worship rooms are beginning to resemble the deck of the Starship Enterprise, or who offer vocal ministry to machines and microphones rather than to each other, may wish to investigate this resource.



We Belong to Each Other

Kathy Czekaj
Manasquan Meeting

continued from page 1

large screen TV within the meeting house. All of us, whether in person or online, are necessary to make a "whole" meeting of our spirits and our minds gathering together in worship. It brings into focus an image of the whole being more than the sum of its parts and the Light shining ever more brightly as we combine our lumens of the Christ within into a "high beam" for each other and for our world.

The "different work" we have to do has been greatly enhanced by the technological expertise of some among us and the generous sharing of these gifts with our entire membership. Educational sessions held to increase our knowledge and awareness of racial disparities and inequality within our society have been of immense value. The "nuts and bolts" of the upkeep and improvement of our facilities have been able to continue under less than optimum conditions with the attention and devotion of so many of our members and attendees. The outreach we have been unable to accomplish during this time of social isolation is being well prepared for when circumstances permit. There are so many wonderful gifts being unwrapped and shared within and without these walls.

As we are reminded, "O, the book, it will perish, and the steeple will fall, but the Light will be shining at the end of it all. Walk in the Light, wherever you may be!" It doesn't really matter if we are in a physical building or not, the Light is "wherever you may be!"

Respectfully submitted by Kathy Czekaj, a longtime attendee at Manasquan Religious Society of Friends, my friends, the Quakers.





New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) is the organization that gathers together the Quaker congregations in New York State, northern New Jersey, and southwestern Connecticut. The yearly meeting gathers together for business three times a year: for a weekend in spring and in fall and for a week in summer. This annual summer meeting is what gives us the name "yearly meeting". In addition to conducting business, the gathered Friends also worship, share experiences, socialize, and create a sense of community together. Spring Sessions will be online only and Summer Sessions is expected to be "hybrid," both online and in person. The Sessions Committee has given the NYYM 2022 Sessions the theme "**Being Changed, Living Faithfully.**"

Spring Sessions

April 1-3, 2022

Online via Zoom Videoconference

All Friends are invited to attend any or all of Spring Sessions. The yearly meeting will gather online April 1-3 for business and worship. Although Friends miss gathering in person and spending time together, the health of our community was paramount to the Sessions committee as this discernment was undertaken. Zoom is not ideal but it does give us the technology to gather virtually and engage in the business of the yearly meeting.

Spring Sessions is an opportunity to meet other Quakers and experience Quaker practice in action! Registration and more info will appear at nnyym.org/spring-sessions-2022 and will be announced to the NYYM email list. If you're not

sure you receive emails from NYYM, please send your name and email address to walter@nnyym.org.

Plans for Spring Sessions include a 'light and lively' Friday evening program. We hear from many Friends that they really miss just 'hanging out' and having fun with other Quakers, so Friday will give us that opportunity. Our three meetings for business will be preceded by an hour of worship. There will not be time set aside for committees to meet. Committees are encouraged to find out when their coordinating committee will meet and plan a committee meeting with enough time to bring any business to the coordinating committee. That is the path to get an item added to the yearly meeting sessions agenda.

One way to offer Friends another opportunity to meet and chat is a social meal. These may be focused on a topic of interest or 'unprogrammed.' There are three mealtimes: Saturday lunch, Saturday dinner, and Sunday lunch. If you are



Spring Sessions 2019 at Oakwood Friends School

interested in hosting one of these meals, please contact Helen, office@nnyym.org. Let her know which meal you want to host and if you have a topic or concern to bring. This information will be included in the schedule, with links, that will be distributed to Friends who register for Spring Sessions.

Registration for Spring Sessions is planned to open in early March. The opening of registration will be announced via email and social media.



Summer Sessions

July 24-30, 2022

In Person at Silver Bay YMCA, Silver Bay on Lake George, NY
Or Online via Zoom Videoconference

All Friends are invited to attend any or all of Summer Sessions. Summer Sessions is a week-long gathering of Friends where we can worship, play, work, and be in community with each other. Sessions Committee is expecting that some Friends will attend Summer Sessions in person at Silver Bay and others will attend online via Zoom. As many events as possible will be held simultaneously in person and online, with as much interactivity and accessibility as possible.

Silver Bay YMCA is a campus of buildings with different levels of accommodations at a range of prices. Overnight guests receive a full meal plan at the cafeteria and access to Silver Bay amenities including swimming areas, boat house, craft shop, gymnasium, archery, etc. Day passes and individual meals can be purchased separately. Please note that Summer Sessions is PAY AS LED.

What is Pay as Led?



After registering you will receive a follow-up email or letter with your Pay as Led rate options. The three options are: **the standard rate**, which covers the cost of room and board; **the full rate**, which helps others attend; and **the minimum rate**, which is the lowest suggested amount. The Pay as Led plan relies on generosity from those who can afford to pay more.

Activities and Events

- **Worship Sharing Groups.** Participants are given a query and a chance to explore the query in a sacred, worshipful space with a small group of Friends. Friends attend the same worship group throughout the week.
- **Interest Groups.** Interest Groups are 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.

- **Business Meetings.** At business meetings our Quaker practice is put into action. Everyone present is part of the decision-making body, and goes through discernment and the finding of the way forward together. Reports on the recent activities of committees and individuals are also heard. Business meeting is a great way to find out how Spirit is moving around the New York Yearly Meeting area.

Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM)

Children and youth at Silver Bay attend a fun, Spirit-led program each morning, grouped by age and led by Quaker volunteers. JYM gives children the opportunity to experience being in a community with other Quaker kids, living in Quaker values and making lasting friendships. Consider volunteering as a JYM group leader.

REGISTRATION

Registration will open in early Spring. Expect more information to appear in the March issue of *Spark*, sent via email to the NYYM list, and online at nnyym.org/summer-sessions-2022