Dear Friends,

I am grateful for the message Lori Campbell brings to meeting encouraging examination of how we can be more welcoming and how actions are needed to reduce the institutional, structural, and personal bias within our and all Quaker Meetings. It has been a goal of FGC associated meetings to work on becoming an anti-racist faith organization and become aware of the water in which we swim. Thank you to Lori and the Friends working toward that goal.

To move us forward, the Committee for Interracial Well-being and Restorative Justice will lead two second hours; Nov 14 and 21. Please attend.

As clerk, I committed to answering a request from Friends Center for Racial Justice for our meeting to engage in the process to improve relationships within SAYMA and become more welcoming to Friends of Color. SAYMA invited FCRJ through minute YM50-46-01 and the need has been expounded in emails, some sent to our gaggle list, over the past months. Please read the attached open letter. For new information, see the below email and commitment from FCRJ. Additional information can be gathered from SAYMA website documents: YM 50 Minutes and Rep 147 minutes as well as most SAYMA meeting minutes back to 2016.

I intend to use the information discerned during the second hour on Nov 14, to develop a sense of the meeting and translate that discernment into a letter to bring before Meeting with the intention of sending it to FCRJ, SAYMA, and as an open letter if appropriate and approved.

I ask that Friends consider the following in preparation for the second hour as you discern what roles you play in becoming an anti-racist faith community.

1. Am I speaking my own truth? Do I use I statements and speak from my own experience?

2. Have I sought out balanced information to build a foundation for my opinions, remaining open to continuing revelation?

3. Do I acknowledge discomfort and respond with curiosity and a desire to examine my response from other points of view?

No matter where one is in the process of becoming an anti-racist faith organization, there are three parts –

1. AWARENESS of where I am and where our meeting is as well as where we want to be.
2. Commitment to ACTION that moves me toward the ideal.
3. ACCOUNTABILITY for making and maintaining progress.

Please show up on Sunday Nov 14, following Meeting for Worship for the second hour starting around 12:15.

Peace and Light,

Melissa
Friends,

Thank you all for responding to the invitation to share your concerns with us.

We want to specifically acknowledge receipt of the recent open letter from the Sayma Ad hoc working Group. (See Attached or Below.)

We want all Friends to know that we at FCRJ intend to uphold the Minute we received from the SAYMA body inviting FCRJ to journey you in your work to bring right relationships of integrity to the Body.

We at FCRJ will be responding to all the concerns shared with us. At the beginning of our conversations FCRJ, was very clear about inclusion and hierarchy.

We will listen to and hear all concerns in an equitable fashion; therefore, no one individual will be permitted to derail the process of working together to address the concerns raised by this body. We clearly hear your pain and are in anguish with you. Hang in there.

My grandson was discussing with me mushrooms that have an underground connected root system. Our roots are connected. We are connected and as can be the case with biological families.

We can choose to like it or not. That does not change the reality. Know that you are being held in the Light of God.

You are not alone.

I wanted to share this with you ASAP and to let you all know to expect to be flooded by communication from FCRJ members so prepare yourselves! Teams have been developed to work specifically with all the concerns you have shared. We look forward to our next steps together.

I hope this message has been clear.

FYI, I am particularly grateful to Susan Phelan and Elizabeth Schneider our Sayma / Fcrj communication coordinators. I have limited eye sight and rely heavily on Elizabeth for assistance. You may receive a message on occasion directly from me in which auto correct has taken control.

Do not hesitate if you need to reach out for clarity. I am not that easily offended!

In common Friendship,

Angela (607)319-2644
On Sat, Nov 6, 2021 at 4:23 PM Susan Phelan <saymaoffice@gmail.com> wrote:

Friends,

The attached open letter is for distribution through SAYMA widely, and is also an open letter. Please feel welcome to share it with whomsoever you feel would have an interest in reading it.

Shannon Roberts Smith, Clerk

Ad Hoc Racial Justice Working Group at SAYMA,

Note from Melissa 11/9/21: The open letter was shared with WKFM Gaggle, it is attached, and copied below (excuse errors as this was copied from the PDF.)

Friday, November 5, 2021

An open letter to Friends Center for Racial Justice (FCRJ) and the Clerk of SAYMA

From the Ad Hoc Racial Justice Working Group at SAYMA [aka white people in support of the ministry of the Uplifting Racial Justice committee (URJ)]

Dear Friends,

We, the members of the Ad Hoc Racial Justice Working Group at SAYMA (RJWG), feel called to deeply reflect and respond to the ever-evolving issues we are experiencing at SAYMA. If we must choose one word to sum up what we are feeling, it is “frustration”. We are frustrated with the lack of progress on resolving conflicts and building trust within SAYMA, the lack of integrity and transparency in processes, and the lack of acting as a spiritual anti-racist faith community.

The purpose of this letter is to:

● express support for FCRJ being given the space to take up their work with SAYMA

● advocate for truth in regards to our process vis a vis URJ

● highlight accountability issues, especially with the Clerk of SAYMA.

We strongly support SAYMA entering into serious transformative work under the leadership of Friends Center for Racial Justice (FCRJ). We have a minute from the body of SAYMA that reads “50-46-01: Friends approved Friends Center for Racial Justice to lead a called meeting for the purpose of understanding conflicts and building relationships of trust between SAYMA and the Uplifting Racial Justice Committee”.

We have now had almost two years of false starts and miscommunication stemming from white Friends refusing to recognize and allow the leadership of Friends Center for Racial Justice to help us transform our conflicts into positive movement towards being the open and welcoming multi-racial faith community that we claim we want to be. We are deeply concerned that individual Friends in positions of power in SAYMA may have once again stalled our relationship-building with FCRJ, before it has really even been given the chance to begin. To FCRJ we say: “these Friends do not speak for us”, and we are appalled and apologize for the disrespect FCRJ has experienced in SAYMA spaces. We hope that we can find new and creative ways to forge the bonds that will be required of us to move forward in our collective
work. White Friends in positions of responsibility at SAYMA need to step aside from attempting to control the narrative and the process and allow FCRJ to take up their work.

In regards to URJ, it is important that Friends of Color within SAYMA have places to worship and do business without white participation or control. SAYMA has demonstrated repeatedly that white Friends in SAYMA are not yet ready to interact with BIPOC Friends in a way that is free of injury or controlling behaviors. URJ was set up to provide such spaces within SAYMA. This need requires change, and we suggest that as white Friends learn more about systemic and institutional racism, resistance to those changes will decrease. Friends can read about this same work happening at Friends General Conference, New England Yearly Meeting and New York Yearly Meeting. The membership of URJ and appointment of Clerk of URJ is the business of Friends of Color at SAYMA.

Our working group recognizes that there are issues among the BIPOC Friends of SAYMA, and we remind white Friends of the need to leave it to BIPOC to do the work to move through these issues. We believe that is possible with the support of FCRJ, and we support them in this work.

Some very serious wounding has occurred: between white Friends and BIPOC Friends, between BIPOC Friends, and between white Friends. We feel that at this point the heightened feelings throughout SAYMA require expression to a qualified third party (FCRJ) and that through their support of our own work, as individuals and as a body, we will collectively move to understanding, and allow new Light to come to us through their queries. We do not make assumptions as to the outcome of this work.

It pains us to report that our working group brings personal testimony that Friends in positions of responsibility at SAYMA are not acting and speaking with integrity. Our purpose here is not to individually call out members of our organization. However, we must particularly call on the Clerk of SAYMA to immediately cease contributing to and endorsing the false narrative that the body of SAYMA has made any decisions about the status of the Clerk of URJ and the URJ committee. Indeed, the Clerk of SAYMA is well aware that some Friends were prepared to stand in the way of decisions to remove the Clerk of URJ and the laying down of URJ if these questions came to the body.

We urge the Clerk of SAYMA to engage in this and all matters faithfully and with full transparency so that discernment is by the spiritual body of SAYMA and not manipulated using secular political tactics to control the narrative. There is a process for assisting the Clerk as a means to improve communication and discernment within SAYMA and that is the Clerk’s Advisory Committee, made up of the clerks of the standing committees [not a select few individuals with aligned agendas].

We call on the entire SAYMA community to sit with the following query from Friends General Conference in regards to decision-making: “How does this decision support [FGC] in its goal to transform into an actively anti-racist faith community?” Are we ready to do the internal work and self-education that it will take to become anti-racist? Did we mean what we said when URJ was established?

Our committee is united in the view that SAYMA cannot go ahead with any decisions while we continue to act as a secular gathering of secular representatives rather than as a spiritual community. We are not acting like a spiritual community. It is time to focus on spiritual deepening, self-education, and reflection. We urge individual Friends, all SAYMA committees, Monthly Meetings & Worship Groups to reflect deeply on the roles that we have each played in the continuing conflicts at SAYMA. We ask all Friends, and especially Ministry & Nurture, to take a more engaged approach to conflict transformation and in actions that could make our meetings more welcoming.

In deep discernment on way forward,

The Ad Hoc Racial Justice Working Group of SAYMA

Membership of SAYMA’s RJWG:
Karen Morris, Atlanta Friends Meeting
Melissa Preast, West Knoxville Friends Meeting
Susan Firestone, Atlanta Friends Meeting
Kit Potter, Nashville Friends Meeting
Margaret Farmer, Asheville Friends Meeting
Shannon Roberts Smith, Berea Friends Meeting.