

SAYMA.URJ Report-September 2019

Observations, Analysis, Concerns, Recommendations and Funding Request

Friends Meetings, Yearly Meetings and wider Quaker organizations everywhere, have committed themselves to becoming anti-racist faith communities. New England, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and now SAYMA have yearly meeting anti-racism committees. New England Yearly Meeting passed a Minute on Racism in 2001, yet what they have been doing about racism in the last 18 years, is anyone's guess. Every few years Friends ask themselves, why the Religious Society of Friends is so white. If you listen to the conversations about this, they are invariably about how Quakers can attract more people of color to Quaker Meetings. It is essentially about how White people can create the fantasy diverse faith community they want, without having to confront their own racism. Meanwhile Friends of color remain few and far between. Historically, there have always been a few brave people of color led to Worship in the manner of Friends, though many more have left than stayed--most often citing encounters with racism as the reason.

In 2017/18, Friends General Conference spent \$63,455 on an Institutional Assessment of Systemic Racism. They said the Institutional Assessment was "a direct response to events at the 2016 Gathering which encapsulates a long history of Friends of Color experiencing racism among Friends." (Executive Summary, Page 1.)

SAYMA eagerly approved contributing funds to this endeavor the same year the ad hoc SAYMA-URJ formation committee, consisting entirely of SAYMA Friends of color, was granted \$1000 to do all the organizing and planning for a Friends of color retreat, intended to bring Friends of color together from across the yearly meeting's wide geographic area, cultural and class differences.

The plan was to begin the necessary process of community building among SAYMA Friends of color in order to include them in the spirit-led discernment of crafting the Vision, Mission and Goals of SAYMA-URJ. Needless to say, the Vision, Mission and Goals were written and approved by SAYMA Friends of color, but the community building piece never happened. Why? It's simple: URJ was set up to fail by White Friends who just could not stop themselves from interfering, or trying to manage a process which should have been all about Friends of color. Every divisive trick from the white entitlement playbook was employed, from manipulating Friends of color against one another to depriving URJ of the resources needed to do the work. Therefore, as clerk of SAYMA-Uplifting Racial Justice (SAYMA-URJ), I thought it would be instructive to share my interpretation of FGC's post-assessment recommendations which pertain to SAYMA.

Recommendations:

1. Resolved that in all FGC (SAYMA) decision-making processes, each body shall answer the following query with respect to each decision, **"How does this decision support FGC/SAYMA's goal to transform into an actively anti-racist faith community?"** Yes, SAYMA needs to do this.
2. Establish a group to implement the work of the Institutional Assessment on Systemic Racism. **Its charge shall be to guide the transformation of FGC/SAYMA into an antiracist organization.** (SAYMA-URJ is already performing that function. Now all that is needed is for SAYMA to approve the ad hoc White Friends URJ support committee as a standing committee.

3. The implementation Group will use the information and recommendations from the Institutional Assessment on Systemic Racism to begin their work and **its work shall not be limited to the scope of the report and its recommendations.**
4. Ask Monthly Meetings to collect and provide demographics of their Meetings that include age and race. URJ agrees. Collecting this data will help us track our progress, or lack thereof.
5. **Increase the capacity and financial resources of SAYMA-URJ** to provide anti-racism learning [and practice] opportunities for Monthly Meetings. Provide enough resources to assist Friends of Color serving SAYMA by working with URJ.
6. Conduct a detailed review of SAYMA Faith and Practice, policy & procedures with a view to considering the intentional and unintended impact and consequences on the participation of Friends of Color. URJ wholeheartedly agrees with this and is ready to work with Ministry and Nurture or whomever on this project.
7. Make every effort to bring in new Friends of Color rather than further burdening the few Friends of Color currently serving in leadership capacities.
8. Develop a means to examine and change Quaker traditions, language and processes developed by white supremacist Quakers to be inclusive of other cultures.
9. Seek **funding to implement URJ's recommendations** including but not limited to:
 - a. **Create an endowment to provide funding for People of Color engaged in social change, anti-racism and/or counter-colonial work.** SAYMA-URJ has already approved the creation of a **Racial Justice Fund** for these purposes.
10. **Increase the Racial Justice Fund**, enabling URJ to provide support for Friends of Color to participate in SAYMA and FGC sponsored events, **including sponsoring their own events and projects.**
11. Commit to solving the barriers People of Color face that preclude them from fully functioning as SAYMA Friends. In other words, **DO better.**

<https://www.fgcquaker.org/sites/default/files/attachments/IA%20Task%20Force%20Executive%20Summary%20-%20final.pdf>

In the three months since I became URJ's clerk, URJ has faced every characteristic behavior and attitude of internalized White racial superiority from SAYMA leadership, as we set out to fulfill URJ's Mission and Goals.

URJ faced unprecedented obstruction from the Finance Committee when we attempted to access our own money. In June, there was roughly \$16,000 in Set-Aside funds and \$2000 in Donor-Restricted funds, adding up to approximately \$18,000 for URJ's exclusive use. When URJ attempted to access its funds to conduct the committee's business, the Finance Committee clerk, Charles Schade, challenged URJ's authority and judgement. He accused URJ members of engaging in fraudulent activities, questioned whether URJ's member were "legitimate" and the committee's spiritual discernment

process. URJ members were profiled, falsely accused, and treated like potential thieves everyone in SAYMA should be wary of. URJ was also suspected of “conflict of interest” even though SAYMA never had a conflict of interest policy before. In short, SAYMA-URJ spending was delayed and withheld while URJ members were criminalized and rudely interrogated for attempting to spend roughly \$6,000 of the committee’s own money. Then, after all of that, all URJ spending was put on hold by the Treasurer, until after the September Representative’s Meeting, while she went on vacation.

Worse than that, there was no qualified individual SAYMA Friend, committee or process available to fairly mediate the situation and/or hold anyone accountable, for what was a totally baseless racist attack against URJ members. As URJ clerk, I reached out to the SAYMA clerk, Barbara Esther, demanding a public apology from the Finance Committee clerk, from whom the spurious accusations originated. In fact, we were preparing to demand his removal as Finance Committee clerk, when he abruptly resigned rather than admit fault and apologize. However, URJ still feels we are owed a public apology.

Barbara’s response was predictable but nonetheless shocking. She actually said, **“Apologies need to be reciprocal for them to provide a space for growth or healing. I will leave the apologies up to you and Charles when you are ready to offer them. I believe you both contributed to the misunderstanding of what was going on.”**

All I could say was, WOW. Because the SAYMA clerk’s response sounded very much like our president, when he said, “There were very fine people on both sides,” after the tiki torch white supremacist riot in Charlottesville, VA.

This was no mere “misunderstanding.” The presumption—based on nothing at all—that Friends of color must somehow be up to no good and therefore need extra oversight and supervision to dispense our own set-aside and donor restricted funds, **contradicting already agreed upon SAYMA policy**, was traumatizing for URJ’s members and myself, as its clerk. That Barbara, Charles and other members of the Finance Committee dared to assume responsibility for interpreting SAYMA-URJ’s Mission and Goals, and then to question whether URJ was living up to them, was beyond the pale for us.

In her response to URJ’s concerns, our SAYMA clerk had the audacity to advise me, to **“Listen more, speak less, and act like we’re on the same team.”**... **“Rather than creating a we/they adversarial confrontation, I would prefer that conflicts be resolved in a way that declares, “Because we are all Quakers, let’s work on this together until we find a way forward that is mutually agreed upon and Spirit-led.”** News Flash, Barbara Esther: You now owe SAYMA-URJ a public apology too.

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, **you** have chosen the side of the oppressor. **If** an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and **you** say that **you are neutral**, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.” --Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict... [an individual] who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.” – Martin Luther King Jr.

Whereas, SAYMA policy, under “Disbursement of URJ Funds” clearly states:

If the authorized person(s), i.e. the URJ clerk(s), has/have approved the expenditure and the funds are available in the appropriate category, the treasurer makes the payment. **The accounts payable policy does not give the treasurer or the finance committee authority to deny or delay payment due to questions of judgment about the advisability of an expense that has proper authorization and for which funds are budgeted and available.**

Under Conflict Resolution:

Should URJ and the finance committee find themselves in disagreement about the use of funds for which URJ is responsible, all involved need to keep in mind that among the goals of URJ, warmly received at Rep Meeting 159, is: **Work to resolve the expressed concerns of Friends of Color in a timely manner.**

Because **“We don’t have a specific conflict resolution process to propose at this time.”**

That I had to argue via e-mail, over several weeks, with the Finance Committee and the treasurer in order to access URJ funds is not only patronizing and deeply insulting, it is also exactly how institutional white supremacy/racism operates in predominantly white organizations, like SAYMA. Given the proclivity for White Americans to criminalize people of color, particularly Black people, for doing everyday things, like breathing, it was highly offensive for Charles Shade or anyone to interrogate URJ over its well-seasoned financial decisions, especially when everything URJ has done is completely legal.

Remember, SAYMA made a commitment to dismantle its racism, consistent with the same decision made by FGC in 2017. At the FGC Central Committee meeting, as their minute was being approved, one White Friends described how white supremacy showed up in their process. Near the end of the Executive Summary, it says, “a White Friend noted to [one of the trainers]...“So, did you see that just happen? That is us – that is our Quaker white supremacy in action in our process. We tell you to bring us a big, beautiful expansive dream, and then through our process we will whittle it down for you and put it into a box.”

I call this “racial process violence” which is precisely what URJ is designed to address. The entire purpose of structuring SAYMA-URJ as a Friends of color only committee, was to prevent white supremacy, conscious or unconscious, from creeping into the separate work Friends of color need to do, as SAYMA works to unpack its racism. The intent of the URJ ad hoc formation committee was to open ways for Friends of color to provide the leadership SAYMA desperately needs to address its systemic and institutionalized racism, without white interference in its processes. Though URJ exists to work with SAYMA to build the multicultural anti-racist faith community you committed yourselves to, we cannot and will not do your work for you. White Friends have got to do their part. Which is the reason SAYMA-URJ recommended the formation of an auxiliary White Friends only, URJ support committee.

Change does not happen by doing things the same way one has always done them. Because white supremacy is maintained by white people controlling all narratives, processes and resources, concerning everything and everyone, white people generally do not notice how they are upholding white supremacist systems and institutions. Therefore, with URJ’s guidance, SAYMA Friends must examine how we do things to discern whether our policies, processes and practices are in line with what we say we believe in: Integrity, Equality, Peace, Love, Community, etc.

FYI: SAYMA-URJ members are all adults, fully capable of managing URJ's financial business, without extra oversight or interrogation from the Finance Committee. And URJ is unified that it will never be put through that kind of racist harassment again.

Therefore, in view of the fact that the SAYMA Finance Committee will most likely be populated by well-meaning color-blind racists for the foreseeable future, URJ must have complete control of its finances as per Goal # 10 of the revised URJ Vision Mission and Goals. (Attached) The SAYMA treasurer will hand over all funds set aside for URJ via electronic transfer, to whichever bank or credit union URJ decides to use. In future, any SAYMA Funds allocated to URJ and/or funds from Friends Meetings and individuals will be deposited into that account. **From now on, URJ will manage its own finances and submit an annual financial report to SAYMA.**

Now let us address another issue raised at Sessions 2019: That URJ members need to be members or attenders of a SAYMA Meeting, vetted by the Nominating Committee and approved by the entire body of SAYMA. What is the point of having a racial justice committee only Friends of color can serve, if white Friends can choose which Friends of color will be members? Frankly, it makes no sense at all. This is a perfect example of unnecessary oversight of the activities of Friends of color. Because it clearly states in SAYMA Faith and Practice, (top of page 25) **"Members of ...standing Committees are either self-selected or recommended by the yearly meeting Nominating Committee."**

Therefore, **URJ will approve its own members and clerk without interference from SAYMA. White Friends will not decide how many members URJ should have, nor whether they need to be members of Meetings, or even Quakers. White Friends absolutely will not take it upon themselves to interpret URJ's Vision, Mission or goals, and will not dictate URJ's agenda.**

URJ must establish these boundaries to protect the mental health and stability of its membership from the "internalized racial superiority" and white addiction to exploitation and control of non-white peoples. Especially since no Quaker process, practice or procedure has yet been developed to protect Friends of color from racist incidents, conscious or otherwise, or to hold Quaker racists accountable for their actions.

In spite of everything, in the three months since I became clerk, URJ, has made some progress.

1. SAYMA-URJ is now formally affiliated with **the Friends center for Racial Justice**. We will be collaborating on a number of projects in the future. In addition, URJ reimbursed Angela Hopkins' travel costs of \$690 to SAYMA2019.
2. The **Paul Cuffee Friends of Color Worship Group** was established, in fulfillment of URJ's mission to **"provide safe space for Friends of color to bring issues and concerns regarding racism within their Monthly Meetings and SAYMA, to find support and advocacy."** The Paul Cuffee Worship Group acts as a Meeting community for people of color who wish to worship in the manner of Friends, if/when they are uncomfortable doing so in SAYMA's all or mostly white Quaker Meetings. URJ named the worship group after Paul Cuffee (1754-1812), because two members of URJ, are direct descendants.
3. URJ has partnered with **the Abolitionist Center**, in Sumter SC. SAYMA-URJ and the Abolitionist Center share work and living space. It is also where the Paul Cuffee Worship Group meets for

Worship. As part of the partnership agreement with the Abolitionist Center, URJ committed to financially supporting the Abolitionist Center's work, with an initial investment of \$3000.

4. URJ granted \$1000, to **Asheville Black Lives Matter** to support its community work, and intends to continue granting URJ funds to ABLM in the future.
5. URJ granted its clerk \$1000 in financial aid to cover the costs associated with moving to the Abolitionist Center and repairs to her living and work space. More money will be needed, as there is still plumbing and electrical work to be done before the property is fully habitable.

In total, URJ spent \$5,690, to date, leaving approx. \$12,310, based on a starting approximate figure of \$18,000.

Funding Request:

SAYMA-URJ requests an additional \$10,000 for fiscal year 2020. URJ also requests donations from individual Friends and Monthly Meetings for **the Racial Justice Fund**.

Any plan for racial justice must include economic justice. If you do not comprehend what we are saying or why, please Google "the racial wealth gap." URJ asks that you give generously, according to your capacity, to those most impacted by racial economic disparities and that you **let go of your need to control what is done with those funds**.

SAYMA-URJ is bursting with talent, ideas and commitment to the cause of uplifting racial justice and must have ample funds to implement SAYMA-URJ's Vision, Mission and Goals.

Lastly, every person of color who survives the relentless onslaught of white supremacy is already doing their part, every day, to challenge and dismantle it. We have put our lives, livelihoods and health at risk to work with White Friends who say they want to dismantle their racism, so the very least you can do is support our initiatives. Because, there is so much SAYMA-URJ can accomplish in the name of Friends, with enough money.

"In my workshops, I often ask people of color, 'How often have you given white people feedback on our unaware yet inevitable racism? How often has that gone well for you?' Eye-rolling, head shaking, and outright laughter follow, along with the consensus of *rarely, if ever*. I then ask, 'What would it be like if you could simply give us feedback, have us graciously receive it, reflect, and work to change the behavior?' Recently a man of color sighed and said, 'It would be revolutionary.'" (From "White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism" by Robin di Angelo. Page 113.)

In the Light of Racial Justice,

Sharon "Star" Smith, clerk of SAYMA-URJ