

## **Mt Toby response to Queries from NEYM Ad hoc Work Group Challenging White Supremacy, May 2017 :**

### **How has your meeting engaged with Sessions minute 2016-64?**

Our ad hoc committee on race and class held an initial discussion of the minute before meeting for worship on 5/28/17. Eighteen people attended. This led to being invited by our Retreat Planning Committee to devote a half day to a program for all retreat participants on entitled 'Holding Space for Transformation: Deepening our work on racism in our lives and at Mt Toby'. Although this did not focus on the 2016 Minute specifically, it opened a deeper conversation about racism among the wider group Friends, including Friends of Color, in our meeting.

### **Who is guiding the process: an individual, committee, ad hoc group...**

The Race and Class Group, which is a volunteer, ad hoc committee that meets monthly. This group is officially under the care of our Peace and Social Concerns committee.

### **How you are doing it: readings, small groups, all meeting gatherings, one-time, several meetings, ongoing...**

That same group has been active since February 2013, after a racist incident in the December 2012 Meeting for Business, which led to a request by an African American member of our meeting for the white members of meeting to look at our own racism. That member provided a set of readings to lead us into that consideration. Since then, this group has met somewhere close to monthly, sometimes focused on class and sometimes on race. We have lately been more focused on race, and our approach has been on 3 fronts: (1) understanding and working to unlearn our own racism and role in white supremacist culture, (2) increase our understanding of the experiences of People of Color, and (3) participate actively in People of Color led groups and activities. We have done things such as:

- respond in a worship sharing format to questions designed to have us reflect on our own histories
- read and discuss books by people of color in an effort to better understand the experience of others.
- Seek, and gain approval for Mt Toby to place a Black Lives Matter sign on the highway at our driveway entrance, and replace it every time it was stolen.
- Gone to exhibits and events together such as: an art film on the experience of black men in America and other films (eg 'I Am Not Your Negro' - about James Baldwin; '13<sup>th</sup>'); fundraiser/celebration events and volunteer work days for local urban gardening and youth empowerment group; anti-racism discussions and presentations.
- Explore Reparations as something we would like to initiate as a collective witness.
- Following a weekend workshop at Woolman Hill with Dr Amanda Kemp (attended by 5 Mt Toby folks), use readings from her book 'Say the Wrong Thing: Stories and Strategies for Racial Justice and Authentic Communication' to stimulate dialogue in small groups.

### **What resources have you used? Which have been most useful? Are there resources you**

**don't have but feel would be helpful?**

There are so many good writings by People of Color! Some that we have used:

- *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander
- *The Case for Reparations* (Ta-Nehisi Coates in *The Atlantic*)
- *Between the World and Me* Ta- Nehisi Coates
- *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*, Michael Dyson

We have also used resources from Showing Up for Racial Justice and from Amanda Kemp's ideas and book, *Say the Wrong Thing*.

**Are there understandings or questions that have arisen that you would like to share with others in NEYM?**

When we met to specifically focus on the 2016 Minute, we found that the group in attendance fully embraced the statements in the Minute. That is, people were on board with the reality that Friends are complicit and 'colonized' by the white supremacy culture, and that we are being called to challenge and transform this. Comments included 'I'm amazed that the People of Color at 2016 Sessions stuck with this process to produce this Minute' and 'If there IS a cultural competency audit, it has to be led by People of Color! But isn't it kind of a delaying tactic, and couldn't the money be better spent?'. Increasingly, in this group there has been a sense of deep commitment to the work of undoing racism.

Opportunities for responding to readings or queries in pairs or small groups help people to go deeper and experience transformation.

It is important to go beyond our comfort zone internally within meeting and reaching out to other cultures and communities. We also embrace the principle of 'calling in, not calling out'.

There is a need to continue the work through study/reflection and through witness/action. Both of these are key.

We have a long way to go to transform the culture of Friends Meeting. Every step along the way matters. It is not just about 'being more welcoming'.

**Other thoughts or comments you would like to share?**

It is encouraging that NEYM is leading work on these issues. The 2016 Minute was not the driving force of the work on racism in our meeting, but it sets the stage for a wider conversation and action and helped move us to include this work in our yearly retreat program. How can we build bridges between/among meetings that help with this work?

Submitted by Carol Lewis and Ruth Hazzard  
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