

NPYM Phone Conference on Spiritually-grounded Responses to White Supremacy, April 22, 2018

At the request of the convenor, Betsey Kenworthy, we began the phone conference in waiting, centering worship. After we introduced ourselves, Betsey focused the conversation on ways of fostering spiritual growth while dealing with racial justice issues, with a goal of supporting tender, truthful, and courageous dialog on the topic of white supremacy in our Meetings and in this summer's Annual Session. She read the queries we were asked to address.

One Meeting is located where white supremacists had been very active until recently, but the Meeting is not yet having conversations about their own condition or the Meeting's. A Friend recalled having an awakening upon learning that an active black Meeting member had not felt comfortable revealing his experience of racist policing with others in the Meeting. Another was awakened by loving and marrying a black person. One group's awakening to the decimation of Native Americans was brought by participation in the Standing Rock resistance and by the prevalence of police violence disproportionately directed at non-whites, in their small city. As we prepared to close, a Friend shared experiencing new awareness through the personal experience of a family member in their hometown.

Study resources that were mentioned were Bryan Stevenson's "Memorial for Peace and Justice", and his book, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*.

Several Meetings have arranged events to build self-awareness that were primarily for Meeting participants but open to the community. These included posting the AFSC exhibit Twenty Questions and holding a related discussion at the Meetinghouse and again in a public library, holding discussions once or more including an ongoing series with attempts to include non-Quakers and others with black facilitators, displaying a Black Lives Matter sign and discussing whether they honor the commitment that implies, showing racial justice movies, giving support to largely non-white schools, writing Minutes for racial justice, developing a resource list of materials and various online communications, and sponsoring an emotionally powerful sculpture exhibit by young people. The theme of one Quarterly Meeting was awareness of White Privilege in oneself and in one's community. Friends are also working on being tender toward those for whom the awakening around them feels hurtful. In one Meeting the events have resulted in more diversified attendance at meetings for worship.

Friends also reported actions to reduce white supremacy. One Meeting supports the "palpably spiritual" cultural revitalization of nearby Native American tribes, hold a summer social justice camp for teens, engaged in supporting Standing Rock and local pipeline protests, and made their presence known at an ICE facility. We reflected on the Minute passed by PNW QM – and how it could be strengthened?

Near the end of the discussion, Betsey asked us to shift our focus to how we can support one another during awakening self-awareness to our place in white supremacy. At the Yearly Meeting level, tenderness may be especially needed at Annual Session where Friends with widely different levels of awareness will be participating together. We search for tender words to accurately describe events, and try to listen with tenderness to descriptions of hurt feelings. To each be in our own individual awareness is what is important – encouraging all the individual work taking place, and honoring it as we honor our own new steps.

Some intentions expressed were to wrap one's head around where one hopes to arrive, to ask important beginning questions such as "Where does inequality impact MY life?" "What would it be like to be a person of color?" One path was acknowledging the choice to be a Quaker, then reading Vanessa Julye's work and descriptions of micro aggressions, and to keep opening ourselves to awareness of the issues people of color face. Another angle is looking at past Quaker mistakes and evidences of prejudiced thinking which led to dehumanizing practices. The book [Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen](#) by Jervis Anderson is helpful for this.

Final thoughts as we prepared to close the discussion were interest in more books or aids to awareness, and acknowledging a new awareness of not knowing what to do. A Friend reflected how wearing a signal of safety for persons being harassed had made her more mindful of possible calls to address white supremacy on an individual level.

After a thankful silence, we closed.