

# Peace and Justice Committee

## Annual Report 2021

Prepared by Matt Chandler

June 2, 2020

(Delayed from the regular May reporting)

### Active Membership

#### *Full Committee*

##### **Regular Members**

Steve Bacher  
Nola Bencze  
Gene Borish  
Matt Chandler (clerk)  
Jenna Davis  
Nancy Martin  
Alisa Miles  
Jasmine Spence

##### **Co-opted Members**

Owen Buxton  
Betsy Crofts  
Kathy Harr  
Bill Strong

##### ***Environmental Action Subcommittee***

Steve Bacher  
Gene Borish  
Katherine Borish  
Marguerite Chandler  
Matt Chandler  
Betsy Crofts  
Kathy Harr (clerk)  
Jasmine Spence

##### ***Racial Justice Subcommittee***

Steve Bacher  
Nola Bencze (clerk)  
Matt Chandler  
John Magee  
Tim Mammel  
Nancy Martin

### Reflections on an Eventful Year

In early May 2020, this Committee changed its name from “Peace and Service” to “Peace and Justice,” having no idea how timely that change would soon prove to be. On May 25, George Floyd was killed by Minneapolis Police officers, and the horrors of it all were captured on video, sparking nationwide protests against police brutality and racial injustice. Prompted by a call from Abington Friends Meeting for Quaker Meetings and other faith communities to join them in a demonstrating for racial justice on Friday, June 5, 2020, the Peace and Justice Committee organized a silent vigil in Newtown in solidarity. Members of the Meeting and the community brought signs and stood resolute all along State Street, between Center and Washington. At the time, no one knew this was the beginning of the largest wave of protest actions in US history--united under the banner of Black Lives Matter.

The week this report is being written marks one year of continuous bi-weekly vigils for racial justice organized by the Peace and Justice Committee. Through all four seasons--and through a global pandemic, no less--an average of 15-25 people from Newtown Friends and the surrounding community have stood firmly in public opposition to white supremacy, systemic racism, and abuses of power by law enforcement. These events have allowed us to forge

relationships with Newtown Borough Police, strengthen ties with members of local Friends Meetings (especially Southampton Meeting), form connections with other like-minded individuals in the community, spark conversations with many different passersby, encourage countless drivers inclined toward our cause, and raise awareness among less engaged citizens. The negative responses we get from some folks every time we go out also underscore the need for continued witness.

After several months of orchestration from the Committee as a whole, we decided to form a Racial Justice Subcommittee in October 2020 in order to more nimbly manage the logistics of the bi-weekly vigils. Members were also energized after hearing all of the voices of young people, with their zeal for racial justice, brought forward during the Bucks Quarterly Meeting in August 2020 (huge credit to Owen Buxton and Alisa Miles for making that happen). With Nola Bencze's able clerking, the Racial Justice Subcommittee also took on oversight of the conversations on race the Meeting has been having for a few years now (and which were paused in winter 2020-21) and of the Meeting's membership in POWER Bucks. The formation of the Environmental Action Subcommittee in early 2020 set a good precedent, allowing for more flexibility around the schedules and interests of Committee members and others not formally part of the Peace and Justice Committee.

And indeed, the Environmental Action Subcommittee was also very busy over the past year. With Kathy Harr as clerk, the Subcommittee met regularly through the summer of 2020, and was delighted to see that two of its early priorities were fulfilled quicker than anyone expected: the Meeting transitioned its gas and electricity to a renewable energy provider and the Meeting's major investments moved away from the fossil fuel industry permanently. The Subcommittee then turned its focus to visioning spiritual connections to the environment around us amidst the pandemic. This evolved into an Adult First Day School session led by Jasmine Spence in October 2020 and, designed to elicit input from all different Meeting members and attendees about what the natural environment around the Meetinghouse means to them and what we might do collectively to stay connected (or even deepen connections) to the cherished environment during a time of such disconnection. The feedback the Subcommittee collected led its members to reach out to the Ad-hoc Committee on Parking and the Building and Grounds Committee, to address concrete matters of individual transportation and site master planning.

The story of the Meeting's discernment process with regard to parking and master planning is still unfolding, and it extends well beyond the purview of the Environmental Action Subcommittee. For the purposes of this report, what should be noted is the dedicated engagement of Subcommittee members (especially Jasmine Spence and Marguerite Chandler) through many behind-the-scenes organizing actions along with the visible coordination of Meeting-wide information-gathering and deliberation throughout the winter and spring of 2021. This all happened with minimal need for involvement from the Peace and Justice Committee as a whole, and it is a testament to the value of restructuring with standing subcommittees. Newtown Friends Meeting has incredible energy for peace and justice work--of multiple varieties. This Committee is thriving because of the many resources offered by our entire community. And the Meeting as a whole will continue to thrive because it puts its values into action. It is an honor for this Committee to serve as a conduit of that blessed transformation of believing into doing.