

## Meeting for Business May 2004

Acting Clerk: Barbara Esther  
Acting Recording Clerk: Steve Livingston

Meeting gathered at 11:46 a.m. and heard two readings offered by the clerk. The first was a Nilotic proverb (that is, originating from the area of Africa near the Nile River): “a village without elders is like a tree without roots.” The second was a reading from Quaker Faith and Practice of Britain Yearly Meeting, a quotation of the contemporary British Friend George Gorman:

One of the unexpected things I have learnt in my life as a Quaker is that religion is basically about relationships between people. This was an unexpected discovery because I had been brought up to believe that religion was essentially about our relationship with God.

If we are sensitive, we find that everything that happens to us, good or bad, can help us build a vision of the meaning of life. We can be helped to be sensitive by reading the Bible and being open to experience of nature, music, books, painting, sport, or whatever our particular interest may be. It is in and through all these things that we hear God speaking to us. But I do not think I am alone in my certainty that it's in my relationships with people that the deepest religious truths are most vividly disclosed.

### Attendance

There were seventeen Friends in attendance: Christy Bischoff, Alice Brown, David Clements, Barbara Esther, Will Kaylor, Kristi and George Gjelfriend, Joy Gossett, Steve Livingston, Laura Maynard, Philip Neal, Grace Ellen Oldham, Elizabeth Roebing, Ursula Scott, Eda Smith, Gerald Smith, Jennifer Walker

### Introductions

Friends welcomed Willie Kaylor, who was attending business meeting for the first time.

### Review of Agenda

Friends made a few changes in the order of the agenda but agreed to try to consider all of the proposed items of business.

### News of Ourselves

Elizabeth Roebing conveyed thanks from Veterans for Peace for allowing them to “find shelter” in our Meetinghouse for their regular meetings. Veterans for Peace also holds a weekly vigil at Pack Square, every Tuesday afternoon.

David Clements reported that Evan is “more relaxed than ever” after receiving several massages at the “spa retreat” she is attending in Miami.

Ursula Scott reminded us that Al Dupree will reach his 90th birthday next week, and Friends agreed to hold an informal celebration next First Day.

Friends are asked to continue holding the family of Bettina Wolff in the Light as daughter Jennifer Snow Wolff, a member of Atlanta Meeting, is slowly recovering consciousness after suffering a stroke a month ago.

### Support Committee for Christy Bischoff

As requested at last month's Meeting for Business, Christy's support committee brought further clarification of her financial needs and recommendations for disbursement of funds. Ursula Scott reported that their budget of just under \$3000 included the \$1800 expense of the trip itself, together with \$500 to cover maintenance of Christy's apartment during her absence, \$111 for special health insurance during her two-month sojourn, and \$500 of discretionary funds to cover incidental expenses and purchases.

Ursula reported that only \$184 remains to be raised. Friends considered how best to receive further donations and to dispense the funds that might exceed the amount budgeted. Suggestions included donating the excess to Christian Peacemakers, or underwriting expenses incurred by Christy as she travels in her ministry after her return.

**Friends recommended that any further donations be written to Asheville Friends Meeting and earmarked for Christy. Friends agreed that if the total funds exceed the budgeted amount, that the excess will be held in the Meeting's general fund until Christy's return, and then we may decide how best to use the additional funds.**

## NOMINATING

The report was read by Joy Gossett

“Asheville Friends Meeting Nominating Committee continues to meet regularly and talk with Friends to ascertain Friends' leadings for service to AFM. Some responses were received on questionnaire forms; this cumulative information has been of great help towards making nominations for needed service.

“At this time, Nominating Committee brings to AFM the nominations of Steve Coward for Religious Education Committee, and John Wickle and Gary Briggs for Meetinghouse and Grounds.

“Other nominations, including those for Clerk and Recording Clerk will be made at the sixth month Meeting for Worship for the Conduct of Business.

“Submitted respectfully in love and friendship.

“Joy Gossett, Clerk  
AFM Nominating Committee”

A Friend inquired about the progress of the Pastoral Care Committee, suggested at last month's Meeting for Business. Joy reported that the ad hoc committee is coming along, with Joy, Karen Cernek, and Susan Mitchell having met already and planning to bring a proposal to next month's Business Meeting. She reported that several other Friends have come forward expressing interest in serving the Meeting in this way.

In response to an inquiry about term limits, Joy related that Nominating Committee is not clear on what term lengths should be, except for the two year duration for clerk and recording clerk. They are learning more about past practices of our Meeting, but their primary focus is on finding Friends who are led to sustain the work of the Meeting and open to subsequent discernment of the length of service.

**Friends approved the nominations of Steve Coward for Religious Education Committee, and John Wykle and Gary Briggs for Meetinghouse and Grounds. Friends minute their appreciation to Nominating Committee for their ongoing work.**

## State of the Society Report

The clerk read the draft of the State of the Society report. With only a couple of minor exceptions, Friends were very comfortable with the content of the report. Friends asked that the numbers of new members in meeting and average number of attenders of business meeting be confirmed, the ages of the children involved in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program be ascertained, and that the transfer of two of our members to a different faith community be noted. With those changes, **Friends approved the State of the Society Report.** [The approved report is presented on pages 1 and 2 of this issue – ed.]

Friends were moved to express their sense that our Meeting has benefited from the guidance and example of our outgoing clerk. A minute of gratitude was immediately drafted.

**Asheville Friends Meeting wishes to express its deep and heartfelt gratitude to Evan Richardson for her stewardship of this Meeting as its clerk. Under her spirit-led direction, the quality of worship has deepened and our sense of community has increased. We are mindful that this service has often required a contribution from both Evan and her family. Our meeting sends back to her, and to her family, our light and our deep appreciation.**

Friends broke for lunch and fellowship at 12:50 p.m. then gathered again to discern our business at 1:25 p.m.

Christy Bischoff rose to speak for Peace and Earth Committee in recommending that our Meeting endorse the Earth Charter. She reminded Friends of the good process that was followed in presenting the Earth Charter to the Meeting, allowing for seasoning through the committee's worshipful discernment, a forum facilitated by Susan Carlyle, the Charter's principal steward among SAYMA Friends, and ample notice of intentions to allow for individuals to read and consider the substance of the Charter.

A Friend asked what it would mean to our Meeting and to individual Friends for us to “endorse” the Charter. Christy

explained that there are many concepts embodied in the Charter that parallel expressed Quaker testimonies, that the document is too lengthy to digest all at once, and suggested that Meeting or individuals may choose to sit with smaller portions of it, to discern what actions arise from the charges expressed in it.

Several Friends came forward to encourage our endorsing the Charter, pointing out the symbolic value of joining with many other groups worldwide in embracing the expressed philosophy of the document.

One Friend felt uncomfortable with the strident language of the document, though agreeing with all of the principles embodied within. Another Friend felt that although the principles in the Charter resonated strongly, it set goals that were impossible to reach, and diverted too much focus from self-improvement and spiritual growth to judgement of others' perceived shortcomings. This Friend was particularly challenged by our Meeting's attachment to our cars, and felt uncomfortable about endorsing a document that called on us to stop using fossil fuels when we were so clearly not ready to stop using fossil fuels.

Jennifer Walker advised that endorsing the Charter is an acknowledgement of what we feel led to do, not what we feel others should do. She suggested that perhaps the main value in the document is to bring attention to and stimulate dialogue about these issues and principles. Additionally, endorsement by our monthly meeting is a necessary step in bringing it to SAYMA to further its impact.

Another Friend spoke to the urgent need for a new environmental ethic, and offered the example of the way attitudes about smoking changed once "push came to shove" and people realized how destructive it was. Restrictions and limitations become necessary out of a need to survive.

A Friend spoke of the sense that a coercive tone might be perceived in the document that is not very "Quakerly". At the same time, this document can be a guideline for future actions.

Another Friend expressed reservations about endorsing a document that we are not ready to comply with. The clerk likened our position to that of William Penn, who as a Quaker found he was not ready to lay down his sword, and was advised to "wear the sword as long as thee can." We may live to see the time when we no longer come to Meeting more than once a month because we can no more drive a car than wear a sword.

A Friend spoke from a keen awareness of fifty years of species depletion, urging that we move forward with endorsing the Charter. Another Friend likened the Charter to the Sermon on the Mount, exhorting us to lofty goals, acknowledging our responsibilities although we may each of us fall short of meeting them.

Friends finally agreed to the following Minute:

**Acknowledging that the Earth is in need of care and striving to be better stewards of it, we join with others in endorsing the Earth Charter.**

Jennifer then presented a local action, a grassroots effort. The University, our near neighbor, plans to clear-cut 2.5 acres of the "urban forest" opposite the Botanical Gardens on W. T. Weaver Blvd. for the purpose of building a temporary parking lot. This issue is deepening into a community dialogue, with many local residents offering joyful and optimistic alternatives to the destruction of the forest.

Many of the people supporting alternative solutions to the parking problem are members of the University community, including some in the biology department, who use the forest for research and instruction. The cost of the parking lot will be very high. Much of the neighborhood uses that land as a park.

Friends weighed the urgency of the matter, the strength of Jennifer's personal leading to be active in the dialogue, the need to speak truth rather than simply being reactionary, attention to good Quaker practice of reporting and seasoning, and the opportunity to put into practice our previous decision to endorse the Earth Charter.

Clerk sensed that there was approval for the signing of the petition as a corporate body with an acknowledgement that it had not gone through the deliberate Quaker process that we would normally give such an issue. Friends were reminded that this was perhaps an opportunity to implement the Earth Charter.

**Those gathered at Business Meeting, given the urgency of the matter, felt led to endorse this petition despite the fact that all members of the Meeting may not have had a chance to be thoroughly informed of the issue.**

George Gjelfriend stated that while he could not stand in the way of this, he could not unite with it.

**Friends united in their support for Jennifer in following her leading.**

Many Friends signed the petition as individuals.

**Ministry and Counsel**

Steve Livingston reported that M&C had failed to meet its deadline in preparing its report, so was only submitting a query for reflection by individual committees: why do we have such a hard time preparing ourselves for meeting for business, specifically getting written reports to the Clerk by the requested deadline, so that the Clerk may worshipfully prepare our agenda? The committee recognizes that this behavior impacts our meeting for business as well as our clerk. Steve would like to point out that this was the case with M&C this month; this committee shares the responsibility as much as any other. He would like to simply plant this seed, and return to this query next month.

**Finance**

David Clements read the Report to May Business Meeting

1. "We congratulate Amelia Wallace on her recent admission to the North Carolina High School of Science and Math.
2. "The final financial report for 2003 will be presented.
3. "We have reviewed the various separate funds held by the Meeting. For several of these Funds Meeting has not recorded a decision about which committee is empowered to direct the Treasurer to disburse funds. Without such a decision any expenditure from these funds would need to come to Meeting for Business. We are making two recommendations regarding special funds:
  - a. "The Meeting House Emergency Fund contains \$6,000. We have put no limits on its use. We recommend that the House and Grounds Committee disburse this as needed and report to Meeting afterward. This money might be needed for an emergency related to the Meeting House, and it would be inconvenient to have to call a Meeting for Business to disburse money.
  - b. "We are holding over \$700 previously raised for projects of the Youth of the Meeting. We recommend that this be disbursed only by decision of the Junior Business Meeting.
4. "The Finance Committee was asked to organize and schedule a threshing session or forum on several questions that have arisen in Business Meeting. This Forum is currently scheduled for 6/13, which happens to be also the last day of SAYMA. We are open to delaying this forum or rescheduling for a different day of the week if friends prefer.
5. "We remind the Meeting about the Young Friends Support Fund. This fund is worth about \$10,700, and has been designated by Meeting for grants to college-age friends. The program was under the care of the Ministry and Counsel Committee (or the equivalent earlier Committee) in 2002. They took the opportunity to communicate with our young (sometimes dispersed) friends, and also invited them to accept a gift subscription to a Quaker journal. In 2003 we allocated \$500 from that fund for grants. Ministry and Counsel invited Friends to request money. We received several requests for grants. We have realized that Meeting has never responded to these young friends, and the allocated money has not been spent. We recommend that Meeting appoint an ad hoc committee to respond to these friends, to review the program, and to make further recommendations. If the program is continued, we would recommend again allocating \$500 for the Fund.
6. "Rentals for use of the Meeting House: We have received a recommendation from Joan MacKenzie, our MeetingHouse Use Coordinator, that our basic rents be increased, perhaps to \$20 for two hours from \$15. We thought that \$25 might be more appropriate (1/2 price for groups that have Meeting connections.) We note that the Imagine Group, the most frequent user of the Meeting House, pays far less than our present rates. We decided to ask Meeting to have the Finance Committee review rental rates and policies, to set new rates if appropriate, and to supervise collection of rents. We would also like to negotiate new terms with the Imagine Group. We note that in the past discussion of rents has occupied a great deal of time in Business Meeting, and suggest that if a discussion is needed it be held in a different venue. The Finance Committee will be open to hearing from friends about this issue.
7. "Contributions for the first quarter totaled about \$7,800.
8. We have sold our common stock, Exxon and BellSouth.

David explained the meaning of each line in the chart "summary of fund activity" [see next page – ed.]. He further explained that the divesting of stocks was planned and approved last year. He reminded us that the Pickett Fund grant supported the leading of Lauren Mitchell to work with the FWCC Youth Triennial.

A Friend expressed gratitude and relief that Finance was diverting our funds into more appropriate investments such as Self-Help Credit Union.

**Friends approved empowering House and Grounds with disbursement of the Meeting House Emergency Fund as they discern the need arising.**

David related some misgivings about the disposition of the \$700 held over from Youth projects. Friends agreed to hold over consideration of this.

**Friends asked that the threshing session scheduled for 6/13 be postponed to allow participation by those who are already committed to attending SAYMA on that date.**

**Friends approved an ad hoc committee consisting of Elizabeth Roebing and Lynnora Bierce to review the records from the Young Friends Support Fund and pick up the work that had been laid aside. Friends approved the clerk of Finance providing consultation with them.**

Many Friends expressed a sense that additional involvement was needed in discerning rental policies. We were reminded that rental rates were previously made by House and Grounds.

**Friends approved holding a forum or open meeting of Finance Committee to season the questions around pricing of Meetinghouse rental, asking for participation of the Meetinghouse Coordinator, House and Grounds members, and other concerned Friends.**

#### **individual concerns**

Grace Ellen Oldham asked that Friends note the greatly improved appearance of the interior of our refrigerator, and asked that we support her stewardship in both spirit and action.

Grace Ellen also spoke of her concern that many evangelical publications she sees regularly portray our current political leadership as Divinely inspired, and opposition to it as inherently evil. She is especially disturbed by the so-called “marriage act”, the Constitutional Amendment that would declare marriage as a solely heterosexual right. Her experience leads her to fear that the evangelicals are highly organized and powerful, representing a large bloc of voters.

Jennifer Walker invited all Friends to join in giving their light to Christy Bischoff as she embarks on her Christian Peacemakers journey. A send-off worship and pot luck will take place at the Meetinghouse on 5/23, 5:30 p.m.

#### **Closing**

With thanks for Friends’ gift of time and attention to our business, Meeting closed at 3:20 p.m. with silent worship.