

Southeastern Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

Yearly Business Meeting 2020

5th Month 16th Day to 6th Month 7th Day, 2020

Numbered Minutes

- 20YM01: Friends accepted the Treasurer's report for the period ended 2/29/2020.
- 20YM02 Friends approved the numbered minutes of the Executive Committee meetings of June and October 2019 and January, March, and May, 2020.
- 20YM03 Friends accepted the numbered minutes of the Fall and Winter Interim Business Meetings.
- 20YM04 Friends accepted the report of the SEYM Trustees.
- 20YM05 Friends approved the proposal for the establishment of a COVID-19 Relief Fund as follows:

"The Quaker meeting is meant to be a blessed community - a living testimony to a social order that embodies God's peace, justice, love, compassion, and joy, and is an example and invitation to a better way of life. Like our other testimonies, community can be a prophetic call to the rest of society."

SEYM Faith and Practice, page 76

The Covid-19 pandemic has had many impacts on our Faith Community. Our meetings have become virtual and our Meetinghouses vacant. Some Friends have lost employment and others have found their income and financial resources reduced. Many of us are among the most vulnerable to the potentially deadly impacts of Covid-19. As we convened this annual gathering, a concern was raised by a number of Friends as to how Yearly Meeting can be of service to our constituent Meetings, Worship Groups, and the Friends that they serve. At Executive Committee, SEYM Trustees presented a concept for a relief fund dedicated to this purpose. An Ad-Hoc Committee of the clerk, and a member of the trustees, Worship and Ministry Committee and Peace and Social Concerns Committee met and have found unity on a proposed SEYM Covid-19 Relief Fund.

SEYM COVID-19 Relief Fund:

Purpose:

The purpose of the SEYM Covid-19 relief fund is to provide financial relief to Constituent Meetings and Worship Groups to support their basic operations and support their efforts to provide relief to Friends who may be members or attenders, to meet their needs for additional funds arising from the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Establishment:

The SEYM Covid-19 relief fund shall be established by an initial contribution of \$15,000.00 from funds under the care of SEYM Trustees. The fund may accept earmarked

donations from individuals, Monthly Meetings, and Worship Groups, that may have resources and a leading to contribute to this effort. SEYM Trustees may supplement this initial contribution upon approval of the SEYM Executive Committee should need, available funds, and leading, arise.

Process for disbursement of funds:

Funds shall be disbursed to constituent Monthly Meetings for the Monthly Meeting or Worship Groups under their care. A Monthly Meeting or Worship Group may submit a written request for funding with a description of the quantity of funds needed and purpose for which the funds will be used. Names of members and attenders seeking this support will be kept confidential by the Monthly Meetings or Worship Groups.

To be as responsive as possible to immediate needs, an *ad hoc* Covid-19 Relief Fund Committee will be created. This committee shall consist of the YM clerk, the Assistant clerk, YM Treasurer, a member of the Worship and Ministry Committee, and a member of the Peace & Social Concerns.

Committee. This *ad hoc* committee will work with requesting Meetings and Worship Groups to seek clarity on any request for these funds. The Youth and Young Adult Coordinator may work with this committee, the Meetings, and Worship Groups, to help connect young adults and families with youth in need of this support to this process. This committee may approve the disbursement of funds up to \$500.00 for immediate needs. In the case where a request for funds is greater than the \$500.00 that can be immediately approved by the *ad hoc* Covid-19 Relief Fund Committee, the committee may issue the initial \$500.00 and approval of the requested funding above this limit may then be discerned by a called meeting of the SEYM Executive Committee.

Reporting:

The *ad hoc* Covid-19 Relief Fund Committee shall provide a written report to Fall Interim Business Meeting, Winter Interim Business Meeting, and Yearly Meeting 2021, in regard to disbursement of funds, contributions received, and the remaining fund balance. The report shall include the amounts disbursed to the various Meetings and Worship Groups and general purpose of the funding. To preserve the confidentiality normally afforded to Friends seeking assistance from their Meeting's Care and Counsel Committee, individuals receiving assistance will not be identified in these reports.

In Closure:

The *ad hoc* Covid-19 Relief Fund shall close with the sense of Yearly Meeting that this emergency has passed and that no further funding will be needed to meet needs arising from this emergency. Residual funds, should such exist, shall be returned to the care of SEYM Trustees. The *ad hoc* Covid-19 Relief Fund Committee will dissolve upon closure of the fund as described above.

- 20YM06 We would like to express appreciation to the yearly meeting clerk, administrative secretary, youth coordinator, recording clerk, representatives to organizations, all committees that have diligently met and given reports, and all who have participated in any and all ways during these 2020 Yearly Meeting Sessions. The significance of our beliefs and care for all remain clearly visible.
- 20YM07 Friends approve the revised Nominating Committee Report.

20YM08 Friends approve the 2020-2021 SEYM budget as presented.

20YM08 Friends approved the Epistle which will be shared with other Yearly Meetings and Friends Organizations.

We are experiencing challenging times.

Yet, we gathered in some part over the last three months, beginning with a virtual mini-Gathering. We participated in worship sharing, workshops, a talent show, and plenary sessions. We even danced the Julia Geiger Memorial Chicken Dance with joy together, each from our homes. We give special thanks to Esme Dellinger for her role as emcee of the All Ages Talent Show.

Friends from Friends Committee on National Legislation filled the gap of the loss of the Walton Lecture speaker with information and inspiration about lobbying online.

We were joined by Friends from other Yearly Meetings to observe and participate in our virtual mini Gathering and plenaries. People who may have been unable to attend in person in the past were able to join us in the online sessions. Some Friends, however, found the technology challenging for various reasons. Feedback from the mini Gathering included appeals for more online content such as movies, Project Drawdown and other workshops, and opportunities for spiritual deepening.

The Gathering Committee and others are planning more workshops, as suggested, at least once per month through 2020. There will be an evaluation after that time of the desire to continue with this format. The first of the workshops will take place on 23 June with Shelley Tanenbaum, General Secretary for Quaker Earthcare Witness. Brian Humphrey will lead a workshop on Collaborative Conflict Strategies for Interpersonal Situations to Earthcare on 28 July. More information and registration will be posted on the SEYM website.

For four weeks, we held Worship Sharing sessions with quotes and queries selected by the Worship and Ministry Committee prior to Meeting with a Concern for Business plenary sessions.

In our first plenary, more than 30 Friends from 11 Meetings and Worship Groups shared how they have blended old and new practices and technologies to meet their needs. Considerations on when and how to resume meeting in person and the extent to which online gatherings might help to maintain ties to distant members or persons in the COVID high-risk group. Many spoke of the desire to continue the practice of living simpler and more sustainable lives—"that in the Simplicity of less busy-ness, they found spiritual growth." A Meeting Clerk shared "...we are uncertain of how long we will live the day we are born; and that we need to live each day in peace and with gratitude."

A number of committees met prior to the plenaries. A leading arose among several committees to develop a relief fund for those experiencing financial hardships as a result of the corona virus. The SEYM COVID-19 Relief Fund will assist individual Meetings

and/or individuals identified by the Meetings. Peace and Social Concerns Committee also donated \$400.00 to Miami AFSC to help with farmworker food relief.

Representatives to Quaker and other organizations brought forward concerns, actions, and messages. These provided senses of shared burdens, insights, and aids.

Committees within the Meeting have been responsive, enduring, and provided a special grace throughout. This was witnessed by the rather sudden shift from an in-person Gathering to the creation and delivery of the virtual. Friends have and continue to serve the Yearly Meeting by fully showing up, e.g., the COVID-19 Relief Fund, serving on committees, providing queries, and much more.

Of particular concern are the impacts of climate degradation and systemic racism and the work that is needed to realize the world we seek. During the course of our Yearly Meeting sessions, we were heartbroken to learn of the murder of George Floyd and grieved for his family and friends and all those who have been harmed by racial and police violence, white supremacy, and the ongoing racism in our country.

We are heartened by the call by many to make changes in ourselves, our meetings and our communities for racial justice. We are looking at how we can increase our support to groups such as Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, among other possibilities. This Gathering is a witness to our commitment to do that work. As mentioned earlier, we are already planning how we will focus our energies on transformation.

Technology may provide a new-old sense of intimacy. We saw each other's living rooms and virtual backgrounds. The sense of community within the Yearly Meeting seems to have been strengthened and sustained though we look forward to the hugs, hang-out time over snacks, the table talk, worshipping, singing and dancing together when we see each other in person again.

These quotes spoke to us during Yearly Meeting:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34-35

Integrity forms the basis for covenant relationship in which persons exercise a sense of responsibility and accountability toward one another. Integrity . . . leads to an even deeper sense of community. . . . If the wholeness aspect of integrity leads to a sense of community of persons, likewise it can lead us to an experience of spiritual wholeness in our relationship with God.

Wilmer A. Cooper