

Notes on Continuing Sessions in Reading, PA on March 23, 2019

I started the day with the spirit-filled action led by the Young Adult Friends at the Berks Detention Center where migrant families are being held, and for which there is a movement to get the center closed and the families released to the community. Young Adult Friends were moved to organize this witness at last summer's Annual Sessions, and the date was picked to be the same as Continuing Sessions, and the Reading location was picked to coordinate with the witness. I was impressed with the organization of the demonstration; there was a mix of song, speeches, including one by the Shut Down Berks Interfaith Witness group, and open worship. Many spoke and there was not only a sound system so we could hear, but a translator for those who spoke Spanish and those of us who don't speak Spanish. We stood or sat, all ages, for two hours in love and clarity that this is a place that should not exist, under the watchful eyes of the police sitting in their cars across the street.

Continuing Sessions had two other locations including Reading Meeting where there was a multigenerational program for those who did not attend the demonstration, and children's programming in the afternoon. The Miller Arts Center of Berks County Community College was the site where those of us who are Bridge Contacts (I am the one for Concord Quarter as a whole) gathered for lunch. This is a new program at PYM where each meeting, hopefully, will choose someone to be the Bridge Contact for their meeting to share back and forth with PYM. I see it like being a "cheerleader" for PYM at your own meeting (or Quarter) and being a "cheerleader" for your own group at PYM. In the old structure there were meeting representatives to "Representative Meeting" but that all went away with the new structure. We talked about what we would like to see for this group including several meetings a year, either in person or by Zoom, where we share what is happening. Currently there are about 20 Bridge Contacts identified out of 103 meetings in PYM. Wendy Kane is the staff point person for Bridge Contacts.

At the afternoon meeting for worship with attention to business, we got through part of the agenda. We heard more about Bridge Contacts with an offer to sign up, and that the deadline for the One Quilt, One Yearly Meeting squares is extended to June 1.

We then heard a report from the Young Adult Friends. They thanked us for coming to the action and they encouraged us to cultivate trust and love when conflict makes us want to flee, fight or freeze. They felt hopeful last summer about PYM and asked PYM to stand at their sides regarding their leading to do something related to migrant justice. They also pointed out that this kind of detention is nothing new in our society. We appreciated their faith in action.

Nominating Council gave their report titled "Gratefully accepting the gifts we have received". PYM now has a new Clerk (Chris Lucca is officially Clerk now) and we have two new Assistant Clerks (Terry Cooke and Jonathan Rhoads). They will also be expected to attend the various Council Meetings and be more involved than previous Assistant Clerks have been in the past. The Clerk has been functioning since last summer without any Assistant Clerks, but with the support of Council Clerks and the General Secretary. Several other nominations were also approved.

The bulk of our time was spent hearing about the "Philadelphia Quarter Minute" and the Multicultural Audit Steering Committee's recommendation for a consultant. There are some in the Yearly Meeting who thought the MASC process should be laid down when Friends General Conference's Institutional Assessment results were released last fall. Philadelphia Quarter, after minutes from 3 of their member

meetings, decided in late January that they were united in recommending that the process be paused until the FGC results could be examined.

tonya thames taylor, Clerk of the MASC, explained their process in selecting a consultant, and that they were united in recommending Prototype Entities, which has worked with other organizations, including the Methodist Church, around structural racism. There were questions from those present including whether they had considered the FGC Assessment. They were informed about FGC's project, and used some of the information about the process as they worked. The process has taken 14 months, but there has been conflict on the committee, along with a vague charge. (And my own opinion is that the committee was way too big – 23 to start).

Among others, one question raised was about why people had left the Committee since it is so small now. Those present were asked to share why they left the committee. Several members who were People of Color left last fall, and they left because they thought the process should be paused to look at the FGC assessment.

In the end, we decided to receive the recommendation of the consultant, but not start any audit at this time. The MASC members are released. Their job was to find a consultant and they have done that and we appreciated the work they have done. It was hours and hours of meetings, threshings, interviewing and checking of references, especially since they had two excellent finalists.

It was after 4pm by this time and we needed to leave the building, so we did not hear the reports from Christie and the other Councils. We closed with a short worship. One Friend was saddened that the agenda was so packed that we couldn't get through it, something that has happened before. At the very end, Young Friends brought in a banner that said "No Cages, No Walls", the saying on the smaller banners we held during the morning action.

I was glad to be present, to listen to everyone and to participate in the witness.

Minutes are on the PYM website since they were approved at the end of the afternoon.

Lynne Piersol