

Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association
Representative Meeting 147b
Twelfth Month, 4, 2021
Online, via Zoom

147b-01 Opening Worship

The meeting opened at 9am EST after a period of fellowship. The Clerk settled the Meeting into a time for worship.

147b-02 Greetings, Roll Call, Clerk's Remarks [Attachment A: Attendance, Attachment B: Clerk's Letter]

SAYMA's clerk Bob McGahey greeted Friends; roll call was not taken however the zoom participants list showed 34 Friends were present. Our administrative professional provided the attendance list based on who electronically joined the meeting. The clerk asked Friends to hold their original Light and not be stuck in past personas, for themselves and others, as we review minutes from a previous time. Live transcript was turned on for this meeting, with the request that it not be used outside the meeting itself. The clerk expressed his desire to share the minutes in the face of the minute as he had been urged by the recording clerk and several Monthly Meetings to do.

Business related to RM147 was not completed Tenth month, 16, 2021. For clarity RM147 and RM147a refer to the same session which occurred on Tenth month, 16, 2021. The continuation of RM147 in the Twelfth month, 5, 2021 is designated as RM147b.

147b-03 Review and Approve Narrative Minutes from Annual Sessions IV and V

Friends were reminded that the narratives of Sessions I-III of Yearly Meeting 50 (YM50) were reviewed and approved with minor changes and clarifications at Representatives Meeting 147a on Tenth month, 16, 2021, as reflected in the minutes from RM147.

This meeting began with review of Section IV. Friends accepted YM50 through Session IV Section 50-38. Some Friends expressed concern with the narrative in 50-39. Friends struggled with changing and interpreting the record, especially since so much time had passed.

Much deliberation occurred around the suggestion for the addition of a paragraph from the perspective of the clerk of URJ. After several attempts, the below intensely wordsmithed paragraph did not achieve a sense of the meeting:

“Some Friends stated it is inappropriate for White Friends to interfere with issues between Friends of Color. Friends also said that the minute excluded the violent nature

toward the clerk of URJ. Additional Friends expressed concern that the meeting in general included violence toward other members of the Meeting.”

Friends did not find a sense of the meeting on the sentences above related to violence, and therefore no new information from this discussion was added to YM50 minutes or narrative. A note was placed in YM50 to refer to this narrative.

During the discussion on YM50-39, Friends expressed a concern that we continue to have different interpretations of our actions taken within Yearly Meeting discussions and a lack of awareness of the impact of our actions on others. This inability to agree to what occurs in our meetings is inhibiting our ability to proceed, grounded in Spirit.

Some Friends brought awareness to our focus on wordsmithing and how we have become beholden to the written word in this process, which was felt to hold up business and our attention to Spirit. Friends also expressed the need for written narratives to accurately reflect our actions as they are the historical record.

Friends returned to review of YM50 Session IV. Sections 50-40 through 50-41 were approved.

Friends reviewed YM50 Session V. No questions were raised until Section 50-45.

A Friend raised a concern that the narrative in YM50-45 Section “Note to SAYMA from [Acting] Nominating Clerk [Attachment CC]”* does not fully capture the pressure against URJ and the Clerk of URJ.

The [acting] nominating clerk restated his concern from YM50. His interpretation is that the clerk of URJ cannot be self-nominating and that Nominating is at a standstill due to our established practice. A Friend reminded us that URJ declared their intention of being self-nominating in 2019. In the two years since, we have avoided discussing and resolving this matter. Some Friends stated that URJ is a functioning committee with Friends wishing to serve, so they should not be punished because SAYMA has process problems. Some Friends supported the statement that the just thing is to have URJ continue and allow them to do the work until Friends figure out what our process is. Some Friends were strongly opposed to the clerk of URJ continuing.

A Friend noted that the clerk of Nominating (term ended June 2020) and the clerk of URJ (term ended June 2021) are in the same situation yet treated differently; neither is self-nominating and have been completing duties in an acting capacity. The Friend noted that the concern about a Naming Committee (for Nominating) was brought before the previous clerk prior to the Yearly Meeting scheduled/canceled in 2020. The SAYMA presiding clerk noted that he had helped form a naming committee after YM50, but one member resigned in early fall before their duties were complete. The clerk asked for volunteers to comprise a naming committee to ensure that all

Nominating members had current terms. There are three members out of six whose terms lapsed in 2020.

*[*Note: The record in YM50 was corrected to list the clerk of Nominating as the acting clerk of Nominating by adding the word “acting” in brackets to YM50.]*

Friends are reminded that all committees act autonomously. We are Friends without authority, except God and we associate to hear that of God in each other. Individuals do not need a committee to express their needs, they can express their information outside a committee. It is time to examine why some Friends are so opposed to a specific committee.

The clerk of URJ raised the concern that her concerns are not recognized or noted on matters related to URJ.

Clarification was sought on whether both Nominating and URJ clerks are acting or in abeyance.

According to the clerk of SAYMA, Nominating is assumed to continue and URJ is assumed in abeyance. According to the Nominating clerk, they should both be treated the same.

A Friend suggested that since Nominating agreed to continue on and the clerk of URJ has agreed and no one stepped in to block it at YM50, they should continue until SAYMA provides more guidance on this matter. Some Friends agreed, other Friends stood in the way of this solution.

After much discussion on 50-45 no unity was reached on what it means to leave things as they are, nor whether the same standard would be applied to the clerk of URJ as the clerk of Nominating. Much evidence for and against was presented with various interpretations. Friends stood in the way if both clerks were allowed to be acting, and Friends stood in the way if both clerks were put in abeyance.

No one interpretation led to a sense of the meeting. Friends from multiple perspectives urged other Friends to engage with the Spirit for discernment.

A sense of the meeting was not achieved.

Most of Section 147b-03 was not read in the face of the meeting.

147b-04 Final worship

Friends entered into silent worship after which RM147b was closed.

Robert McGahey, Clerk
(archived copies signed)

Melissa Preast, Recording Clerk

Attachments

Attachment A: Attendance

Attachment B: Clerk's Letter to SAYMA Representative Meeting 147b

Attachment A: Attendance

List of attendees in archived print copy only.

Attachment B: Clerk's Letter to SAYMA Representative Meeting 147b

Dear SAYMA,

November 29, 2021

The recent open letter from the Ad Hoc Racial Justice Working Group closes with an appeal to regroup ourselves as a spiritual community and dig more deeply into conflict transformation over our racism: "We are not acting like a spiritual community. It is time to focus on spiritual deepening, self-education, and reflection." As we face yet another representative meeting in the midst of ongoing conflict, your clerk agrees.

In advance of our effort to accept the narrative minutes of YM50, it is important that we have a common understanding of what those minutes say. In particular, minute 50:45 was discussed at length at Rep147a in October, and we were unable to reach unity on the minute. The minute begins with a recording of a letter from Nominating: "In a letter to SAYMA, Wood Bouldin clarified the status of the Uplifting Racial Justice Clerk position. The term of office 2019-2021 has ended." The rest of the recorded narrative speaks of what this might mean, which is where we have fallen into disagreement. I want to clarify that SAYMA minutes record approval by the body of Nominating's naming members to the URJ committee (140-17-01). The series of clerks and co-clerks that brought SAYMA URJ from ad hoc through to standing committee ended when John Adams withdrew from his interim clerkship in 2019. The Nominating Committee then exercised its appointed authority over the functional life of URJ by nominating Star Smith to replace him for a regular two-year term as clerk, 2019-2021. Friends should notice that neither Star nor any of the other current advocates of self-selection objected to her nomination or her approval by SAYMA.

Proposals for the URJ Committee to be self-nominating, both the clerk and members, have been discussed within the URJ Committee, and mentioned in attached reports to our minutes (RM 143 attachment G). But they have never been approved by the body. Ongoing confusion over the membership of the URJ Committee has led some in SAYMA to speak of two committees – one the SAYMA-sanctioned one (which is now empty and thus in abeyance) and a second one operating out of Sumter, SC under the charge of Star Smith. Star has herself argued repeatedly for the independence of this committee, so that habitual white supremacist structures are disempowered.

Friends have often reminded us that the clerk declared towards the end of session V of YM50 sessions that we would not do any more business until we had the opportunity to engage with FCRJ in their ministry of accompaniment. Given that Nominating Committee did not choose to re-nominate Star Smith as clerk of the SAYMA URJ Committee minutes prior to that statement, it is the re-peopling of the now-empty SAYMA URJ Committee that constitutes new business, whether it be in the form of a proposal from the floor to extend Star Smith's term, or suggestions of other SAYMA BIPOC's as chair and members of that committee. The draft narrative reads, "The nominating committee awaits minuted instructions in the spirit of discernment on the way forward in filling this position."

Many faithful Friends remind us that we made a commitment to do the work of uplifting racial justice more than four years ago. Many faithful Friends have confronted their own racism and begun to change. But during these trying times, we have also lost Friends, both European-

descent and BIPOC. And yes, SAYMA's embeddedness in the structures of the dominant culture remains.

But as Angela Hopkins reminds us, we have all answered the call to be Friends, because there is something beyond the structures of this world in the message of early Friends that answers a deep hunger in us. The name Friend comes from John 15:15, "I have called you friends." We need to reground in Christ's love, so that our foundation is in spiritual friendship, not judgment, with tenderness towards and tolerance of each other, while still holding to the other meaning for early Quakers, *Friends of Truth*. Surely we are being tested mightily to follow both of these meanings. I look forward to settling into worship this Saturday morning, holding each other in a spirit of care and deep listening as we try to find a way forward.

-Robert McGahey, SAYMA Presiding Clerk