

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business
Asheville Friends Meeting
8th Month 8, 2021

Present via zoom: Bob Lackey, Clerk; Kitti Reynolds Recording Clerk, Pat Johnson, Morgan Murray, Steve Livingston, Gita Larson, Laura Lane, Rylin Hansen, Robin Wells, Susan Oehler, Sarah Jane Thomas

Meeting opened with Silent Worship

The Clerk shared a reading out of silence.

Quaker Quotations of Faith and Practice by Leonard S. Kenworthy. P 69. A Joint Publication of the Publication Committee of Friends General Conference and Quaker Publications. 1983

“The Meeting for Business is another of the unique contributions of Quakers in the world. In fact it may even be more unprecedented than the Meeting for Worship. It is a rare form of democracy especially suited to a religious fellowship, based on the belief that Divine Guidance is as available in transacting group business as it is in conducting group worship. It is a way of doing business in which the collective wisdom of the group is illuminated by the Light. It is a Meeting for Worship with a concern to do business. Nothing like it exists anywhere in Christendom or in any of the other world religions. It is uncommon, unusual, unparalleled, unique... most of the sects which rose in 17th century England died; the Society of Friends survived because it had a special method of transacting business, as well as a special message.”

Minute #1: The seventh month business meeting minutes were not approved. Pat Johnson and Kitti Reynolds had some changes to make. They will be available for approval at ninth month MFB.

Announcements: Pat Johnson and Mike Eddy presented our Land Acknowledgement document to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal Council.

Committees:

Religious Education

Laura Lane presented an unofficial report and told us the children have been participating in first day school on Zoom every week since March 2020, not in a formal way but checking in with each other and community building. They have met outdoors sometimes at the Botanical Gardens. She presented results from a survey she conducted of families whose children have been participating in our Religious Education program. Responses were mixed, some families wished to continue as they have done recently

and some wanted to meet in person at the Meeting House, observing CDC safety protocols.

We discussed allowing the children to meet upstairs with masks on. The business meeting decided that due to the recent rise in COVID numbers, the current policy for non-vaccinated people to meet outdoors should continue for adults and children. We feel it would be unsafe for our children to meet indoors at this time.

Minute #2

Friends expressed how much they care about our families and we want to make it possible for them to be with us. We decided that all those who participate in our Meeting activities should wear masks except when speaking in Meeting and practice social distancing, which is presently keeping apart 6 feet.

Peace and Earth: Pat Johnson

Pat Johnson requested a one-time exception for Peace and Earth to put information about Dr. Steere's presentation on our Facebook page. The information would be how to contact Pat to get the Zoom link to the presentation about Cherokee lands. Meeting approved this one-time post.

SAYMA Bob Lackey

The following information required no action. Friends are asked to read these documents for later discussion.

Draft Policies for Circulation for Seasoning by Monthly Meetings

Friends,

Please see attached draft policies from Charleston Monthly Meeting for review and seasoning by monthly meetings. This is part II of the Charleston minute read at the Yearly Meeting.

These draft policies are presented as policies that might be suitable for addressing the concerns raised in the minute Charleston Monthly Meeting presented at Yearly Meeting.

The letter below was the request to bring these policy concerns before Yearly Meeting. The three policy drafts are attached to this email in MS Word format and PDF format.

Please contact Susan Phelan if you have trouble accessing the files.

May 16, 2021

Dear Bob McGahey,

At a called Meeting for Business on May 16, 2021, Charleston Friends Meeting adopted the following minute.

Charleston Friends Meeting asks the Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association (SAYMA) to adopt necessary financial policies forthwith, addressing: (1) Financial conflicts of interest; (2) Financial operations continuity; and (3) Grants.

The need for clear policies has become evident during the past two years.

1. Financial conflict of interest. SAYMA has no written financial conflict of interest policy, but avoidance of conflict of interest is baked into many of its written and unwritten policies and procedures. Additionally, the Finance Committee received advice from both a tax consultant and a CPA consultant on private, non profit financing that it should have such a policy.
2. Financial operations continuity. Such a policy would handle situations such as the present lack of a treasurer, and provide for overriding treasurer actions in the event of incapacity or suspected malfeasance. Three of the last six treasurers have died or become incapacitated while in office. This has disrupted SAYMA's continuity of operations (payment of employees, filing and paying taxes). There is no clear authority for the assistant treasurer to assume the role of treasurer when the treasurer is incapacitated. There is no authority for the clerk or anyone else to appoint an acting treasurer when both offices become vacant. There is no mechanism for removing authority from a treasurer for malfeasance or in the event of serious errors in judgment.
3. Grants. Recent payments of grants to individuals have created disputes and resulted in spending of approximately \$10,000 for uses that are still not clear. This violated the SAYMA financial goals of transparency and accountability. Open-ended grants to individuals should not be allowed.

Our meeting asks that these policy concerns be brought forward at the upcoming yearly meeting. We will provide sample policies under separate cover for distribution and request they be seasoned by SAYMA monthly meetings.

Diana Masso

Abbey Pratt-Harrington

Co-Clerks

Attachments:

CharlestonMMDRAFT Grants Policy pdf
CharlestonMMDRAFT Finacial Conflict pdf
CharlestonMMDRAFT operations pdf
Clerk letter called meeting pdf

The meeting closed with silent worship until way opens for our next business meeting in the 9th month of 2021.

SAYMA Policy on Grants

Background: Grant-making is a labor-intensive activity, if done correctly. It assures that a donor organization's "investment" in a grantee yields a return in good work done on behalf of causes important to the donor. SAYMA does not have the volunteer resources or expertise to be a grant-making organization.

Purpose: To identify the circumstances in which SAYMA will make grants to individuals or organizations. In this policy, "SAYMA" includes its officers, committees, and set-aside fund stewards and their budgeted funds.

Policy: SAYMA may make grants to wider Quaker organizations annually as part of its budgeted expenses and grants to individuals from the Released Friend Set-Aside fund per the procedure specified in the *Handbook*. SAYMA does not make other cash grants to individuals. Such grants are more appropriate to monthly meetings. SAYMA does not make grants to for profit organizations. SAYMA does not make grants to its own committees or persons in positions of responsibility.

SAYMA may make grants to nonprofit organizations other than as described above on recommendation of a SAYMA committee or by action of Yearly Meeting after treasurer confirmation of the organization's purpose, financial responsibility, and charitable status (501(c)(3)). Grants may be made from committee budgets, set-aside funds, or unallocated Yearly Meeting funds. Such grants will be restricted to a specific purpose, and SAYMA will expect to receive an accounting of grant fund use from the grantee.

SAYMA does not make grants to for profit organizations.

Financial Conflict of Interest

Background: Avoiding conflict of interest is deeply engrained in Quaker practice. Clerks routinely stand aside when they need to speak personally to a matter under consideration. The nominating committee is not self-perpetuating, in part to avoid self nomination. Friends declare conflicts of interest that they perceive when participating in Friends business. The Treasurer may not authorize payments or make payments to the Treasurer. Thus it seems unnecessary for a Friends organization like SAYMA to have a policy on conflict of interest, just as it seems unnecessary for SAYMA to have a policy addressing financial malfeasance by persons in positions of responsibility or sexual abuse by persons responsible for children and teenagers. But Quakers are not perfect. When our imperfections surface, we need a kind but firm and just way of dealing with them.

Additionally, some kinds of conflict of interest have the potential to violate federal tax laws because SAYMA is considered a charitable and religious organization under section 501(c) (3) of the tax code. If SAYMA made payments that benefited “insiders” (see definition below), it could be considered “inurement to private benefit,” and SAYMA could be penalized¹. Absent specific and minuted intention to violate a law out of conscience, SAYMA should adhere to laws as it is best able.

Policy: Friends should always declare anything they perceive as personal conflict of interest in matters related to SAYMA finances. They should refrain from participating in decisions that give the appearance of conflict of interest. It is in SAYMA’s best interest to obtain goods and services of the best quality available at the price SAYMA is able to pay, and to invest its charitable dollars in activities and individuals who are most likely to achieve the goals and objectives SAYMA wishes to advance through spending its charitable funds.

Definition: “A conflict of interest arises when what is in a person’s best interest is not in the best interest of another person or organization to which that individual owes loyalty.” (*Ethics Unwrapped*, <https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/conflict-of-interest>)

For decisions related to expenditure of SAYMA funds, a financial conflict of interest exists whenever anyone who participates in the decision-making process could gain personally from the decision. In this context “gain personally” means that (1) the individual participant, (2) a business owned or controlled by the participant, or (3) member of the participant’s immediate family could benefit financially from the transaction that is proposed or authorized.

Definition: SAYMA insiders are its named officers (including the Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Recording Clerk, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer and any other Friends who may be appointed to SAYMA-wide executive responsibilities) and Clerks of standing and ad hoc committees.

¹ Given the size of SAYMA’s budget, we are advised the risk is low, although the Internal Revenue Service does not allow the practice.

Procedure

1. Friends serving on committees, in positions of responsibility, or participating in SAYMA Meetings for Business shall disclose potential or actual financial conflicts of interest that they have with respect to any item under consideration.
2. Friends with financial conflicts of interest shall not participate in decisions related to spending SAYMA funds in the areas where conflict arises.
3. SAYMA shall not make payments to SAYMA insiders for their personal benefit, but shall reimburse insiders for reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out their responsibilities.
4. The Treasurer may not make payments in situations in which there was conflict of interest in the decision to propose or authorize an expenditure. If the Treasurer learns of potential or actual financial conflict of interest in a pending transaction, the Treasurer shall not complete the transaction until the conflict of interest is resolved. This may require the decision-making body to review and repeat the decision-making process.

Financial Operations Continuity and Lines of Authority

Purpose: To provide for orderly transfer of financial authority and duties if the Treasurer dies or becomes incapacitated; to provide for succession in the event of simultaneous vacancies in the Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer positions; to authorize intervention in situations of suspected malfeasance or serious misjudgment by the treasurer.

Background: SAYMA grants broad discretion to the Treasurer to spend money on SAYMA's behalf. When a treasurer dies or becomes too ill to manage the organization's finances or is suspected of malfeasance or poor judgment in making transactions, an orderly process is required to assure that SAYMA's financial obligations are met timely and that its financial assets are protected. In particular, staff need to be paid, taxes remitted, and other obligations met. If the Treasurer becomes incapacitated when there is a vacancy in the Assistant Treasurer position, an immediate replacement is required to assure SAYMA's financial responsibilities are met.

Policy: Under specific circumstances, the Clerk, the Clerk of Finance Committee, or the Clerk's Committee may: (1) transfer responsibilities of the Treasurer to another individual (usually, the Assistant Treasurer); (2) disapprove and halt payments not yet made on behalf of SAYMA; (3) stop payment and/or attempt to recoup payments already made on behalf of SAYMA.

Procedure:

1. If the Treasurer is incapacitated, the Clerk of Finance Committee shall ask the Assistant Treasurer to serve as Treasurer until the Treasurer is able to resume duties or resigns. If the Treasurer dies, the Assistant Treasurer shall immediately become Treasurer. In the event of a dispute over whether the Treasurer is incapacitated, the Finance Committee shall investigate, and present its findings to the Clerk's Committee. The Clerk's Committee may engage additional experts if needed (e.g., physicians). The Clerk's Committee will then make a final determination of incapacitation.
2. Anyone who believes that the Treasurer may be engaged in malfeasance (e.g., embezzlement or fraud) or is making serious misjudgment with respect to SAYMA's finances (e.g., violation of SAYMA's financial policies that endangers SAYMA's fiscal integrity) should bring it promptly to the attention of the Clerk and the Clerk of Finance Committee. If the Clerk and Clerk of Finance Committee conclude that malfeasance or serious misjudgment is likely to have occurred, they shall suspend the Treasurer's authority to spend SAYMA funds and transfer the Treasurer's duties to the Assistant Treasurer or another Friend if the Assistant Treasurer is involved in malfeasance or the position is vacant. They shall promptly convene the Clerk's Committee. If the Clerk's Committee confirms malfeasance or serious misjudgment, it may take additional emergency action to protect SAYMA's financial resources including, but not limited to, appointing new financial officers, changing banking signatories and [updating passwords](#), ~~and reporting the matter to law enforcement.~~

- 3 In the event of simultaneous vacancy in the Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer positions, whether by death, resignation, or incapacitation, the Clerk shall appoint an interim Treasurer, seeking advice from the Clerks of Nominating and Finance Committees and treasurers of monthly meetings as needed. The Interim Treasurer shall serve until another Treasurer is appointed by the Yearly Meeting or Representative Meeting.

Aug 5, 2021

Dear SAYMA Friends,

We will be convening the first of our called meetings under the leadership of Angela Hopkins and the Friends Committee on Racial Justice towards the end of this month. The goal of this meeting is to go back to first principles, to our roots as Quakers, the values and form of worship that brought us each to Quakerism. We are called to be in right relationship with each other, grounded in our roots in the divine Spirit. We have strayed far from this in recent years, and we have sought help from FCRJ to realign ourselves, starting with those things we hold in common, not our differences, which have sadly been the emphasis in our recent history. Once we re-root in the spirit, sinking down into the Seed as Fox would put it, we can embrace the process of developing a common language so that we can better communicate our various approaches to the work of manifesting our testimonies in the world – and especially with each other. As I said in last week’s letter, the initial work is envisioned as a set of three meetings. But we will take this one step at a time, discerning the way forward methodically, as Spirit guides us. Being open to Spirit, rather than our past narratives and framings, is absolutely key to any movement we may have towards transformation of the place we have been stuck.

Angela and I want to hold our first meeting in late August. It will be two hours long (the result of studying Zoom tolerance), online. Each meeting will have two possible dates for attendance, in order to be as inclusive as possible. Probably this will entail a Saturday morning and midweek afternoon option each time we convene. A Doodle poll will go out among the planners later this week, and you will receive the results as soon as the process concludes. Stay tuned.

Lastly, I want to apologize to the SAYMA body for the abrupt manner in which I halted the consultation process with Angela and FCRJ last fall. I interpreted the process as biased and not following Friends’ right order, without sitting down with all members of the ad hoc committee that had been constituted to discuss and season my concerns. That effort at consultation was an ad hoc committee formed by the former clerk, and I interpreted SAYMA Faith and Practice as putting it squarely under the clerk’s authority to both form and to disband. I acted clumsily and hurt folks in the process. For that I am profoundly sorry.

I want to emphasize that the charge is entirely different this round. At our last business session, the SAYMA body minuted a called meeting led by of Angela Hopkins and her team at FCRJ (appended below). We reached unity around this minute. So we move forward now as an entire body, not at the clerk’s discretion. This is a huge distinction. Let us steadfastly and humbly proceed out of this sense of unity, going into prayerful discernment as we approach this opportunity. May we re-find our way to right relationship with one another as fellow Friends, rooted in the Spirit.

Robert McGahey

SAYMA Presiding Clerk

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.