

Your Coordinator's Reflections on PYM Annual Sessions, July 25-29, 2018

I attended the recent Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions at The College of New Jersey in Trenton, NJ. The experience was very different for me compared to the last couple of years. We felt more grounded and loving in our interactions and I came away feeling like I had participated in a spiritual experience, a feeling I had not had for a while at sessions. Following is what I experienced and my thoughts on why.

First, there was a Spiritual Retreat the day before Annual Sessions which about 30 of us participated. I went on my own time, and highly recommend it if they do it again. It was well done by the Spiritual Formation Collaborative and it meant that there were 30 of us holding Sessions in the Light, as support to the body and the official elders. We spent time on queries related to the themes of reflecting, reigniting and reconnection.

The meetings for worship with attention to business were very well clerked by the three Alternate Clerks. Since Penny Colgan-Davis resigned and then died, the Alternate Clerks, assisted by the Clerks of Administrative, Quaker Life and Nominating Councils, the Treasurer and the General Secretary, worked together as a team to carry out tasks and plan the agenda for Annual Sessions. They chose to have very few reports from various Quaker organizations, other than Ujima Friends Peace Center. This allowed more time for the business items and the agenda did not feel crowded. We also had some wonderful sessions with Dr. Amanda Kemp who led us in a session on racial justice from the heart, and Walter Hjelt Sullivan who talked about covenant relationships (personal, not the financial kind...). We had an experience with Open Space Technology which allowed those with passions to share them with others drawn to the same issues. And we heard the new Mission Statement for the Youth Programs.

There were listening sessions around certain issues, including a planned one on the staff voice policy, and a quickly scheduled one on the progress of Multicultural Institutional Audit Committee when it appeared that the Clerk and the Committee were not on the same page. I heard that 100 people came to the second one, which was scheduled quickly for early afternoon when needed, and a way forward was found through that process.

There were also many other opportunities to learn, share and have fun during the days we were there.

The campus was the same as last year, but the spaces we used were generally closer together, and we had dinners together in the new Student Center (which has lots of natural light), although other meals were in the dining hall. I thought the food was better this year...

Challenges are still with us. There is lots of work to do yet around developing our Beloved Community. Nominating Council has been quite challenged in finding a new Clerk and new Alternate Clerks. We now have one remaining Alternate Clerk. They have approached a number of people and have been given generally one of three answers: 1) I'm not ready yet, try me again in a few years – which asks the question of how are we raising up and growing new clerks? 2) Clerking seems like a full-time job; you have to be retired to do it. The Council will be looking at the job description. 3) I don't think I am strong enough, brave enough or courageous enough. They have fear about being in an adversarial relationship with the body of PYM.

The Nominating Council Clerk asked us to expect that the Clerk will make a mistake, say things you might disagree with, but love them anyway. She asked for support for the Nominating Council.

Later in sessions we approved a structure for leadership until Fall Sessions – The remaining Alternate Clerk, Chris Lucca, will continue to act as Presiding Clerk in conjunction with the Clerks of the three councils and the Treasurer until November 3. The Nominating Council intends to bring forward some names at that time.

By Lynne Piersol, Concord Quarter Coordinator