Friends have asked for a story and reluctantly – here is one small portion.

My knowledge of SAYMA (Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association) comes from my involvement in activities supporting SAYMA and other Quaker Organizations – interacting with multiple groups with diverse opinions and goals. It takes a huge time investment and I do not have a full understanding, not even close – no one person does. If you want to have a voice and an understanding, you must do the hard work and be involved.

One thread is from and email group I belong to and interact with. It is not a public group, but since so much of it has been shared in other places and there are so many individuals, I will share it with WKFM. It also saves me from trying to catch people up on the history using only my experiences. The other thread was sent to a group of people and I received it from two different groups which in which I interact.

I am providing this information to answer to newer Friends who want to understand but haven't had the opportunity. It is against my initial judgement as it is full of opinions, some facts, some falsehoods (either intentional, or because the knowledge shared is not firsthand, or it is a matter of perspective based on what was experienced. Even an eyewitness story has many sides. My hesitancy to share the threads is also because it is very difficult to catch up on an issue that is more than six years old and extremely complex. The issues are rooted in colonialism, generational trauma, white fragility, aggression, passion, control, and many other factors.

The current conflict is in the guise of the relationship SAYMA has with URJ (Uplifting Racial Justice Committee). Much of the written history pertaining to this committee is in the SAYMA minutes available on their website. But the written word is only part of the story. Other parts are on the Anti-Racism Networking Google Group, Chuck Fager’s blog, a few Facebook groups facilitated by special interest groups, and stories passed along to likeminded individuals. But I offer that the guise is a cover. When you examine other Monthly and Yearly Meetings, they struggle with the same issues – even those outside the US. This is why I say, you don’t need the backstory, we need accountability to change.

This thread is a taste of the challenges that exist in SAYMA. I caution Friends against trying to focus on the personality challenges and look to the systemic and institutional issues at the historical root of race relations. If any good comes from this document, perhaps it would be for discernment of this query: Do we want to continue systemic racism, or do we want to actively root it out?

Below are two email threads. The first starting on page 18 is from June, 2021 shortly after SAYMA Yearly Meeting 50, and the second starting on page 10 is after Rep Meeting 147A. Please start at the bottom and work your way back to here.

End OF EMAIL THREAD #2.

--- Forwarded Message -----  
From: Karen  
To: Melissa Preast  
Cc: Adrian Mehr <; Diana Masso < >; Bob McGahey_Celo < >; Barbara Esther < >; Laura Seeger < >; SAYMA-Anti Racism Network >  
Sent: Thursday, October 21, 2021, 03:56:56 PM EDT  
Subject: Re: Enough - we isn’t me

Thank you Melissa. I appreciate your thoughtful response. Laura, thank you for sharing your truth. I hope for a vibrant SAYMA going forward, although I feel in a muddle now. The mirror you mention holds me and also reflects to me that I can do more to move SAYMA toward compassionate action, embracing differences, and finding a way through.  
Karen Morris

On Thu, Oct 21, 2021 at 3:39 PM 'Melissa Preast' via SAYMA Anti-racism Networking < > wrote:
Friend Laura, and everyone else reading this,

Since Sunday, as I labored on a reply to this message I vacillated between anger at your truth, frustration that there is little forgiveness, outrage that Friends are not faithful to their word, and sadness for our lack of compassion. Our collective light should be so bright we don’t lose our way. I hear so much disparaging talk from many sides - from YM and RM gatherings, from SAYMA M&N Meetings, from workshops, and to hear you say our troubles are common gossip at FGC and other Quaker organizations saddens my heart.

I asked myself, what purpose does a letter like yours serve? Well it certainly cracked open the discussion and provided an example of how well meaning people need the FCRJ training.

I tried to frame a response that modeled the compassion I long for, and perhaps you do too. Your statements about emotional and physical needs of others without knowing them or their experiences was a barrier to my compassion for you. To characterize abuse and who needs help in an open forum is very uncaring - you don’t know what you’re triggering, what harm you are doing, and you don’t know if it is even applicable.

Your message made me wonder who is "we"? When the word “we” is used, it implies "people like me", "you and me". It is exclusionary, elitist, and makes assumptions about people, defining the conformance norm. If I don’t identify as part of the we, am I an outsider? Or are you? What would your letter sound like if you used I statements and spoke your own truth?

Who are we and how can we come closer together?

For every story about the Clerk of URJ, there are others interpreting the scenarios differently; those are the spoken but unheard voices. There are people who were present at those meetings who speak their truth, they attempt to broaden the narrative. They are missing from your "we".

Something else stood out to me as I read your letter. Only in destruction can your goals be achieved. I wondered about the need to tear someone else apart to gain comfort. How could that need be transformed into self-compassion? That is a query worth exploring.

SAYMA is hearing from more than one voice - and the voices focused on becoming an anti-racist spiritual body are those that don’t prioritize weaponizing money, comfort, history, and the written word; they don’t stifle emotion or ignore the voices of change, acceptance, and compassion. Friends in positions of power have not been true to their word, yet the word is used as truth against others. What a conundrum.

URJ has consistently requested engaging in Conflict Transformation. Finally after SAYMA imploded, we came to a minute to bring in FCRJ, but factions are too impatient to let them do their work and others set roadblocks. Are white Friends afraid of what they will find out about ourselves?

Money is one of SAYMA’s control mechanisms, it is also essential to navigate our culture. The Clerk of URJ has been without funding for some time and yet she stays. There isn’t been enough money in play to make these trials worth staying so there must be something more.

All the things in your letter are your truth, but they are not reasons to expel a Friend. The perceived problems will not go away with Star, because they didn’t come with Star. She holds a mirror for our own behavior.

I feel a need to consider compassion in the hopes of it spreading through SAYMA like a wave overtaking the bonfire of destruction. That is my hope.

Thank you for speaking your truth and revealing how much work we have to do.

Since you said we can forward - I am sending this to the anti-racism network and to FCRJ as an example of the help we need.
A Seeker of Compassion,  
Melissa

----- Forwarded Message -----  
From: Sharon Smith < >  
To: Shannon Roberts Smith < >  
Cc: Hank Fay < >; "sayma@fcrj.org" < >; Angela Hopkins < >; Judy Meikle < >; Kathryn Potter <kitpotter.quaker >; KarenM < >; Margaret Farmer < >; Melissa Preast >; Susan Firestone < >; Laura Seeger < >; Adrian Mehr < >; Diana Masso < >; Bob McGahey_Celo < >; Barbara Esther <; Jackson Napier < >; Patricia Gailey < >; Geeta Jyothi McGahey < >; Wood Bouldin < >  
Sent: Tuesday, October 19, 2021, 06:56:56 PM EDT  
Subject: Re: Enough

I worked through Laura's letter for you. My commentary is in RED.

Dear Friends.

We must stop the abuse to members of SAYMA. We are allowing abuse within our midst as surely as the Catholic Church. A different kind of abuse - abuse just the same.

I agree. We must stop the abuse of SAYMA Friends of color.

This has gone on long enough. We are being gaslit. We are being held hostage by Star Smith and we are allowing it to happen.

Except, Star Smith and URJ are the ones being gaslit. Gaslighting is what it is called when the clerk of SAYMA decided to remove the URJ report from the agenda, three times in a row. That's what is happening when SAYMA refuses to acknowledge that URJ is a self-selecting committee, and that nominating does not get to decide who the members of URJ are, or our term limits. That is also what is happening when I and URJ are blamed for the yearly meeting's inability to fill 29 committee openings.

We are listening to only one voice. How is that discernment? Y'all are certainly NOT listening to my voice, no matter what I say or how I say it, so I really do not understand where this particular comment is coming from.

There are no longer any of the original FOC on the URJ committee. And those that would speak we have IGNORED. Shainia, Adrian. We have heard from FOC that Star does not speak for them or to them. We have IGNORED them. Clive, John. There are voices we no longer hear from. Folami, Lisa. We have been told by Avis that we are being abused & IGNORED her. None of the FOC within SAYMA meetings will be on URJ with Star. We IGNORE them.

Hmm. At the very least, Laura could try to get Sahina’s name right. After that, it is each FOC’s prerogative whether they want me, as clerk of URJ to “speak for them” or
not. Why is SAYMA trying to make an issue of it? There are extremely few SAYMA FOC to begin with, and all the names Loura mentioned are from Atlanta, except Adrian, and it is debatable whether he is in fact, a Friend of color.

As for Shahina, she is the one who started all the negative talk about Star Smith, claiming I abused her, back during the URJ ad hoc formation stages, in 2016. Everyone simply took her word for it, and none of y’all asked me what my side of it was, because you were already looking for reasons to exclude me from the formation process. However, the facts are, Shahina is a Pakistani immigrant, and, as such, has no connection to our history of genocide and slavery in the US. She never took one anti-racism analysis training workshop, yet still argued with me over the definition of racism. Then she was furious, because she could not bend me to her “why can’t we all get along and love racism away” point of view, so she accused me of assaulting her, over a difference of opinion. Literally. She even accuse me, Folami and Lisa, of not wanting to hear what she had to say, because she is not a Black woman.

Furthermore, URJ paid Dr. Kimberly Richards from the people’s Institute, $9 thousand dollars to mediate between us, so the matter should have been resolved at that time. However, Shahina continued to complain about me, but for some reason she got the support of other Atlanta Friends of color, like Clive Gordon and John Adams. In fact, DR. Kim asked Shahina, why she was still trying to push her agenda in SAYMA, after she had moved to some spiritual commune in New York state and was no longer part of SAYMA. Her answer was, “because I feel like it.”

I’ve said this before, and I’ll repeat. Clive was Shahina’s choice to be clerk of URJ. Thank God that didn’t happen. Because, when I spoke with Clive, he did not know the definition of racism and he did not care. He told me, his Quaker values were all he needed. How could he possibly support and advocate for Friends of color experiencing racism, if he cannot even define it? Not to mention, what kind of grown ass man, comes to a SAYMA meeting for Business, just to call for URJ to be laid down and defunded, because he does not personally like me? Make it make sense!

And I KNOW you are not trying to blame me for Lisa Bennett quitting as URJ clerk. She left Quakerism all together because SAYMA set her up for failure. Who would approve an inexperienced Friend, who has never clerk a Quaker meeting for business, or committee in her life, to be clerk of a new and already controversial committee? Y’all did that to her, thinking she would be easily manipulated. NOT me.

Throwing books, microphones, chairs, yelling "shut up" & "fuck you" to the clerk, interrupting people & then accusing them of interrupting you, attacking people's character, telling people to disregard other people - this is not normal or acceptable. And for those in SAYMA that would normalize this behavior - I hope your Monthly Meetings are taking care. We know that people who have been abused normalize abusive behavior. We know that Quakers are not exceptional - we are victims & perpetrators of abuse at the same rates as everyone else. I pray that you get the help you need. SMH.

You should know, that it takes a lot for me to get to the point where I am willing to throw
microphones, book, chairs, and curse at folks. That does not happen without a lot of provocation. When each of those incidents occurred, it was because SAYMA Friends plucked my last nerve, with their racist acts against me, Ian I felt like I had to defend myself. So, please, do not pretend that SAYMA Friends have ever treated me like anything other than a threat to your white supremacist, racist social club, passing itself off as a faith community. Each of those incidents, comes with a story about how and why it happened, but none of you haters ever asked, because you obviously do not care to know.

I have heard from 2 different people that AFSC & FGC will not send a FOC to SAYMA because of Star. This should say something to us. Really? I’d love to hear the back-story on this comment. AFSC and FGC are racist institutions, just like SAYMA, so are you really going to blame me for the fact that they don’t want to send their token Negroes to SAYMA to confront me? Ridiculous.

We have tried. We have failed. There is no shame in that. So have Asheville, Nashville, Sandwich - why should we continue to allow ourselves to be subject to this abuse? Sandwich had to get a restraining order. We are not helping Star. We are enabling her. The care she needs is beyond our ability to provide.

Sandwich did not get a restraining order, because they would have had to explain why they needed one to a judge, and that would have outed them as the racists they are. Stop lying—and stop repeating lies. However, I agree, some of y’all did try. But, only as long as you were able to use me to virtue signal. And, then, when you were not able to tokenize me and use me to show off how not racist you are, or I did not behave like your hand puppet or a gate keeper for white supremacy, you tried every way you could to eliminate me. As I said before, it never fails to amaze me, how those who benefit from the genocide, slavery, land theft and rape, of my ancestors—which I am directly impacted by, can have the audacity to accuse me of abusing them for holding them accountable. But, that is exactly how settler colonial racism works.

It has been asked what we in SAYMA have done to reach out to Star. Nashville did provide hospitality - Star would gaslight you otherwise. One in Asheville provided in excess of $16,000.00 worth of housing. Another assisted with an affordable automobile. SAYMA has provided Annual Session & Retreat scholarships - to which the registrar was submitted to abuse from Star & to my knowledge SAYMA never thanked for. And there was the initial start up funds of $16,000.00 for URJ. And there was approving Star as clerk of URJ. None of this has been enough or acknowledged.

Seriously? It would take too long, and take up much too much space here, to glean the truth out of this particular narrative, that y’all tried to help me and that I am so ungrateful, and even abusive. So, I will have to save that for another time and place. But I must say, SAYMA has done a masterful job of promoting the idea that I am using SAYMA-URJ’s money for my personal use. The finance committee keeps detailed records of all URJ spending, and it is al posted on SAYMA’s website, so the truth is easy to access. Stop lying. And, why should I than SAYMA for approving me to
be URJ clerk, when all you have done, since the ad hoc formation stages of URJ is
block me at every turn, by every possible means. I should be getting combat pay for
what SAYMA has put me through.

We have a responsibility as a Faith community to not allow abuse in our midst. What
kind of example are we setting for our children? Why should our children trust us? How
can we care for them when we cannot care for ourselves? FYI: I am the one who is
being abused. And, sandwich tried the same strategy, complaining to NEYM that they
were afraid to bring their children to Meeting because of Star Smith. You should be
ashamed of yourselves for promoting that nonsense, because none of the Quaker
children I have worked with are afraid of me. Not in Asheville, and not in Sandwich. So
stop it.

39 open positions within SAYMA. Do we really need to ask why? This is victim
blaming, aka scapegoating. It’s pitiful.
If we continue to allow Star to define Quakerism we are lost. Isaac Pennington said
"There is a great difference, between comprehending the knowledge of things, and
tasting the hidden life of them. I fed on the sweetness of the former, before finding the
true manna of the latter." This is even comical.

No this is not a minute. This is one individual member of SAYMA speaking truth to
power - saying NO to abuse. This is a sad excuse to blame me for your racism.

We know that God is Love. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us Love is patient. Love is kind. If i
do not speak with love I am a clanging cymbal. Love is the hidden life - the manna that
we seek.

Way forward - release the URJ committee and Star from SAYMA. Star has made it
clear that URJ needs SAYMA only for money. Star also stated that the only reason the
Paul Cuffee Worship group wants to be a part of SAYMA is for funds. Wanting money
is not a sufficient reason to be part of SAYMA. Please show me where I said, "URJ
needs SAYMA only for money" and, "the only reason the Paul Cuffee Worship group
wants to be a part of SAYMA is for funds."

The clerks of SAYMA & SAYMA M&N have been sent this letter/plea. Many others
have been blind copied. Please feel free to share as led.

Love, Laura Seeger - member of Chattanooga Friends Meeting & SAYMA
speaking only on behalf of myself

So, my Friends, this is exactly what Quaker racial hysteria looks like.

Sharon "Star" Smith
On Tue, Oct 19, 2021 at 4:16 PM Shannon Roberts Smith > wrote:
I prefer to be guided and operate under the leadership of FCRJ about all of this. We don't need to be
adding extra processes right now.
On Tue, Oct 19, 2021 at 4:01 PM Hank Fay <> wrote:

Hi Shannon,

re: our differing perspectives.

Might this not be a good opportunity to engage in a "mutual clearness committee" as a way of demonstrating how 2 people, each aided by their own clearness committee of 2 to 3 people, can work to understand each other in a way that makes coming together possible? We could do so on Zoom, which aids us in broadening our clearness committee, and open it up to SAYMA (to observe, only).

If you agree, I would suggest getting together on Zoom next week (after Carol's Memorial) to work on uniting on the process.

thanks,

Hank

On Tue, Oct 19, 2021 at 8:33 AM Shannon Roberts Smith <> wrote:

Firstly, thanks, Hank, for tagging me. I have tagged in FCRJ and STAR because FCRJ needs to be aware that emails are still flying around behind Star's back, and Star because she has a right to see what is being said about her. I have tagged in the other members of the ad hoc racial justice working group because they need to be aware of the dynamics at play.

In response to Hank, I agree with much of what you have said here. Thank you so much. Where we diverge is in your emphasis on class over race.

I again feel called to name a number of racist dynamics that are evident in Laura's interpretation of the dynamics at SAYMA.

In regard to her (yet again) using the conflicts between Friends of Color against Star, well, I have spoken at length about this in many other forums and I am getting tired of repeating myself. Instead, I will offer an equally valid interpretation of what could be happening. Rule #1 for POC in predominantly white spaces is DO NOT ROCK THE BOAT. This is a survival tactic that has played out in a variety of ways across history in many social settings and organizations. Star has broken this rule. So what we have is a conflict that is, at its root, about tactics. Star is standing firm in her authentic humanity demanding that we white folks re-examine EVERYTHING. Because: white supremacy. I have heard the term "existential crisis" being thrown about. If we are having one, this is why. Regardless, FOC have seen this dynamic countless times before, even if for many of us white folks this is our first time seeing and experiencing what we are seeing and experiencing. FOC are wisely getting out of the way of the lynch mob. That is all. And I get it completely. This sucks. A lot. But we need to go through it if we are ever going to get on the other side and start acting like we actually want to be an open and welcoming multiracial faith community.

Laura is speaking the language (PTSD, gaslighting, speaking truth to power) but appears to have only a surface understanding of what these terms actually mean. If we white folks are so fragile that we can't see inanimate objects being hurled, or hearing the word "racist", or godforbid "fuck" without crumbling, we are suffering from being forced out of our comfortable safety of whiteness, not abuse.

I could go on and on about the aggressive abusive nature of Laura's behaviour but I will, for the moment step back. These conversations need to be happening under the care of FCRJ's process. Not by emails flying around behind people's backs.

Shannon

On Tue, Oct 19, 2021 at 12:12 AM Hank Fay <> wrote:
Hi Laura,

SAYMA's failure is first and foremost, but not exclusively, a failure to be a spiritual community. We are a middle-class community and are capable of operating smoothly as a middle-class community when not disrupted.

A middle-class community reacts to disruption as harmful, to the community and to those the disruption specifically targeted. The acceptable method for voicing objection in a middle-class community excludes mentioning another by name, excludes any "acting out" of reactions, and finds such "acting out" as harmful. Others from more diverse backgrounds may find the kind of acting out we have seen to be trivial (including the use of certain words).

Our backgrounds often determine how we view events. For example, I was within 5 feet of Star when she launched the microphone to the floor. What I recognized, coming from my background, is that she actually took care not to throw it toward the ground, but rather used a horizontal movement nearly parallel to the floor. That it broke was most likely due to its being an electret condenser microphone, which uses a ribbon suspended between sensitive "rods" that pick up the vibration. They break easily on being dropped. My description does not remove responsibility, but does change the characterization of the act.

It is also the case that for those with traumatic backgrounds, the kinds of behavior we have seen, even the disruption of an online workshop by two well-meaning members of Berea Friends, can have adverse effects. Verbal anger in itself can be a trigger for a PTSD episode. I knew a Vietnam vet who went into a 4-hour fugue state, sitting in a lawn chair unaware and unmoving (his wife finally noticed and went out to him) because a Huey helicopter flew over him. PTSD triggers are real. I'm sure the helicopter pilot did not wish to trigger a PTSD episode, just as I am sure the two Berea Friends did not want to trigger a PTSD episode. All were just doing what was right, as they saw it, for them to do at that moment.

A spiritual community seeks Spirit in each other as a way of finding a way forward. It does not attempt to convince or confront or control, but rather seeks to understand, deeply. Lacking that deep, mutual understanding of Spirit in each other, members of a spiritual community enter a process of spiritual engagement leading to a place of unity that binds them together.

There are those in SAYMA who recognize our deficit in being a spiritual community, both in our own meetings and in SAYMA. There was a moment, a covered Rep Meeting in Huntsville, and a couple of the YMPC planning meetings that were covered, where I experienced spiritual community alive in SAYMA Meetings. It was noticed by the Clerk and Recording Clerk of that Meeting. W. Knoxville Meeting spent 2 years in the study of deepening the experience of spirit in community during Meeting for Worship, and I am told by a member that doing so worked. That's a good start. Learning and practicing the process of a two-sided clearness committee would be a good start. Going back to the old way of waiting for spirit to arrive in Meeting for Worship would be a good start. And yet, this lack of spiritual community is resisted. Suggestions to foster the arrival of spirit in Meetings, e.g., Dennis Gregg's suggestion to not time our meetings but rather await the arrival of spirit, have been treated with polite but firm rejection.

Decisions can not be made in a spiritual community when it is not a functioning spiritual community. I have no doubt that most individuals in SAYMA, perhaps all, have their own spiritual lives. A group of people with spiritual lives is not, by that fact alone a spiritual community. The middle-class rules of engagement were enough to allow SAYMA to move forward, as a social organization, in the absence of confrontation. Our choices now are to kick out those who do not follow the middle-class rules of engagement or to learn how to be a spiritual community. If we choose the latter, we must put decisions on hold until we become a spiritual community. If we choose the former, the action we take should be to disband SAYMA as a decision-making organization and, perhaps, have it function solely as a coordinating instrument of the member meetings. Pretending to be what we are not is not working.

Thank you for raising the issues you raised. They reflect the large, systemic issues that have been neglected. I have my doubts about the willingness of the good people I know in SAYMA to move toward a welcoming spiritual community. In my own meeting, comprised of as good a group of people as I have
known, when I brought up the reasons for waiting for spirit to arrive I got the "separate but unequal" solution: I was told I could have that form of worship on a Wednesday evening if I wanted. Similarly when I suggested that we become a more welcoming spiritual community to those unlike ourselves by loosening the unwritten rules of Quaker worship I again got the "separate but unequal" suggestion, and also was told "they can go somewhere else." I figured this moment of reckoning would occur sooner or later. Star's breaking of the rules of middle-class interaction simply made it sooner.

There is only one reason I can think of to release a person from a spiritual community. That reason would be the presence of a conflict where the person(s) refuse(s) to enter into the process of mutual discernment of Spirit in each other. For that process to work requires the presence of spiritual community. Until we in fact are a spiritual community, that reason does not obtain.

in Friendship,

Hank

On Sun, Oct 17, 2021 at 8:04 PM Laura Seeger <> wrote:
Dear Friends.

We must stop the abuse to members of SAYMA. We are allowing abuse within our midst as surely as the Catholic Church. A different kind of abuse - abuse just the same.

This has gone on long enough. We are being gaslit. We are being held hostage by Star Smith and we are allowing it to happen.

We are listening to only one voice. How is that discernment?

There are no longer any of the original FOC on the URJ committee. And those that would speak we have IGNORED. Shainia, Adrian. We have heard from FOC that Star does not speak for them or to them. We have IGNORED them. Clive, John. There are voices we no longer hear from. Folami, Lisa. We have been told by Avis that we are being abused & IGNORED her. None of the FOC within SAYMA meetings will be on URJ with Star. We IGNORE them.

Throwing books, microphones, chairs, yelling "shut up" & "fuck you" to the clerk, interrupting people & then accusing them of interrupting you, attacking people's character, telling people to disregard other people - this is not normal or acceptable. And for those in SAYMA that would normalize this behavior - I hope your Monthly Meetings are taking care. We know that people who have been abused normalize abusive behavior. We know that Quakers are not exceptional - we are victims & perpetrators of abuse at the same rates as everyone else. I pray that you get the help you need.

I have heard from 2 different people that AFSC & FGC will not send a FOC to SAYMA because of Star. This should say something to us.

We have tried. We have failed. There is no shame in that. So have Asheville, Nashville, Sandwich - why should we continue to allow ourselves to be subject to this abuse? Sandwich had to get a restraining order. We are not helping Star. We are enabling her. The care she needs is beyond our ability to provide.

It has been asked what we in SAYMA have done to reach out to Star. Nashville did provide hospitality - Star would gaslight you otherwise. One in Asheville provided in excess of $16,000.00 worth of housing. Another assisted with an affordable automobile. SAYMA has provided Annual Session & Retreat scholarships - to which the registrar was submitted to abuse from Star & to my knowledge SAYMA never thanked for. And there was the initial start up funds of $16,000.00 for URJ. And there was approving Star as clerk of URJ. None of this has been enough or acknowledged.
We have a responsibility as a Faith community to not allow abuse in our midst. What kind of example are we setting for our children? Why should our children trust us? How can we care for them when we cannot care for ourselves?

39 open positions within SAYMA. Do we really need to ask why?

If we continue to allow Star to define Quakerism we are lost. Isaac Pennington said "There is a great difference, between comprehending the knowledge of things, and tasting the hidden life of them. I fed on the sweetness of the former, before finding the true manna of the latter."

No this is not a minute. This is one individual member of SAYMA speaking truth to power - saying NO to abuse.

We know that God is Love. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us Love is patient. Love is kind. If I do not speak with love I am a clanging cymbal. Love is the hidden life - the manna that we seek.

Way forward - release the URJ committee and Star from SAYMA. Star has made it clear that URJ needs SAYMA only for money. Star also stated that the only reason the Paul Cuffee Worship group wants to be a part of SAYMA is for funds. Wanting money is not a sufficient reason to be part of SAYMA.

The clerks of SAYMA & SAYMA M&N have been sent this letter/plea. Many others have been blind copied. Please feel free to share as led.

Love, Laura Seeger - member of Chattanooga Friends Meeting & SAYMA speaking only on behalf of myself

This is the beginning of EMAIL 2. Read from here back to page 1.

This is the end of Email 1. Start at page 18 and work back to here.

On Jul 7, 2021, at 2:56 PM, Sharon Smith <> wrote:

What you say is true, Kit Potter, as it was said to me. SAYMA has rejected URJ and the Paul Cuffee Worship Group, which was created by URJ in fulfilment of it's mission, to "provide support and advocacy for Friends of color experiencing racism..." based on racist fear mongering by some, hearsay and speculation.

The first time two URJ members attended a representative meeting with me, it was after they had already been subjected to suspicion, criminalization and falsely accused, by Charles Schade. But they did not want to judge all of y'all based on his unFriendly behavior or the dysfunctional way Barbara Esther, who was clerk at the time, badly mismanaged the situation, they agreed to come meet y'all. But when they
arrived, they were horrified at the hostile treatment I received so now they are rightly sceptical of your intentions concerning URJ, it's clerk and it's members.

So, please do not assume URJ members want to be trotted out to satisfy your curiosity, or your white cultural need to look us over and judge whether we are worthy. As it was did to me, "What? Do they think we are supposed to line up and be inspected for their approval? GTFOHWTBS!"

I hope you can hear that and not take it personally.

On Wed, Jul 7, 2021, 1:04 PM Kathryn Potter <> wrote:
I am just reading all of this after a break where I had other things demanding attention. I regret that I missed some.
There has been a lot shared and I especially appreciate that Torrey is taking time to also be with us. What she said is very important. RELATIONSHIP is the essential first step. I would not presume to speak for my partner of 50 years or to characterize him other than loosely. How could I presume to do that for others whom I know even less well? We are constantly teaching one another in the best of circumstances. The less time we spend listening and allowing one another to teach us, the less we can truly know one another. As I meditated on queries and spent time in worship during Gathering, it became clear to me that SAYMA Friends have not taken enough time to form real relationships with URJ members. They have been characterized without being truly heard, and blamed for things without personal investigation. We have obliviously brought the internalized White Supremacy culture into our Meetings and allowed its habits to overrun our stated Quaker beliefs. We have allowed the either-or thinking and the extremely polarized thinking of our present secular culture to invade and damage established relationships and block the creation of new ones. (Stating the obvious.) It is time for us each to take responsibility for this. I urge everyone to take the time to study our culture and our history more deeply. It is essential work. No other individual can do it for anyone. It is work that is necessary for the healing of our yearly meeting.
And, if you care deeply for the Society of Friends, it is the only way for us to grow more open to Spirit and outgrow the limitations of the culture in which it was born. 'No change' is not an option.
Still learning,
Kit

On Mon, Jul 5, 2021, 8:52 PM Sharon Smith <> wrote:
Well said!

On Mon, Jul 5, 2021, 7:38 PM Torrey Brooks-Mauga <> wrote:
Dear Friends;

Reading through all of this, I discovered the most honest sentence:

"My patients didn't hate me any more than I hated them. They just saw me as a means to an end."

I believe this perfectly explains what is happening between SAYMA and URJ. We descendants of colonized people who have in turn chosen to function and live within colonization frameworks/ colonize others, have a history of projecting our own feelings and refusal to take personal responsibility for healing our own trauma, onto others.

This is how we have justified everything from slavery to residential boarding schools, from upholding Manifest Destiny and Doctrine of Discovery, to refusing to fund URJ.

The courage required to acknowledge that we, as individuals, have not chosen to make choices that would inspire Bengalis... or Sharon Smith... to trust us, is a giant first step.
Hopefully, healing can begin now that we are beginning to acknowledge that the hate began in our own heart, and people have a right not to trust us.

In Love and Light,
Torrey

On Sun, Jul 4, 2021, 4:24 PM Karen <> wrote:
Thank you Pat. You've put into words many of the feelings I've had in my heart.
Karen

On Wed, Jun 30, 2021 at 10:04 AM Patricia Gailey <> wrote:

Laura,

I share Sharon's understanding that you seem only concerned about money used by URJ. It is interesting how neatly you tie protection of resources to your definition of a faith community. My idea of a faith community is entirely different, so we have some dissonance among us that we will need to sort out if we are to move forward. I hope you remain in the discussion to participate in that process.

I do agree with you though that SAYMA has lost its spiritual passion. Most of the passion I've seen in the last two years is a passion for maintaining the status quo and protecting a bank account.--and that doesn't seem very spiritually oriented or driven at all.

In fact, this entire email thread, begun by Larry, raises questions about the kind of community we have become. This idea that a community member can have their voice heard via email, yet opt out of the continuing revelation afforded only by full participation in community worship is troubling. BFM has had to grapple with this also, and found it to be a huge problem when someone feels that need to be heard yet cannot show up. Other Friends have had questions or concerns about those emailed views, yet have had no one to look to for a response. On occasion, some of us have felt that we were being held hostage to a view in print, not knowing if the writer might change their view in the process of continuing revelation and not comfortable adhering to a view that has not been seasoned in continuing revelation.

I realize there are a lot of strong feelings these days. Goodness knows, I have my own, but showing up is our way forward. Sitting together in our collective pain is our way forward, as difficult as that sometimes is.

Pat

On 6/30/21 3:36 AM, Sharon Smith wrote:
Correction, the PCWG is not asking for funds, never did, but URJ is.

Are you suggesting that URJ, a standing committee of SAYMA whose mission is to work for racial justice and equity, should do its work out of love instead of money?

If that is the case, SAYF, FWCC, etc. should do the same. Because, what you're suggesting is, white people should have access to SAYMA funds but not Colored folks? How is that equitable?

Please be clear.

On Tue, Jun 29, 2021, 8:03 PM Sharon Smith <> wrote:
Laura,

I'm curious to know how you arrived at the idea that social justice is NOT a spiritual concern?

What brand of Quakerism does it spring from?

On Tue, Jun 29, 2021, 7:39 PM Laura Seeger <> wrote:
Greetings all.

Our passion has gone with our spirit. We are no longer a faith community but a Social Justice organization - seen as just a resource by some.

We are no longer a community built on spiritual relationships - or really relationships at all. We are just a resource. The PCWG is looking for resources (ie money from association with SAYMA). Nothing mentioned about relationship with the divine or others.

If i only want a social justice group - i will look to BLM, Poor Peoples Campaign, etc - not the Religious Society of Friends. I hope that SAYMA gets back to what it is about - providing a spiritual foundation so that our lives might speak. Without the spiritual foundation we are just another social justice organization. We have wider Quaker organizations that serve the purpose of being the social justice arm for the Religious Society of Friends.

Star thank you for continuing to provide educational resources & excellent examples of what gaslighting is.

Charles & Judith thank you for your enlightening emails about how folks go about getting their needs met.

May SAYMA live into Isaac Pennington's words "Our life is LOVE, and peace and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and FORGIVING one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying for one another, and helping one another up with a tender hand."

I pray for all of you.

I ask that i be dropped from this email chain - just as I left the SAYMA anti-racism group. Neither are edifying to me. And as adults we can choose what we wish to be a part of - so that our lives may be more - not less.

Sincerely, Laura Seeger

On Mon, Jun 28, 2021 at 9:40 PM Hank Fay <> wrote:
Hi All,

What is very hard to see is what we take for granted.

We take for granted the economic system in our country, and other countries. Yet the economic system within and among countries is just as much a creation of humankind as is the smallpox vaccine. The economic system throughout the world is both racist and classist based on its observable effects. Intent is irrelevant. The proof is in the pudding.

From my perspective, when those who have been gamed against by an economic system then game the system in order to ameliorate the harm done by that system to them and their families, that is a virtuous act.
And all of that has nothing to do with Sharon. It does have to do with our blindness to racial/classist inequity embedded so deeply in our segment of our culture that we fail to get enraged about it. The beauty of our form of Meeting for Worship is we get to talk about injustice but never have to feel much. It doesn't leave us disturbed, enraged, reaching for our metaphorical pitchforks. We get to keep on with our comfortable lives.

Sharon's rage is a pale reflection of the horrific reality of present-day racism/classism in our country. Black babies are twice as likely to die as white babies. Do I have to go farther than that? Does that not enrage you? If so, why are our Meetings not filled with prophetic voices echoing off the walls and through our hearts? Sad isn't enough: that's already having given up. Deep caring is a lie: caring is a verb, to care, to act on the movement of the heart. Caring without action is a lie. Actions not commensurate with prophetic voices echoing off the walls of our Meetinghouses are lies. They purport to be the best we can do, when demonstrably they are not.

Sharon's knowledge is useful. And frankly, if you have to go farther than black babies are twice as likely to die as white babies before you are ready to change your life and take action, all is already lost. Reading more books is a great way to avoid getting enraged and taking action. You can't be "doing the work" without changing your life in ways commensurate with the harm being done.

Oh, you don't like "enraged"? Do you not think purposely killing black babies is cause for being enraged? Yes, purposely: when Ford decided to save $15 per car by having the gas tank above the rear axle of the Pinto, they chose to kill people (poor people: rich people didn't buy Pintos) in order to make $15/car more. They had been warned, they chose to kill people in order to profit. And that kind of killing goes on, targeted on racial and classist lines, throughout our country. The killing of black babies goes on. The lung diseases that disproportionately affect the black population are known, the probable causes are known, and nothing is done: we, our country, are deciding to kill them.

I long for a time when our Meetings so accurately reflect our connection with the harm being done to others by our society that Sharon's voice is heard as being "middle of the pack and a little bookish." :)

Hank

On Mon, Jun 28, 2021 at 9:39 AM Sharon Smith <> wrote:
Judith,

In this instance, it looks to me like you, Charles, and others, have been seeing me and URJ as "outsiders" not worthy of access to SAYMA's resources at all.

Therefore, I ask you and Charles and whomever else to consider the following.

1. URJ is an approved standing committee of SAYMA which only Friends of color can join. To withhold the funding it requires to comply with it's mission and ministry, is to deprive Black and Indigenous Friends of resources to do the racial justice work we are charged to do--which is exactly how systemic white dominance/supremacy works.

2. All of SAYMA has committed itself to becoming anti-racist. Do you really think you can get there by criminalizing and demonizing the Friends of color who have been doing this work long before you were even aware there was such a thing as anti-racism?

3. Most importantly, you are living on stolen land, as direct beneficiaries of genocide and slavery. Do you really think it is productive to accuse Black and Indigenous Friends of color of attacking you for speaking the truth from our lived experience of racism and colonialism--of being thieves, liars, con artists, etc? Truthfully, we have an ancestral responsibility as survivors, to demand racial justice and to be treated justly by SAYMA Friends. Especially by SAYMA Friends who say they are committed to racial justice.
Do you really think you will get there by depriving URJ of financial support?

Do you really think you can get there by falsely accusing anti-racist Friends of attacking you, abusing you or taking advantage of you, just because our truth makes you uncomfortable?

Do you truly think racial justice can be achieved without white people releasing control over institutional power and resources?

Maybe you should read a few statistical studies on economic racism and inequality. URJ has posted book titles on that subject in our resource list, on the SAYMA website.

Lastly, the real question is, who is taking advantage of whom, here?

On Mon, Jun 28, 2021, 8:42 AM JUDITH geary <> wrote:
Thank you, Sharon,

That's actually very helpful to get this perspective. So, I think I understand what Charles was saying much better. He seems to have been saying we should accept that you're trying to get the needs met that you see, without taking it "personally" that SAYMA is seen as a resource. I realize that's an extreme oversimplification, but it's helpful to me.

Peace,
Judy

Judith Geary
author, GETORIX: The Eagle and The Bull

From: Sharon Smith >
Sent: Sunday, June 27, 2021 7:59 PM
To: JUDITH geary <>
Cc: Charles Schade <>; HL Ingle <>; Ronald McDonald <>; Bob McGahey_Celo <>; Geeta McGahey <>; Roger & Karen Wise <>; Karen Morris <>; Brian Yaffe <>; Florence Kline Yaffe <>; Bob Welsh <>; Chip Poston <>; Catherine Peck <>; becky Ingle <>; Dennis Gregg <>; Laura Seeger <>; Free Polazzo <>; Charles Jones <>; Nancy Whitt <>; wood bouldin <>; Hank Fay <>; Michael Galovic <>; Kendall Ivie <>; SAYMA-Anti Racism Network <>
Subject: Re: SAYMA's crossroads

Judith,

Your explanation does not fit the facts. I am the one under attack here, NOT the other way around.

In fact, this conflict began when Charles Schade falsely accused URJ of mismanaging it's funds, of being thieves, con artists, and the like, based on nothing but unsubstantiated suspicion and opinion, which has continued, even after his accusations were proven to be false. Furthermore, Charles has yet to apologize to us for his absolutely racist attacks against URJ, and SAYMA has yet to hold him accountable.
As a result, all URJ has been asking for, is for SAYMA to willingly and enthusiastically engage in a transformative justice/racial conflict transformation process to address its blatantly obvious issues with systemic racism.

I fail to see the connection between URJ's perfectly reasonable request, all the push-back against it, and what you chose to frame as attacks.

I'm pretty sure, based on many demonstrations of Charles’ open hostility against me and URJ, that his motivation is not to be an ally. Please don't insult my intelligence.

On Sun, Jun 27, 2021, 5:51 PM JUDITH geary <> wrote:
I think what Charlie is saying is that the attacks you make on the people trying to be your allies, and the feelings of resentment and discouragement that those attacks arouse in "us," can give insight into your feelings and what you may be needing. Whether you feel that his assessment is accurate or not, it's a valuable point of view to consider.

peace,
Judy Geary

Judith Geary

From: Sharon Smith >
Sent: Sunday, June 27, 2021 1:44 PM
To: Charles Schade < >
Cc: HL Ingle >; Ronald McDonald <; Bob McGahey_Celo <;>; Geeta McGahey <>; Roger & Karen Wise <>; >; Brian Yaffe <>; Florence Kline Yaffe <>; Bob Welsh >; Chip Poston <;>; Catherine Peck <>; < >; becky Ingle <>; Dennis Gregg <>; Laura Seeger <>; Free Polazzo <>; Charles Jones <>; Nancy Whitt >; wood bouldin <>; JUDITH geary <>; hankfay galovic <>; guershea <>; kivie <>; SAYMA-Anti Racism Network <>
Subject: Re: SAYMA's crossroads

Can someone please help me decipher what Charles Schade is attempting to say?

I was so taken aback by his rendition of the story of his colonizer past, that the point he is alluding to completely escaped me. That story alone, explains much...

Sharon "Star" Smith

Years ago, I was sent to Bangladesh to assist in the eradication of smallpox. The World Health Organization (WHO) brought in short term staff from all over the world, and provided expense accounts so consultants could cover costs associated with the effort. The Bengali currency (the taka) was not
worth a lot, and there were no ATMs or credit cards. Consequently, it was common to see WHO staff carrying bags stuffed with wads of currency.

Bengalis were generally poor. This was only a few years after the country's violent separation from Pakistan. War did not improve the economy. I was amazed to see how Bengalis were able to do so much with so little. Bengali ingenuity extended to dealing with foreign consultants, who were viewed as rich and gullible. I was surprised to learn how frequently the motorcycles WHO provided some local workers "broke down," and how expensive repairs were. It was also odd to see how much worse the gas mileage on the WHO jeep I had at my disposal was after it had been left overnight in the hands of a Bengali driver, as compared with when I kept it at the WHO compound. Local health inspectors seemed to be forever getting caught away from home at night on smallpox business, although there were no active cases in my district. Why they needed these "night halts" requiring reimbursement was unclear.

A fellow consultant explained the situation. The WHO staff were a ready source of income, and Bengalis felt they deserved it. The game was to separate the consultant from his cash, and most of the local staff played it well. It was difficult to say no to things I knew full well were flimflam. The constant demands for cash left me feeling attacked, and made me quite depressed. At first, I thought it was culture shock.

Once I understood the rules of the game, I stopped being depressed, for I knew the demands weren't a personal attack on me, even though I was a white foreigner. I never thought the Bengali staff hated me, and outside of the financial game I thoroughly admired them.

A few years later, I became the medical director of an alcohol detoxification center that catered to street alcoholics. The people I took care of spent most of their days and nights drinking and hustling for money to support their drinking. The manipulativeness of substance abusers is well known, but I was little prepared for the constant demands from my patients. Principally they wanted a letter certifying that they were unable to work. That could get them food stamps (salable on the street) and cash stipend for living expenses. They also wanted prescription drugs (sedatives and pain killers) that they could use or convert to cash.

Oh the stories! Oh the cajoling! Oh the abuse and threats if I seemed unlikely to capitulate! The constant pressure from these patients worked a toll. I thought I was a bad doctor. Or just not a caring human being. Even though I knew what these men (and the occasional woman) were up to. One day it dawned on me. This was the Bengali game again. I was the person with the deep pockets. My patients didn't hate me any more than I hated them. They just saw me as a means to an end.

This realization made me a much better doctor for these patients. Oh sure, I got conned from time to time, but it wasn't personal. And because I could compartmentalize the game, I was better able to identify and minister to the patients who were ready to change, and to appreciate the wisdom, insight, and humor they had to offer.

A psychiatrist colleague once gave me valuable advice. "Pay attention to the countertransference," he advised. From the feelings your patients arouse in you, there may be valuable insights that help in caring for them. More true than ever, these days.

cps

From: HL Ingle
Sent: Wednesday, June 23, 2021 4:57 AM
To: Sharon Smith; Charles Schade; Ronald McDonald; Bob McGahey_Celo; Geeta McGahey; Roger & Karen Wise; Brian Yaffe; Florence Kline Yaffe; Bob Welsh; Chip Poston; Catherine Peck; elizakeiser@aol.com; becky Ingle; Dennis Gregg; Laura Seeger; Free Polazzo; Charles
Friends,

SAYMA is at a crossroads, and I do not see the way forward. I need—and SAYMA needs--your help, thoughts, and prayers.

Forward means more of the same, what we have witnessed for the past three years, continuing strife, divisions, and acrimony, resulting in a constant erosion in numbers of faithful members and attenders from our annual sessions and, I fear, our monthly meetings, where we experience what Quakerism is.

To the right, lies a tiny angry, even hostile, remnant, their faces set hard against dealing with the racism that many see deeply rooted in our collective historical past, both religious and secular. As a historian, I do not believe that this minority has anything to say that can appeal to people who have found our faith appealing in the past; it certainly cannot speak to the future.

To the left is a group of what can only be called a group of “true believers.” Convinced they are absolutely right in their view that racism is so insidious and deeply rooted that it can only be cut out with the most vigorous efforts, they condemn the persons who, however inadvertently and blindly, may espouse what the group determinedly rejects.

Friends hold, to the contrary, that truth can be discovered and acted on, if those who seek it will wait and listen to God’s spirit speak. (That is why I have included Sharon Smith among those who are receiving this e-mail.) I did not attend the 2021 yearly meeting, but from what I’ve

BEGINNING OF EMAIL THREAD # 1

Start here and read up toward page 11.