

DRAFT
State of the Meeting Minutes
Newark Monthly Meeting
January 30, 2022

The state of Newark Monthly Meeting was considered on Zoom by Aliza Appel, Ginny Bailey, Annemarie Carr, Gavin Ferris, Lily Grosso, Shelley Hastings, Diane Kesler, Maggie Ladd, Richard Ladd, Ariana Langford, Sally Milbury-Steen, Treba Thompson, Trebs Thompson, Wayne Thompson

Discussion was guided first by three queries formulated by Wayne Thompson, co-clerk of our meeting, and then by a series of ten queries proposed by PYM.

Queries proposed by Wayne Thompson:

1) *Last year we settled on Climate Change as our issue of focus. Should we continue with this?*

No: Friends feel a real futility in any kind of individual effort on behalf of the environment; only industry and the government can make a difference. As other topics, Wayne Thompson suggested combatting voter suppression; Shelley Hastings suggested fighting the packing of school boards with conservative people; Aliza Appel proposed joining Move-On in pushing back against attorneys general who are willing to challenge election statistics. Yet the fact that we reside in three states, each with its own government and its own problems, makes it hard to generate real convergence on any of these. Diane Kesler emphasized the centrality of social justice: the money we raised for the vandalized cemetery of St. John AM Church is an example. Annemarie Carr emphasized the importance of being aware of truly local issues, and it was suggested that we have a committee to raise awareness of them. Lily Grosso pointed out that agitating current issues is wearing on our mental health, and Friends embraced Shelley's suggestion that we each pledge ourselves to make the group aware of local issues that raise concern. As a guiding rubric, social justice was chosen.

2) *Are we providing the spiritual nourishment that you need? How can we improve our Meeting to better meet your needs in this time of Covid?*

Friends affirmed how important our regular Zoom meetings for worship have been for all of us. Our meeting is doing well. Wayne asked about looking ahead to hybrid meetings, and whether we should apply for a Shoemaker Grant for the necessary technology. Diane quickly and firmly asserted the importance of hybrid capability. Wayne cautioned that we would need to clear any such effort with NCCL, whose connectivity and electricity we'd use. Shelley questioned whether the investment was worth it. It has proved very difficult to connect adequately from London Britain meeting house, where we'll meet as often as possible, and the gym at NCCL is far less conducive to worship than Zoom. Ariana Langford pointed out that there are not enough Shoemaker grants for all meetings, so it might not be fair for us to gain one to use only during six months. In turn, Western Quarter will get a block grant that it can distribute among its meetings, and that might be a wiser course. Diane

emphasized again that hybrid is a very important issue, especially if we look ahead to broadening the Meeting's membership. Wayne pointed out that at present we simply do not understand well enough either the technology itself or the factors that play into its effective use. Diane and Lily agreed to find out about the things that have made Wilmington Meeting's use of hybrid technology so successful and report about it at our next meeting for business, and Diane will ask NCCL about using its facilities.

- 3) *Are we taking adequate steps to maintain and protect our community in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic?*

Yes, we believe we have done everything we can to protect ourselves and our spirit as a worshipful community.

Queries forwarded by PYM:

1. *What practices and strategies are employed by our meeting to help members and attenders of all ages prepare for worship—whether in meeting for worship or in meeting for business?*

What stands out particularly is the quarter hour of music that Richard Ladd plays on the piano for us before the opening of each meeting for worship. First Day School sessions before Richard's music are also available for all to share.

2. *What are the challenges to and opportunities for enhancing the worship of our meeting, and what are we doing to address these?*

While we have had challenges from outside—from the pandemic, and from matters of building repair and damage from trespassing at London Britain meeting house—we have had few challenges from within the spirit of the group. As seen in the question of hybrid technology in question 1) above, issues are addressed in good, honest discussions.

3. *What opportunities are provided to address topics important to deepening both personal spiritual journeys of members and the spiritual life of the meeting?*

Most importantly, we have stayed together over the months of pandemic restriction. We have had two good book discussions, on Marcus Rediker, *The Fearless Benjamin Lay*, and on Mosab Hassan Yousef, *Son of Hamas*.

4. *What is most needed to strengthen the communal witness of the meeting to the local community and beyond?*

Friends responded vividly to Shelley's statement that what she misses most is being able to eat together. Eating and talking together has been a long and beneficent tradition among us.

5. *To what priorities does God call our meeting? How do our annual budget, or meeting's standing committees and other aspects of the meeting's life reflect these priorities?*

We have devoted earnest and informed discussion to the destination and amounts of the meeting's charitable giving. In addition, we have collected funds out of pocket when special needs arose, as in the \$300+ that we raised from members and attenders for the cemetery at St. John AM Church. We participate on a regular basis in Hope Dining Room, that serves lunches daily for those in need in Newark.

Responding to the terminology of the question, Shelley expressed gratitude for opportunities in the group to hear not so much about God and Jesus, but about other faiths, particularly for Aliza's sharing of Jewish religious traditions. Gavin Ferris expressed appreciation for the meeting's openness to non-theist beliefs.

6. *What specific issues of concern has your community experienced in the past year?*

We believe we have done very well in maintaining our sense of community during the pandemic, but this has not been accomplished without determination. Having London Britain meeting house, where we could meet socially distanced in a natural setting during the summer, was a great help. We have also experienced two very significant losses, with the passing first of Fran Beer and then of John Beer. They were founding members of the Newark Meeting, and remained central to its life over a half a century.

7. *Has our community recently engaged in threshing, dialogue and/or discernment regarding the purpose and importance of membership or any other concern? How have we engaged in this process and what have we learned?*

No. Membership as such has not been a concern. Ginny Bailey noted that PYM has not been very helpful about notifying her about changed personnel and altered destinations for the membership information that she is supposed to send them. By contrast, she has experienced no difficulties in our meeting.

8. *What work has our community engaged in or explored in the past year that reflects our testimonies?*

As noted above, we make regular, annual contributions to a range of socially engaged organizations which we select with informed care; we participate regularly in Hope Dining Room, and individuals help in other local charities. But as Aliza emphasized very beautifully, our testimonies are seen above all in the way we relate to each other. A real friendship binds us together. We care for each other. Ginny gave as an example how many of us give her stamps to send on to Right Sharing of World Resources. Maggie Ladd said that she makes a testimony of herself in three different groups on addiction. She is herself participant in the meetings, and the Newark meeting in turn has been valuable in sustaining her dedication.

9. *How had God led us to face and address conflict and/or misunderstanding among us when they have arisen?*

Issues have rarely risen to the level of conflict within the meeting.

10. *What is our understanding of “unity”?*

Shared time together.

Wayne Thompson and Trebs Thompson, co-clerks
Annemarie Carr, recording clerk