

SAYMA Ministry & Nurture Committee Report 2023 Sessions and Retreat

SAYMA Ministry and Nurture Committee (M&N) grew in number this year, providing better representation of our Meetings. When Meetings did not have a person able to attend the committee meetings, committee members reached out to those Meetings, sometimes in person, sometimes virtually.

We began our year with a virtual retreat led by Mary Ann Downey with her husband, Bill Holland, assisting (both from Atlanta Friends Meeting). This set us on a path to working in a Spirit-led way. As we wrote queries for use at Representative Meetings and for Yearly Meeting Sessions and Retreat, we practiced their use in our bi-monthly meetings.

We worked in small groups to season various aspects of the committee's tasks, then shared the results with the whole committee for discussion and approval. We stewarded the use of the Kenworthy Charitable Trust and distributed Spiritual Development funds to several Friends. We also met with two Friends who requested funds to support their respective ministries from the Released Friend Fund. Along with some members of the Handbook Committee, we are clarifying the process of handling requests for Released Friend funds, as no one has asked for those funds in quite some time. We reached unity on supporting both individuals and are excited to experience the gifts their leadings are bringing to the Yearly Meeting.

Adrian Mehr requested help to attend a Pendle Hill retreat on "Connection, Rupture, Repair: The Trauma-Informed Beloved Community". He began to read "Set Boundaries, Find Peace: a guide to reclaiming yourself" by Nedra Glover Tawwab on the way to that workshop. Those two events opened a leading for him to be a vessel for fostering better connection, reconnection, communication, exchange, deep community and growth in our Yearly Meeting. Over the past months, he followed his leading in the form of working on SAYMA committees, researching institutional history, listening among Friends, organizing, clerking, planning workshops, and visitation with Meetings beyond what SAYMA Ministry & Nurture Committee usually does. In order to do this work he requested, and we provided, six months of his basic expenses from the Released Friend Fund. This ministry is evolving, and he is being faithful to where it is leading him. After coming to M&N he had a clearness process with Memphis Meeting and has been provided with a support group. He is also keeping in close communication with M&N.

Sharon Star Smith shared with SAYMA Ministry and Nurture the many years of struggle she has experienced as a birthright Friend of color from New England Yearly Meeting. During a seven-month retreat at Pendle Hill in 2007, and a workshop with Marcelle Martin, "Experiment With Light," her ministry to challenge racism in the Society of Friends was affirmed and strengthened in a clearness committee meeting. She told us that during the clearness process at Pendle Hill and again in Asheville Friends Meeting, "it was affirmed that I am carrying a Quaker prophetic ministry for Justice, challenging Friends to be faithful to what we say we believe in: That of God in everyone, continuing revelation, and the testimonies we profess to live by: Peace, Truth/Integrity/Justice, Simplicity and Community". Though the path laid out for her has been very difficult, and hard for us to hear sometimes, M&N also affirmed this as a true leading. As a result, Star requested that we support her ministry financially and recognize her as a Released Friend since she has been faithful to this leading for many years without official acknowledgment or support from Friends. This money will enable her to continue her ministry with SAYMA and contribute financially as an elder and clan mother, to her newly established traditional indigenous multigenerational household in Nashville.

We hope that the Released Friend Fund can be rebuilt to allow for further field work to be supported. We would like to see it maintain a balance that can be tapped as Friends seek to be released to do important work in our yearly meeting.