



# SPARK

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

Volume 53, Number 4

15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003

September 2023

## Notes from Summer Sessions

## News and Ideas



Oakwood campus during Summer Sessions 2023.

### Note of Thanks to NYYM

**Chad Cianfrani**

Head, Oakwood Friends School

To the NYYM Community,

It is with deep gratitude that I thank you for sharing your energy, care, thoughts, and community on the Oakwood campus this week. I have called this space home and 'office' for close to two decades. We focus our work at Oakwood on strengthening community, building upon a school mission firmly rooted in Quaker principles, and supporting our students and families through ever-changing and often challenging times.

This week witnessed countless touchpoints, meetings, and spaces for reflection. While I was only able to participate in a fraction of these moments, I thank the NYYM community with a profound sense of gratitude.

On Wednesday this week, amidst a day filled with Oakwood work, meetings, and events, I began my day with Silent Meeting in the Theater with this community. Having to duck out around

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### Epistle from Young Adult Friends

WE ARE the Young Adult Friends at NYYM Summer Sessions. We hail from a variety of regions and Quaker spaces. We hold a range of beliefs. Some of us have attended NYYM since we were children, and others are experiencing it for the first time. We embody a variety of life experiences: some of us are new to adulthood, others have lived on our own for years. Some of us are parents ourselves. Some of us are rooted, others are in transition. Some of us

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### Minute from the Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) Teen Group

Dear Friends,  
We the teen group have noticed a change of scenery this week. The stark contrast of being here hit more personally and abruptly than we all expected. We're all missing our Silver Bay, but we're enjoying learning and exploring this new space. The simplicity of this space has left us to our own devices, and we've discovered new ways to connect on a more personal level.

The lack of closure sits uneasily within our community, both as

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### Why Am I a Quaker? Why Are You?

**Ted Bongiovanni**  
Brooklyn Meeting

"Start with *why*." That's the wise advice leadership expert Simon Sinek gives to people to sharpen their thinking. It makes me wonder if he might be a Friend.

Almost 25 years ago, young and fresh to New York City, I had the good fortune to meet Scott, an attender from Brooklyn Monthly Meeting. After my umpteenth question, and many patient answers, Scott just said, "You know, why don't you come to meeting sometime?" His casual invitation changed my life.

*But why?*

I was seeking—a place to fit in, a place to be myself, a place to connect with others. I found it.

*But why?*

Well, the idea of "that of God in everyone" seemed right. The stern Catholic tradition of my youth framed it differently. We are all made in God's image. We have fallen. If we are good, we'll get into heaven and live an eternal life. The Friendly framing spoke to me—a spark of the divine in me? In everyone? Well, what an animating and useful principle. It spoke and speaks to my heart and mind.

*Why?*

Because if we believe that there's something of the divine in everyone

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### An Open Letter to NYYM: An Explanation, An Invitation

**Renee Fogarty**  
Amawalk Meeting

It felt like awkward performance art... when artists attempt "edgy & creative," but come off "odd & ill-timed."

Dressed in bonnet and plain dress I entered the auditorium and sat in the front as NYYM's Opening Worship for Summer Sessions began. I immediately regretted my outfit choice, wondering if my playful intent was seen as disrespectful.

To explain: I've been dressing in the character of Sarah Underhill (1734-1812) while giving tours of the historic Amawalk Meeting House, Yorktown, NY, where streets and burial stones bear names of Sarah's contemporaries: Purdy, Underhill, Birdsall, Tompkins, Carpenter, McKeel, Hallock.

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Re-Building FAITH in Changing Times **Notes from Summer Sessions: pp. 4-5**

**News and Ideas from Friends: pp. 6-8**



**News and Ideas from Friends: pp. 6-8**

## Notices

### New Members

**Mariah Esposito**—Fifteenth Street  
**Pamela Mackey**—Binghamton Community Friends  
**Laureen Park**—Brooklyn

### Deaths

**Carol Condon**, member of Rahway-Plainfield, on April 9, 2023.  
**Sue Ellin**, member of Brooklyn, on March 8, 2023.  
**Viola Hale Hathaway**, member of Poughkeepsie, on June 3, 2023  
**Don Kissil**, member of Chatham-Summit, on May 18, 2023.  
**Bruce Pacho Lane**, member of Rochester, on June 9, 2023.  
**Thamby Ninan**, member of Collins, on July 29, 2023.  
**Valentine Titus**, member of Westbury, on April 19, 2023.

## NEWS

### REQUEST RESOURCES on Voices for the Next Generation: Insights from a Listening Tour with Quaker Children, Teens and Families in New York Yearly Meeting

In 2021 and 2022, Mattie Johnson conducted a listening tour throughout New York Yearly Meeting to learn about the needs of children and families, what is working, and what changes we dream about. Fill out the brief form at [bit.ly/2023ListeningTourReport](https://bit.ly/2023ListeningTourReport) to receive the full report, slides about suggested best practices for integrating families into the meeting, and an invitation to a discussion of the tour's findings.

### Welcome Kevin Lovelady as ARCH Director

After a nine month-interim period and an arduous search, Kevin Lovelady has accepted the position of Aging Resources, Consultation, and Help (ARCH) Director. Kevin has served as an interfaith chaplain at Albany Medical Center and as a New York State certified Peer Specialist serving adults experiencing mental health crises, and has been an ARCH Regional Coordinator since early 2020. He was trained in ARCH by Callie Janoff and Yana Landowne and accompanied ARCH co-founder Barbara Spring on ARCH visits. Kevin is

## Around Our Yearly Meeting

in the final units of his Master of Divinity (MDiv) at Earlham School of Religion, anticipating graduation in May 2024. You can email Kevin at [klovelady@nyym.org](mailto:klovelady@nyym.org).

### NYYM's Weekly Update Email

An email newsletter is sent to NYYM Friends each Friday. Past editions are available at [nyym.org/weekly-updates](https://nyym.org/weekly-updates). To subscribe, fill out the brief form at [nyym.org/subscribe](https://nyym.org/subscribe). If you've subscribed but haven't received any emails, please check your spam folder.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Save the Date(s) for Sessions

The next gathering of New York Yearly Meeting will be **Fall Sessions**, held online **December 1-3, 2023**.

**Spring Sessions 2024** will be held April 5-7, 2024, at Oakwood School and online.

**Summer Sessions 2024** will be held at Oakwood School and online, Friday July 26 or Saturday July 27 through Wednesday July 31, possibly to Thursday or Friday. Final dates will be announced ASAP.

### Powell House Workshops



Powell House is the retreat and conference center for NYYM. Visit [powellhouse.org/event-list/](https://powellhouse.org/event-list/) to register, or call 518-794-8811.

### CRAFTING SACRED CONNECTIONS: THE ART OF HYBRID WORSHIP

October 6-8, 2023  
with David Coletta

When we hold our meeting for worship in both our meeting-house and on Zoom, it allows a whole new level of accessibility for people who can't come to the meetinghouse. It's God calling us to make space in new ways. We call it "hybrid" or "blended" worship, and we call the work of holding these spaces together "tech host," or "Zoom host." But the work is really care of worship with attention to connection. The work is challenging, pushing us out of our comfort zone whether that comfort zone is the tech part or the worship part. It takes a team of people who can support each other when it gets hard, teach each other the tips and tricks, and pray for each other to be faithful. This workshop is for tech teams (including teams of one

who want to grow larger) to come together, teach each other about how to hold that connection, share what works and what doesn't, and bring home new energy and inspiration for supporting hybrid worship. **FALL WORK-WEEKEND 2023** October 27-29, 2023  
Enjoy learning new skills? Like to work among 57 acres of God's creation in Columbia County, NY? Bring your favorite tools, old clothes and hearty appetites. Our cooks will have lots of good, nutritious & yummy food for us. We have plenty of work projects, both inside and outside our buildings.

### Celebrate World Quaker Day

World Quaker Day — October 1, 2023 — will be an opportunity to learn, reflect, and act in preparation for Friends World Committee on Consultation's 2024 World Plenary Meeting in South Africa and online. The theme of the meeting is **Living the Spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with Hope to God's Call to Cherish Creation and one-another**. For more on *ubuntu* and World Quaker Day, visit [fwcc.world/worldquakerday](https://fwcc.world/worldquakerday)

### Deepening at the Root

An extended workshop at **Pendle Hill**, October 5-9, 2023 (Thursday evening through Monday lunch)  
*Facilitated by Christopher Sammond*  
Through experiential exercises, small group sharing, large group processing, and worship, we will create a community of deep trust and openness, taking off the armor shielding our hearts and opening us into deeper communion with each other and the Divine Source. We will spend time exploring how that deeper communion enhances each of our experiences of worship, listening for vocal ministry, and listening for and discerning individual leadings for action. Visit [pendlehill.org/events/deepening-at-the-root/](https://pendlehill.org/events/deepening-at-the-root/)

### Friends' Decision-Making & Clerking: Participating in Meetings for Business with Joy and Confidence

**A Conference at Pendle Hill**  
**November 17-19, 2023**

This on-campus workshop with Steve Mohlke and .O is an opportunity for both new and experienced clerks of Friends' meetings and committees to meet and think together about the role of presiding clerk in the spiritual practice

of meeting for business. For more, click on the Learn tab on [pendlehill.org](https://pendlehill.org) and look in Upcoming Events.

## FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Children, Youth and Young Adult Community Director Beth Kelly maintains a list of upcoming YAF events at [nyym.org/yaf-events](https://nyym.org/yaf-events).

### SIMPLY NOURISHING

#### A Powell House Conference

#### for young adults 18+

October 6-8, 2023

A good meal nourishes you and lifts your spirit. Intentionally choosing ingredients and cooking them together is a powerful act of creation. At this conference, we will partake in the spirit-filled acts of cooking, baking, and eating. We will focus on simple, delicious recipes that will ideally be helpful in your own kitchen. We will also play games and talk about food and its role in our life.

## FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

### Powell House Youth Conferences

Visit [powellhouse.org/event-list/](https://powellhouse.org/event-list/) to register, or call 518-794-8811.

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[www.nyym.org](https://www.nyym.org)

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[communications@nyym.org](mailto:communications@nyym.org)  
*Editorial Board:*

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**SPARK**

15 Rutherford Place  
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*NYYM Staff*

Chad Giletta: [web@nyym.org](mailto:web@nyym.org)  
Beth Kelly: [bethk@nyym.org](mailto:bethk@nyym.org)  
Kevin Lovelady: [arch@nyym.org](mailto:arch@nyym.org)  
Steve Mohlke: [gensec@nyym.org](mailto:gensec@nyym.org)  
Walter Naegle: [walter@nyym.org](mailto:walter@nyym.org)  
Helen Garay Toppins:  
[office@nyym.org](mailto:office@nyym.org)  
Sarah Way:  
[communications@nyym.org](mailto:communications@nyym.org)



CLANTASTIC! for 4th-6th Grade  
October 20-22, 2023  
Pillow fort building is a common activity at Powell House. Entire worlds form within cushiony structures. Economy and trade flourish. Sometimes, feelings are hurt and justice is needed. At this conference, we will explore what it takes to form a society where peace and justice prevail. We will form clans and develop rules and customs. What happens when clans come together? Let's find out!

BEYOND PINK AND BLUE for  
7th-10th Grade  
November 3-5, 2023

We live in a world that tries to divide people and identities and put them in narrow boxes, when in truth we form a wide spectrum of possibilities of every kind. We are a rainbow. We are many rainbows! Come explore your colors together, the nuances and unique aspects of yourself that make you you! Let's dance along these rainbows until we find the pot of gold where they all come together and we can truly welcome and cherish each other for who we truly are.

DIY CABARET for 6th-8th Grade  
November 17-19, 2023  
On Saturday night of every youth conference at Powell House, we have Cabaret—a time to share creative acts that range from beautiful songs to laugh-out-loud improv games. At this conference, you will get to craft instruments and props yourself for a DIY (do-it-yourself) Cabaret. We will have lots of time for designing materials and have an extra creative (and potentially quite long) Cabaret! We will also sprinkle in games and discussions during the weekend to help us explore different aspects of crafting and performance.

**SAVE THE DATE (and register!) for these future PoHo conferences:**

SPICES: INTEGRITY for 11th-12th Grade and Young Adults, December 1-3, 2023

WINTERSONG 2023 for 7th-12th Grade, December 15-17, 2023

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Job Openings

These Quaker organizations often have job openings. Check their websites for current opportunities:  
**Friends General Conference:** [www.fgcquaker.org/work-at-fgc/](http://www.fgcquaker.org/work-at-fgc/)  
**American Friends Service Committee:** [afsc.org/careers](http://afsc.org/careers)

**Friends Committee on National Legislation:** [www.fcnl.org/about/work-fcni](http://www.fcnl.org/about/work-fcni)

### NYYM Grants for Earthcare and Climate Justice Projects

NYYM Friends and meetings are invited to apply for grants of \$50 to \$500 from NYYM's Earthcare Fund to support their projects related to Earthcare and Climate Justice. Visit [nnyym.org/content/nnyym-financial-resources-individuals-and-meetings#earthcare](http://nnyym.org/content/nnyym-financial-resources-individuals-and-meetings#earthcare) to find out more and to apply.

## Highlights & Action Items from Summer Sessions Minutes

The minutes from Summer Sessions 2023 are available online at [nnyym.org/content/minutes-summer-sessions-2023](http://nnyym.org/content/minutes-summer-sessions-2023) or in print if a request is made to the NYYM office. Some highlights and action items:

The recommendations from the Task Group on Financial Sustainability were approved by the body (see *minute 2023-07-32*). The new Budget Development Committee will develop a multi-year budget for NYYM with input from Friends and meetings. Friends are invited to consider service on a new Task Group on Priorities and Connections that will "recommend ways in which the yearly meeting can identify how the Spirit is moving among Friends and faithfully support and further that movement." Contact the convenor, Fred Dettmer ([fdettmer@aol.com](mailto:fdettmer@aol.com)), to volunteer.

Friends are asked to consider a statement on racism and inclusion brought by Angela Hopkins and Adria Gulizia as part of the report from Friends World Committee for Consultation (*minute 2023-07-24*). An excerpt: "Regardless of our good intentions, the facts of racism, white supremacy and white privilege continue to influence our behaviors and impede us from achieving the Beloved Community to which we aspire."

A minute on Protecting the Rights, Safety, and Human Dignity of Trans People was brought by New York Quarterly Meeting and NYYM's Witness Coordinating Committee (see *minute 2023-07-27*). Friends were asked to take this minute back to their meetings for further discernment.

### Editor's Note

I'm grateful to those who chose to attend Summer Sessions 2023 at Oakwood Friends School, a new location for NYYM after over 70 years at Silver Bay YMCA. I am still sad about the change of location from Silver Bay, one of my favorite places on earth. They aren't choosing to accommodate our group any more, at least for now, and that hurts. Some aspects of meeting at Oakwood are better: being the only group on campus; the housing clusters for teens, young adults, and families with children; the good food and welcoming staff; and the lack of competing activities, leading to a remarkable sense of unity. Silver Bay can still be visited. I hope those who love Silver Bay will consider vacationing there at a different time next summer, and will give Summer Sessions 2024 at Oakwood a try.

*Spark* accepts article submissions of 400-600 words, artwork, photos, poetry, shorter news items and announcements, and letters to the editor.

**Upcoming *Spark* themes:**  
**November 2023: Perspectives on the Peace Testimony.** *Guest edited by Susan Weisfeld.* While the Peace Testimony has given Quakerism its distinctive spiritual character, and many feel they subscribe to it—how exactly do you define or understand it? Is it personal, or corporate, or both? Is it comfortable or difficult for you? Have you been disturbed by its lack of flexibility, or can it be flexible and/or subscribed to on a segmented basis? Submissions are due by October 1 to [susanweisfeld@aol.com](mailto:susanweisfeld@aol.com).

Please also send your meeting's news and upcoming events for the NYYM weekly email update or *Spark* to [communications@nnyym.org](mailto:communications@nnyym.org). Join NYYM's weekly email list at [nnyym.org/subscribe](http://nnyym.org/subscribe).

NYYM is on **Facebook** (NewYorkYearlyMeeting), **Twitter/X** (NYYMTweets), and **Insta** (newyorkyearlymeeting).  
Peace,  
Sarah Way, NYYM  
Communications Director  
[communications@nnyym.org](mailto:communications@nnyym.org)



BEN BEAGLE/LIVINGSTON COUNTY NEWS  
Analea Blackburn, with her dog Misty, waves to a motorist during the annual Genesee Valley Citizen for Peace Hiroshima Vigil in Avon's Circle Park on Aug. 6.

## Friends Participate in Vigils for Peace

NYYM Friend Analea Blackburn was pictured in an August 8, 2023, Livingston County News article, "A call for peace: Observance hopes to ultimately end nuclear weapons." On August 6, Analea gathered with the Genesee Valley Citizens for Peace in Avon's Circle Park for an annual vigil to remember the victims of the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The participants were also calling for an end to wars and nuclear weapons.

A quote from the article:

"It's a message our community needs to hear: that there are people who support peace and are working to abolish nuclear weapons," said Suzanne Blackburn of Nunda, a member of GVCP who attended with her daughter Analea Blackburn. "It's important that we come together to let our views be heard, and practice our right to gather and express ourselves."

The full article can be viewed at [www.thelcn.com](http://www.thelcn.com); search for "end nuclear weapons" and choose the 2023 article by Ben Beagle.



Fifteenth Street Meeting Friend Brenda Kuciemba, June Tano of Morningside Meeting, and Margery Cornwell and Julie Finch of Fifteenth Street participated in the Peace Gathering to Commemorate the 78th Anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki held at the Japanese Consulate in New York City on Tuesday, August 8.





## Epistle from Young Adult Friends

*continued from page 1*

attended Sessions in person, others attended online. We are all happy to be here.

During our time at Summer Sessions this year, we laughed a lot. We stayed up too late. We ate meals together. We danced. We cried. We made friends, we reconnected. We sang. We were bitten by many bugs. We whispered to each other during business meetings. We engaged with Quakerism in an intentional way. We shared ourselves with the wider NYYM community. Those of us in person at Oakwood created a warm, inclusive space for each other. We acknowledge that we did not include our virtual Young Adult Friends in spontaneous activities as much as we could have. We experienced the joy of changing our plans as Spirit moved us.

We saw many new connections form among ourselves, inter-generationally, and in the larger NYYM community. We saw Friends navigating change and transition. We saw grief. At times we saw microaggressions, particularly related to age, race, and gender identity. We saw leadership from young people, including children, and Friends of all ages. We saw a greater mixing of ages and friendships than at previous sessions. We saw that our community is not in unity. We saw disagreement sit in the room without being addressed in a healing way. We saw tensions build and release. We saw that Spirit is here with us at Oakwood Friends.

We felt hope that this community can continue to grow and thrive as we find our way in changing times. We felt grief about the harms Quakers committed through Indian Boarding Schools, and grief for victims of gun violence. We felt glad that Friends who were not able to travel to us were able to attend virtually. We felt sad that some of our Friends who could have made the trip chose not to be in community with us at Oakwood. We felt appreciation of others' gifts. We felt affirmed, validated, and so welcomed. We felt disappointed by some of the immature and unkind ways older adult friends conducted themselves in meetings for business



A circle of Friends at the contra dance, Summer Sessions 2023.  
Photo by Sarah Way.

and discernment. At times we perceived Friends speaking from ego rather than Spirit. We saw older adult Friends speaking about deep hurts in vague and indirect language. Our language here is a deliberate choice to directly name what we saw and experienced. We embrace the traditions Friends have of using truthful and simple language. We find it exciting when Friends are able to communicate and come to unity. We feel Spirit present among us.

We suggest that, given the passion that Friends of all ages feel for social and environmental justice, we find opportunities to attend demonstrations and political actions.

We suggest that, when experiencing conflicts and tensions, we name hurts and concerns directly and specifically, so they can be worked through openly.

Young Adult Friends do not experience ourselves as the future of Quakerism—we experience ourselves as part of the present. We ask that Friends acknowledge and honor the wisdom YAFs bring to Quaker spaces. We ask that the community support and have faith in us as we exercise agency in Quaker processes.

We appreciate the ways in which experienced Friends have served as our elders and answered our questions. We suggest that in our various meetings (for worship, for business, for discernment), Friends with knowledge directly and promptly answer questions that are raised.

We ask that Friends remember that as Quakers we have meetings for worship, not churches—because we understand that we can worship anywhere we are gathered together and in Spirit.

Some of us remember that in past years, we had a facing bench of elders at all our meetings, including meetings for worship with a concern for business. We suggest that we might resume this

practice to ground our business meetings, with Friends of all ages, including children, as elders.

We love our yearly meeting and our community. We are committed to continuously rebuilding our faith and our ways of being together as the world continues to change around us. We look forward to doing so with all of you.



## Minute from JYM Teen Group

*continued from page 1*

teens and as Quakers. Like an old, well-loved sock, the most noticeable change is the growing number of holes in our community. As not just the future, but also the present, the shrinking number of children and teens in attendance has also been disheartening. A lot of our friends chose to sit out, and we're missing their presence at Summer Sessions. People throughout the community have decided not to join us because we're not at Silver Bay this year, and gosh-diggity-darn-it, that really blows.

Through this change, we've discovered that it's a bad feeling to say goodbye, but it's a worse feeling to not even get the chance. That said, we are asking this body to consider how we might all find the closure that is needed. We're understanding of the complexities around this change, but we're still experiencing a lot of grief. Nonetheless, we're really grateful for all the friends who have made it possible for us to gather, and to everyone who is here with us this week.

—Elliot, Griffin, Jules, Lianna,  
Linnea, Thalia



## Note of Thanks

Chad Cianfrani  
Oakwood Friends School

*continued from page 1*

11:00 a.m., I left to connect with members of my Board of Managers for a Zoom meeting. During the two minute walk from the Theater to my office in the Main Building I witnessed slip and slide joy on the hill by the Reagan Dorm with young members of your community. Seconds later, turning the corner by Crowley and Stokes buildings, I experienced an uplifting rehearsal and music.

This was my 120 second work commute and it framed my day powerfully!

For me, this week was inspiring, invigorating, and battery recharging. We all have important work ahead of us. Between effects of the global pandemic, societal and racial reckoning throughout our nation, political upheaval, increasing economic and social-emotional stresses on our students and families, these have been some of the most challenging years within our schools and communities. Reflection, deep listening, willingness to act and speak truth, and an openness to seek out the Light in every member of our society—these are foundational to the work at Oakwood and to the work in all of our Quaker Friends schools. I saw this work on full display within the NYYM community as well this week. It was inspiring.

Change is in the air. The opportunities to support one another, strengthen mission, and find sustainable growth are present on so many levels. While challenging, I find these years the most exciting and rewarding of my time at Oakwood. My charge leading out of this week is to reflect deeply on the place and space of Quaker education, our connection to the larger Quaker community, and how to continue to further this important work in support of our students within our school community.

I thank you all. I have so many thoughts and ideas heading into this year and next summer!

I look forward to connecting and to the road ahead. Be well.

Warmly,  
Chad







## Friends Reflect on Summer Sessions

Adapted from an article for Poughkeepsie Meeting's website by Amy Solis & Renelda Walker

**Sheila O'Hara,** Brooklyn Meeting, comes to NYYM's Summer Sessions to work in the Healing Center. Her first Summer Sessions was in 1991 when



Sheila O'Hara, Summer 2023. Photo by Renelda Walker.

her son was five and they attended consistently until he was 12. She came back to Sessions ten years later and attends most years.

Shelia had this to say about her experience, "The Healing Center has powerful energy and I hope to transmit that energy to the person I am assisting." Shiela enjoys seeing people she knows but hasn't seen in a while, and she likes getting updates on Quaker activities across the region.

**Hugo Lane,** Flushing Meeting, said, "I attend Summer Sessions because I am involved in several commit-



Hugo Lane at Summer Sessions 2023. Photo by Renelda Walker.

tees and I like getting out of New York City. 2014 was my first time at Summer Sessions and I have attended a few since that year. As clerk of the Conflict Transformation Committee, my biggest service includes helping with our workshops. I'd like to let our meetings know that we can help them to find a way forward, to look for and create opportunities to strengthen and transform relationships."

**Linnea Keiser-Clark** lives in MA and has been coming to NYYM for a few years. Her grandmother Peg, an active member of Poughkeepsie Friends Meeting, is grateful her family could join her locally this year. Linnea enjoys helping out



Linnea Keiser-Clark with her grandmother Peg Keiser at Summer Sessions 2023. Photo by Amy Solis.

with the children at NYYM and her remarkable face painting skills put smiles on many faces!

## Experiences of Summer Sessions

*Friends responded to an open request to share their experiences of Summer Sessions.*

### Nancy Kraus Purchase Meeting

I enjoyed Summer Sessions at Oakwood. The location is more convenient for the majority of New York Yearly Meeting members and allows for train travel. Overall, people who came, came for the business and not as a vacation; there were fewer temptations than at Silver Bay. The food was great, but if we had a bigger attendance, we would definitely need a second hot food line and more seating. I think having the high school kids in one dorm, a la Friends General Conference's senior high program, is great; hopefully, next year, more kids will come. The tech worked great! Kudos to that team. I wish that everyone who plans to attend Summer Sessions would read the advance materials and take advantage of the multitude of opportunities to season business items before they actually come to the floor for approval or denial so business meeting the last night doesn't extend into the wee hours! And I know the kids were disappointed that they didn't get to file in that last afternoon so let's fix that next year.

### Morgan Adcock Albany Meeting

I loved being in a Quaker space, and I think it's a great choice for yearly meeting in almost every way. I found Oakwood much easier to

get around under my own power than Silver Bay, so maybe that was part of it. With Poughkeepsie's being the northernmost point on the commuter line, Metro-North, it must be easier and cheaper for people from downstate to get to than Silver Bay. Much better pricing more than made up for any issues, and having the option to stay at the Holiday Inn Express for less than the cheap rooms at Silver Bay was wonderful.

The theater was hard to move around in, particularly for those of us with physical mobility issues, but I know that's not going to change. I would have liked to have had closed captioning on the big screen behind the clerks' table when it wasn't being used otherwise. With my mild hearing loss and visual issues, I had to move across the front of the meeting to get closer to the screen in the middle of one session. Also, the clerk appeared to have a hard time seeing people in the cheap seats—perhaps there are lights at the top which could have been turned on.

Noise in the dining room was loud enough at meals that my watch/phone advised me to leave a few times, but going downhill and across the road (where the dining tent was), then back again wasn't a possibility for me. Could the dining tent be moved to space adjacent to the dining hall?

I think that having shorter business sessions turned out to work against us. Effective communication appeared to be hampered by trying to move forward faster.

### Anita Paul Schenectady Meeting

#### Big Plusses

- the ice cream truck
- the contra dance
- closing worship
- the efficient operation of the dining room—no long waits
- tagless tag sale
- ...and all the other things that made it seem like always
- fine, workable location
- many, many rest rooms
- flatter terrain

#### Not So Plus

- Given all the things that had to be curtailed, Meetings for Discernment shouldn't get an entire day—if you cut out one of

the sessions, folks might realize that they need to speak up sooner

- Start on Friday evening. Maybe start with dinner and then worship sharing groups, to knit us together early
- Check out Vassar for more rooms and perhaps a pool
- There is a need for places to rest for those not staying on campus

### David Gerhan Schenectady Meeting

It worked well for the numbers who attended. The dining and meeting spaces might be quickly overcrowded if numbers grow much.

The campus has many more public restrooms than Silver Bay does and that helped a lot.

For those who stayed in the motel off campus there was a shortage of indoor places during the day to rest and find quiet, so you could return to the blessed community re-energized.

We were fortunate to move the contra dance to an outdoor patio rather than endure the stifling heat of the gymnasium. If we return next year, we should plan on using that Reagan Dorm patio space with the addition of a large enough tent nearby in case of rain.

In short it felt like it worked out well, with those caveats in mind. 🙏

## ONLINE-ONLY: A Summer Sessions Poem

### Cai Quirk, Ithaca Meeting and ChatGPT, an Artificial Intelligence Chatbot

Cai Quirk gave ChatGPT this prompt: "please write a short poem about 'New York Yearly Meeting' of Quakers, who has its 'Summer Sessions' this week in a new place called 'Oakwood.' We used to meet at Silver Bay which was beautiful and beloved by many, but Oakwood has been wonderful too and we are building more community by being closer together and the only ones on campus." ChatGPT generated several poems and Cai tweaked them to arrive at a traditional, yet odd, yet surprisingly moving poem that was read at Summer Sessions. Visit [nyym.org/spark/](http://nyym.org/spark/) to read.





## Universal Quaker Doctrines?

Jeffrey Aaron  
New Brunswick Meeting

The concept that there is that of God in every person is a central concept for Friends. It grounds our relationship to the world. But it is just that: a concept, not a doctrine or dogma. One should never assume it is a universal belief. When, more than once, I have heard Friends refer to that of God in everyone as “what we believe”, I cringe. I became a Friend because it was made clear to me that Friends— at least our branch—eschewed the soothing but mind-numbing yoke of a set of fixed beliefs; we are not a doctrinal or dogmatic sect. We must determine what we believe by remaining seekers.

Today, I may believe that there is that of God in everyone, but I cannot guarantee that I will continue to adhere to that belief when next we meet. One of the greatest lessons I continue to re-learn from wise Friends, is that I must remain fully open to continuing revelation. If, in conversation, reading or in silent contemplation, I discover that I believe something different from what I previously believed, I determine to continue to test my beliefs, perhaps with the constructive help of wise Friends in a clearness committee, if I need further clearness. If I no longer believe that there is that of God in everyone, I am no less a Quaker than those Friends who whole heartedly ascribed to our famous peace testimony but decided to take up arms during World War II out of the belief that evil needed to be confronted to save the world from further misery, death and tyranny. To thine own self be true.

Quakers are famous for answering those who ask what Friends believe by responding with questions rather than with answers, in particular by asking, what sayest thou? If we become entirely comfortable in our personal belief system, we have stopped being seekers. If we think that we KNOW, we have lost spiritual humility, for

who among us can know anything for certain, can claim to know the mind of God? Who can claim to speak with certainty for all?

It is human nature to seek solace with those who share our beliefs, and that is good. But as soon as we assume that we share all beliefs—including what we mean when we say “God”—we are in trouble. This divine conundrum is why religious sects are subject to branch forever into new sects. Sects sprout as soon as we recognize that we may have substantial differences of belief or opinion, including among Quakers. Some evangelical Friends have said that they are “the real Quakers”, in that they still adhere to Fox’s Bible-based Christianity, while some from the “liberal” branches claim that we are “the real Quakers”, adhering to silent, expectant worship and the absence of dogma. Where Quakerism differs from most religious sects is in our acceptance that there will always be differences among people, and that we can cherish and learn from our diversity. We recognize that we are all individuals and that our perception of the world may at times be at odds, but we can remain in unity even when we disagree. When we fail at business, it is because the exigency to respond positively to another Friend’s completely different perspective is so difficult. We are each inclined to think that we are the one who is right instead of thinking “why does that Friend think differently, and how can we cross the divide with Friendly loving curiosity instead of indignance or anger?”

I welcome the Quaker challenge to examine my thinking and beliefs every day, as daunting a responsibility as that may be. I will always be grateful for the wise reminder from Friends that the most exquisite Quaker practice, that of consciously remaining a perpetual seeker, may be our greatest challenge, but that it will always make us better Friends.



Gloria Thompson. Photo by Renalda Walker.

## Meet the New Clerk of NYYM, Gloria Thompson

*Adapted, with permission, from an article by Amy Solis & interview by Renalda Walker, Poughkeepsie Meeting*

At the end of Summer Sessions 2023 Gloria Thompson, Manhattan Monthly Meeting, became the new clerk for New York Yearly Meeting. Gloria grew up Quaker and remembers first joining with Quakers in 1959 at Top Moro Friends Meeting in Rowlandsfield, Jamaica. She attended Happy Grove High School, a Quaker school in Portland on the isle of Jamaica that recently celebrated its 125th year. Gloria is a retired educator with many years’ experience in Quaker service and leadership.

When asked, “What does being a Quaker mean to you?” Gloria responded, “It is a deep, intimate relationship with God, knowing that my beliefs can help change the world. Every person is a child/product of God. We are our brother’s keeper, our earth’s keeper. What’s important is our connection

to both the seen and the unseen. We love diversity, and equity; and wherever, whoever we are, we are the human race. We are all someone’s child.”

She added, “My joy working with the Quaker community is the belief that the human condition is serviceable: Alternatives to Violence (AVP), Prison Ministry, Earthcare, education, and advocacies. I believe it a gift to ‘give back.’”



## An Open Letter

Renee Fogarty  
Amawalk Meeting

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Sarah lived in times when Quaker families were torn apart by divisions between loyalists, patriots or pacifist neutralists. During her lifetime Friends were encouraged to treat their African American servants with “moderation,” to bring them to meetings, to see to their education and to begin freeing them. Sarah, like all colonial women, could not own property, control her own money, or divorce her husband.



Renee Fogarty dressed as Sarah Underhill in front of the Amawalk Meeting House (circa 1831). Photo by Sean Fogarty

I recently found a memorial online, published by NYYM in 1814, that described Sarah’s “cheerful disposition,” her countenance “grave and sweet,” her “thankfulness in the enjoyment of the divine presence, and her sympathies directed to the suffering of the Africans and their descendants, in a state of bondage.”

Now this is a weighty Friend to embody!

And finally, playing a bit part in recorded history, Sarah served a porridge breakfast on Sept. 22, 1780, to Major John Andre, head of the British Secret Service. He was traveling through Yorktown *en route* from a clandestine meeting with Benedict Arnold in treasonous cahoots to surrender West Point. Andre was captured later that day in Tarrytown and hung months later by orders of George Washington.

I’m tickled to pretend to be Sarah, and to imagine Friends who came before me. As I gaze through the wavy window glass of my meetinghouse, I feel her presence—and that of others who have sat on the same horsehair-filled cushions and hard benches.

I invite you to share the delight and whimsy I find in knowing our ancestors and feeling a connection to them.



Poster by Todd Drake for the Climate March to End Fossil Fuels, September 17, 2023, in New York City. Todd is a member of Brooklyn Meeting and a co-director of Pennington Friends House.





## Confessions of a Mind-Body-Spirit Evangelist:

Carl Blumenthal  
Brooklyn Meeting

Writing has saved my life. Writer's block has almost killed me several times, literally and figuratively. That, in a nutshell, are the highs and lows of someone living with manic-depression or bipolar disorder. (Anyone experiencing a mental health crisis may call 988 for help.)

So, when I spied Anna Quindlen's *Write for Your Life* on the New Non-Fiction shelf of my branch of the Brooklyn Public Library, I didn't hesitate to check it out. As an arts reporter for 50 years, I am often told by my subjects, "You are the only reporter who really understood me and my work."

I suppose this gift for empathy, for identifying the creative urges that animate all of us, is what also makes me a peer counselor sensitive to the needs of my clients whose feelings, thoughts, and actions I read like the good books all their lives are. (A peer counselor is someone with lived experience of mental illness, trained to support those with similar challenges). For that is Quindlen's message: We all have lives not just worth living but also worth writing about.

I have collected my dozens of articles for *Friends Journal*, *Spark*, and Brooklyn Monthly Meeting's newsletter in "A Quaker's Guide to the Cosmos, Including the Friendliest Places to Eat" (available upon request for free from carlblumntl@gmail.com).

The title suggests what Friends are least known for—our sense of humor. Dare I say that when George Fox, founder of Quakerism, descended from Pendle Hill and told his followers to go forth joyfully unto the world with the Good News, he had discovered the antidote for his own depression.

In fact, Quaker mystic Rufus Jones claimed that, in addition to his famous journal, Fox wrote a now lost *Book of Miracles* in which desperate (i.e. chronically depressed) souls testified to his healing powers. While Jesus is known for his healing miracles,

George Fox may have been the first peer counselor.


Yet, I imagine that Fox's spiritual comrade-in-arms and wife, Margaret Fell, was the one with the dark sense of humor, as she paid off bill collectors for the practical needs of early Friends back home in England while George gallivanted around the globe on his soul-saving missions.

I emphasize the importance of the mind, body, and spirit for healing. While half of my clients don't have explicit spiritual practices, my task is to help them find meaning and purpose in their lives. A big part of my own recovery consists of seeking these qualities by supporting my peers. The other half of my clients, like me, have at times experienced the merger of physical, psychological, and spiritual states.

For example, during the last New York Yearly Meeting summer retreat before the Covid pandemic, lack of sleep, the stress of caring for my mentally ill brother, and communion with several hundred Quaker souls produced an epiphany during a Meeting for Healing I participated in. I experienced feeling "held" by the Friends in the Meeting for Healing even though they didn't lay hands on me.

In one of my unpublished humorous skits, "Up the Down Staircase at Friendship House," I extol the Quaker model of "moral treatment" that derives from practices at England's York Retreat, established in 1792; it led to the founding of the first private American psychiatric institution in 1817, Philadelphia's Friends' Hospital.

Just as the Thomas Scattergood Foundation carries on the work of the hospital's founder by supporting mental health care innovations, Friends have contributed mightily to such improvements here and in England.

Therefore, I identify with the tradition begun by George Fox of saving desperate souls, but not necessarily by miraculous means. Rather, spiritual accompaniment that Friends practice in responding to the varied needs of all kinds of people in all kinds of crises is my brand of therapy because we are all lost souls seeking to be found. 



Khary Bekka, Joel Jimenez, Bob Rose, Marvin Wade, Stephen Brathwaite, Reggie Singleton, and Zontzell Gordon; Sing-Sing is in the background. *Photo by Frank Beccera, Jr., Journal News/lohud.com staff.*

## A Celebration of Freedom

Renee Fogarty  
Amawalk Meeting

Quakers are reluctant to publish news of their good works in the world. However, a recent event occurred that some might find newsworthy.


On August 13, 2023, former members of the Sing-Sing Worship Group boarded a boat to view the prison from the water. Called a

*Celebration of Freedom*, the boat ride brought together seven men who had attended meeting together. Over many years they had formed a unique bond that continues to this day.

The last man of the group was released after 30 years just one month ago; the group was waiting for his release before holding the reunion.

One attendee, Reginald Singleton, called it a transformative experience. "This is a very emotional feeling for me now. Looking out on the water was always from the other perspective... I remember those days and the guys that used to hang out, and we'd talk about this all the time."

He plans to send friends still inside photos of his day on the river so "they can live vicariously through me until they come home."

Volunteers Matt Scanlon (Scarsdale), Renee Fogarty (Amawalk) and Scott Blumenthal (Morningside) joined the men on the boat trip. 

## Why Am I a Quaker?

Ted Bongiovanni  
Brooklyn Meeting

*continued from page 1*

then I am on equal footing with you. Another pithy message from Bono—another latent friend? "We are one, but we're not the same. We get to carry each other."

*Why?*

We believe in "continuing revelation;" in other words, we favor questions over answers—and the answers that we find are provisional, until we find better answers—together. Not one text. All texts. All people. All voices.

*Why?*

Because we seek in silence—and everyone can be a source of truth—a messenger. We just have to be still and listen. Being still is not easy in today's modern world of digital tethers where distractions are a screen away. A Quaker meeting dedicates a time and place for us to sit, and listen—for our own inner voice, and for a message from a F/friend that might speak to us.

*Why?*

Because I am weary of promises of the next world. I am certain that

this one needs our attention, in a way consistent with us serving as just stewards for the generations that will follow us.

*Why?*

Because the problems are bigger than us, but solvable by us. Together we can figure it out.

*Why?*

Because I think that if we all treated one another as though there were something of the divine inside that we'd listen more—we'd care more. This is also a wish for me—I am seeking, and need reminders.

*Why?*

Because I am inspired by what our beliefs have led us to do—whether it was an early renunciation of slavery, or providing relief to those harmed by war—regardless of what side they were on. Because there's still a vast gap between what we believe and what exists. The Jacksonville shootings of three Black people are a reminder that white supremacy is alive and well.

*Why?*

Because together, Friends, we can work to close that gap, to love one another and build a stronger community.

*Why are you a Friend?*

I'm listening. 





# News and Messages from Friends

## Friends Wore Orange for Gun Violence Awareness

New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) Friends marked Gun Violence Awareness Weekend, June 2-4, 2023, by wearing orange in solidarity with victims and survivors in their communities and nationwide. "Wear Orange" started in Chicago 7 years ago to memorialize the shooting death of 16 year old Hadiya Pendleton; see [WearOrange.org](http://WearOrange.org). NYYM Gun Violence Prevention Coordinator Peter Murchison is pictured in DC with Friends Committee on National Legislation leadership. Also pictured are Friends in Poughkeepsie, Purchase, Morningside, and Fifteenth Street Meetings. A Gun Violence Prevention Task Group has been formed in NYYM to work on the issue of gun violence. Contact Peter at [pdmurch@gmail.com](mailto:pdmurch@gmail.com) to join.



Morningside Meeting Friends wearing orange.



Purchase Meeting Friends wearing orange



A blended—in person and online—group of Friends wearing orange at Poughkeepsie Meeting



Friends from the Farmington-Scipio Region wearing orange at their Spring Gathering, June 3, 2023. *Photo by Suzanne Blackburn.*



Peter Murchison, center, with members of the Friends Committee on National Legislation's leadership in Washington, DC.



Fifteenth Street Meeting Friends carry orange signs that read "We can end gun violence," at the site of their monthly peace vigil in Washington Square Park, New York City.



Brenda Kuciemba, of 15th Street Meeting, wearing orange.



## Friends Marched in the NYC Gay Pride Parade

A group of Quakers marched in the NYC Pride Parade on June 25, 2023, as they have every year since the parade began. The photo shows Robert Renwick and Karl Karma (the dog), Morningside MM. Participant Solange Muller said, "It was my first pride parade. I had no idea what to expect and I felt the leading to be there in honor of my daughter. The Quakers marched at the very end. As we waited our turn, we watched the amazing floats and groups. 5th Avenue was lined with people, and we felt joy instantly as we marched. We waved and exclaimed: 'Happy Pride Day' to those who cheered us on. Robert and I felt tremendous love as the Quakers wowed New York with our commitment to peace, justice, equality and respect for all. A communal experience of belonging." *Photograph and poster: Solange Muller, Bulls-Head Owego MM*