

AN EXCITING NEW RACIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE IN PACIFIC YEARLY MEETING

“We Quakers have always been on the right side of issues of race, haven’t we? After all, from our very beginning we opposed slavery and supported integration. Didn’t Quakers create the underground railroad? Haven’t our families, schools and meetinghouses always been welcoming to persons of color?” . . . In fact, none of these statements is true. The record of The Religious Society of Friends on racial justice is indeed exemplary in many respects—but far from unblemished. Contemporary Friends have much work to do to promote genuine equality—not only in the larger society, but also within Quakerism itself.

In October 2010, PYM’s Committee on Ministry and Oversight created a new Subcommittee on Racial Justice. Its purpose “is to facilitate candid, loving dialogue and transformative activities regarding racial justice and racial healing within Pacific Yearly Meeting . . . [and] to model open, honest and caring dialogue on issues of race . . . “

The primary stimulus for this exciting new initiative can be found in the gentle, honest ministry of Vanessa Julye, Coordinator of the Committee for Ministry on Racism of Friends General Conference (FGC). For five successive years we have welcomed Vanessa to PYM’s Annual Gathering. In 2009, her landmark book (co-authored with Donna McDaniel) was published: *FIT FOR FREEDOM, NOT FOR FRIENDSHIP: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice* (Quaker Press of FGC). With the publication of this book, a growing wave of concern for fuller racial harmony and justice has crested among American Quakers, bringing with it a fresh resolve to do the needed work of justice and love.

Current members of the Subcommittee are Kamillah Fairchild, Ruth Fraser (clerk of M&O), Laura Magnani, Carl Magruder, Diego Navarro, Charla Roberson (co-clerk), Steve Smith (co-clerk), and Jim Summers. The upcoming PYM Annual Gathering (to be held at Claremont McKenna College, 25-30 July) will reflect the work of this subcommittee and its supporters:

- For an unprecedented sixth year, Vanessa Julye will be with us—this time not in a public role of featured speaker and advocate, but rather as a behind-the-scenes mentor and elder in support of PYM’s home-grown efforts to gather ourselves for this work.
- In preparation for the Annual Gathering, on Sunday 24 July Vanessa will meet with Friends of Color at Orange Grove Meetinghouse in Pasadena.
- In Worship-Sharing Groups some queries will address issues of racial justice and healing.
- The popular adult education series, Transformative Quakers, will include one or more sessions on prominent Friends of Color.
- Two Affinity Groups will meet regularly under the care of the Subcommittee: one for Friends of Color, and one for Friends of European Descent Concerned About Racism.
- Two Interest Groups will be sponsored by the Subcommittee: An intergenerational “Class-Race Exercise, Step Forward, Step Back” (aka “Power Walk) that highlights disparities originating in class and race, and a session on White Privilege. (Also, FCL and AFSC will jointly sponsor another Interest Group on racial injustices within the American criminal justice system.)

For questions about this exciting array of initiatives, contact Charla Robertson (818-602-8226, likes2eat@gmail.com) and Steve Smith (909-624-4057, ssmith@cmc.edu).