

Meeting for Worship for the Conduct of Business
Asheville Friends Meeting
8/14/2005

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Meeting commenced at 12:05 p.m. with a period of worship. The clerk shared a reading from Life's Journeys according to Mister Rogers (Page 45):

I need thinking time when someone asks me a searching question. I wonder why it seems to be so uncomfortable for many people to wait through the silence. People of all ages have deep feelings, and if we have the patience to wait through the silence, it's often astounding what people will tell us.

There were twenty-four Friends in attendance: Alice Brown, Rain Newcomb, Steve Houseworth, Susan Mitchell, David Clements, Joy Gossett, Kristi Gjelfriend, George Gjelfriend, Ellen Frerotte, Jim Frerotte, Karen Cernek, Willie Kaylor, Phil Neal, Jim Cavener, Alan Robinson, Barbara Esther, Grey Kirbach, Eda Smith, Evan Richardson, Gerry Smith, Ellen Oldham, Elizabeth Roebing, Steve Livingston (recording clerk), and Lynnora Bierce (clerk)

The clerk asked that Friends hold her in the Light during this her first experience clerking a business meeting. She asked that Friends listen deeply to one another, and to speak only once to any issue before us.

New Attenders:

Jim Frerotte introduced himself as a visitor, attending on the occasion of wife Ellen's acceptance as a member of the Society of Friends.

News of Ourselves:

Susan Mitchell reported that daughter Lauren is now in Bangladesh, where she has experienced eating a meal using only her fingers as utensils. Lauren would welcome any contact from Friends. Anyone wishing to contact her may get her address from Susan.

Willie Kaylor reported the discovery that a blastocyst left over from his wife's *in vitro* fertilization process has been in cold storage for the past six years, and may still be viable. He is hoping to donate the tiny embryo to prospective parents or to stem cell research.

Joy Gossett commented on the beauty of our Meeting's youth, and their growth in wisdom and favor of the G*D in them.

Clearness Committees for Membership:

David Clements read a report of the clearness committee for Ellen Frerotte:

"Ellen Frerotte, Alice Brown, Margaret Farmer, Kristi Gjelfriend, and David Clements met at Alice's house on August 3. We heard from Ellen about her spiritual journey and her experience with the Society of Friends and with Asheville Friends Meeting. Ellen desires to become a member of Asheville Friends Meeting. We were impressed by and convinced of Ellen's sincerity and her willingness and ability to unite with Friends generally and with our Meeting. We see in her a loving and grounded soul who has already contributed much to our community. We recommend that Meeting welcome her as a member."

A Friend pointed out that Ellen is now the third member of Asheville Friends Meeting who works as an ESL coordinator for the Country School System.

Friends approved the membership of Ellen Frerotte in the Society of Friends and Asheville Monthly Meeting.

After chastising himself for failing to submit a written report, Phil Neal reported for two clearness committees on which he said he had the honor of serving. He described that both the committee for Grey Kirbach and for Joy Gossett had lengthy and leisurely discussions, and found that both candidates had every good reason for joining our community.

Friends approved the membership of Grey Kirbach in the Society of Friends and Asheville Monthly Meeting.

Friends approved the membership of Joy Gossett in the Society of Friends and Asheville Monthly Meeting.

Joy Gossett and Robin Wells served with Phil on Grey's committee. Robin Wells and Barbara Esther served with Phil on Joy's committee. Since Joy will be away at a SAYF retreat on fourth Sunday this month, and due to Grey's imminent departure to Berea College, Friends decided to pre-empt the customary practice of welcoming new members at Sandwich Sunday and have a brief celebration at rise of meeting next week.

Ellen Frerotte will be welcomed at next month's Sandwich Sunday, 9/25, along with any other attenders who may be approved for membership at the 9/11 meeting for business.

A Friend reminded Ministry and Counsel to write a letter recommending Grey to the Berea community.

Ministry and Counsel:

Evan Richardson, explaining that she was not at the committee meeting, read a report submitted by Steve Livingston:

"Meeting convened shortly after noon on 7/10. Present were Krist Gjelfriend, Martha Huggins, George Gjelfriend, Alice Brown, Susan Mitchell, and Steve Livingston (clerk). Margaret Farmer arrived later. Jennifer Walker was a guest for the initial portion of the meeting to join our discussion of last month's Meeting for Business.

"We began our meeting with silent worship.

"We were all dismayed that no agenda items had been submitted to the clerk or recording clerk in a timely fashion. This prevented the clerk from preparing for the meeting by holding the agenda in the Light, consulting with other Friends in advance, and organizing the agenda. During the meeting the clerk was understandably distracted from the work of listening and discerning the sense of the Meeting, or even making a basic judgment as to whether any item rightly belonged in the meeting.

"Our sense is that Meeting would benefit from a stricter discipline for creating the agenda for our meetings for business. We recommend that Meeting set a requirement for punctuality, and suggest that agenda items be submitted no later than one week prior to Meeting for Business. We suggest that the weekly e-calendar take note of the deadline so that Friends are aware in advance of it. We recognize that occasional emergencies will move us to make an exception to this practice.

"We examined closely the concerns around the State of the Society report that were brought to business meeting. We felt that we as a Meeting would have benefited from taking more time for good process rather than rushing to meet the artificial deadline for submission of the report. We felt that under the circumstances, the ad hoc committee to draft the report had fulfilled its charge well. We sought ways to improve upon those circumstances for the upcoming year and identified a number of ways to accomplish this:

"1. The process would be greatly facilitated by a full-term clerk.

"2. Greater communication among the committees would be helpful, and could be accomplished in part by regular meetings of committee clerks.

"3. Participation on the committee level would be beneficial, perhaps beginning with each committee writing a description of how they see their work and the challenges to accomplishing it.

"4. A proper seasoning process is essential to creating a report that reflects the sense of the Meeting. In order to ensure proper seasoning, the work needs to begin sooner and not be abandoned due to the perceived deadline of Yearly Meeting.

"5. A clearer idea of the purpose of the report is needed. Is it intended to chronicle our Meeting's history? How vital is the report in conveying the condition of our Meeting to the yearly Meeting community?

"6. More Meeting involvement and feedback could be facilitated by posting the SOTS report on our website and by holding a Called Meeting for Business as the process draws close to completion.

"7. We shared a sense that recent reports have been overlong and too detailed.

"Ministry and Counsel recommend that we hold a Committee Clerks' Meeting before the end of ninth month."

Regarding the recommendation for a deadline to submit items for business meeting agenda, a Friend reminded us of vocal ministry we had heard during earlier worship that warned of bad results arising from being "shamed" into actions. She related her own experience with a family crisis that prevented her from submitting a report in a timely fashion, and suggested the need to hold each other tenderly in the Light rather than adhering to an arbitrary deadline. She also suggested that the clerks send out a friendly reminder for agenda items, and that email is not the preferred form of communication for all Friends.

Two Friends spoke of their experience in other meetings. One expressed that "a week is a long time". The other described a former meeting's requirement that agenda items be submitted a month in advance. What part of our work, this Friend asked, is so important that it cannot wait a month to be considered?

Other Friends supported the need for flexibility, considering the realities of our lives, as we are, for the most part, working families with children. Friends also pointed out that the needs of the clerks should be taken into account as well, so as not to make the role of clerking more onerous by overwhelming the agenda at the last minute.

The matter was referred back to Ministry and Counsel.

A Friend pointed out that it is the clerks' responsibility to ensure that items held over from one business meeting are included in the agenda for a future meeting as intended. Another Friend noted the importance of a well-prepared committee report, that is clearly worded and accurately reflects the sense of the committee meeting.

Friends accepted the report of Ministry and Counsel.

Nominating Committee:

Karen Cernek read a written report:

"The Nominating Committee would like to express its heartfelt appreciation to all the committees that have responded to our request for a written description of their work. Not only are these descriptions crucial to our committee's work, but they are important for Friends considering committee work, as well as future committees. Please update us if there are any changes or new major projects.

"It is with much joy and gratitude that we bring the following nominations to the Meeting:

"For nomination as clerk of Asheville Friends Meeting: Steve Livingston

"For nomination as Recording Clerk: Lynnora Bierce

"We have two Friends for nomination to membership on House and Grounds: Benjamin Hearne and Christopher Jayne

"For nomination to membership on Religious Education: Barry Master

"We also seek the Meeting's approval to release Barry Master from his service on Peace and Earth Committee with many thanks for his work and service."

In response to a Friend's inquiry, Karen said, terms of service have not yet been considered by Nominating Committee. Steve Livingston expressed that his acceptance of the role of clerk was based on the assumption of a two-year term. A Friend pointed out that it takes the first year for a clerk to learn the role well enough to start getting it done right. Another Friend affirmed the decision of staggering terms of clerk and recording clerk, and Lynnora offered to serve for a single year. Karen agreed to take the matter back to Nominating for further discernment.

Meeting approved Steve Livingston for clerk of Asheville Friends Meeting from 9th month 2005 to 8th month 2007, and released him from membership on Ministry and Counsel, with service to continue on that committee *ex officio*.

Meeting approved Lynnora Bierce for Recording Clerk with term to be reviewed at 9th month meeting for business.

Friends inquired about the two nominees for House and Grounds, not being familiar with either of them as they are not attenders. Their identities and connections to the meeting were explained, and other examples were offered of Friends who serve on committees although not attenders. A Friend supported the role of committee work as a community building exercise, and its value to those who do not attend meetings for worship. This Friend remarked on the sense of growing exuberance in our community, and the mutual benefit to be derived in committee work by non-attenders.

Meeting approved release of Barry Master from Peace and Earth Committee. Meeting approved Barry Master to serve on Religious Education Committee.

Friends approved Benjamin Hearne and Christopher Jayne to serve on House and Grounds Committee.

Friends accepted the report of Nominating Committee.

Religious Education:

Barbara Esther read a written report:

"Report of the Religious Education Committee August 14, 2005.

"The Committee wishes to offer a minute of appreciation to Robin Wells for years of dedicated service to the youth and children of our meeting. She is beginning full time work this school year and therefore she will need to drop her part time work for the meeting. The position of Religious Education Coordinator has been announced via the e-news of the meeting. If any person in meeting would like to consider working as RE Coordinator, we ask that you contact Barbara Esther, clerk of the committee, to discuss the possibility. Robin knows the most about the work involved, but a copy of the original work contract is posted in the foyer.

"We thank Robin Wells, who faithfully and lovingly provided the plans and materials for the children of the meeting over several years. She gave well beyond the expected level of commitment, seeking to provide an environment in which each child felt the love of Divine Light while sojourning in our First Day School classes and interacting in the larger meeting. Her continued presence as a teacher will be consoling, but her absence as an orchestrator of the First Day School will be a challenge for all of us. Thank you, Robin.

"Another opportunity available to someone is the Southern Appalachian Young Friends (SAYF) Coordinator/Contact person for Asheville Friends Meeting. The description of this position is also on the e-news and in the foyer. While this is not a position that RE committee needs to fill so much as it is a whole-meeting responsibility, we wish to encourage and support the continued involvement of our Young Friends in SA YF activities. We hope that a Friend will come forward to coordinate that work, and that many others will support it by contributions toward the cost of transportation and scholarship as well as by acting as Friendly Adult Presences and Drivers at retreats and during Yearly Meeting.

"The RE Committee is reviewing our duties and goals for the First Day program for children and youth. Whether or not someone comes forward as coordinator, we are working on a team plan to share the responsibility around the issue of whether or not our current time structure on First Day is best serving our personal and our community needs as we deepen our spiritual lives together. In the first two worship sharings, we had the opportunity to hear much around both our children and our adult religious and spiritual growing. We anticipate that at least some of the last worship sharing, which is scheduled for Aug 21, will look at some more concrete ideas of how our First Day time together might flow. We will however be sure to hold the space open to hear whatever people would like to share about this issue. Whether or not you have already attended one of the previous sessions, we invite all to come. We see these sharings as a series through which each meeting together deepens our searching and processing.

"After that last worship sharing our committee will meet together to process what has risen out of these sessions. What has come up so far clearly relates to both the Religious Education Committee and the Spiritual Enrichment Committee. We look forward to joining in further conversations with these two committees, as well as all in our community as Way continues to open for all of us to explore this issue. Please contact anyone on our committee with your thoughts, concerns, issues – things you think we should know and be considering.

"Our committee would also like to extend our appreciation to Barbara Esther who has been a member of our committee and even facilitated one of the worship sharing sessions. We would like to ask the Meeting's approval for the official inclusion of Barbara as a wonderful help this summer."

Friends approved Barbara Esther to serve on the ad-hoc committee on First Day Meeting Structure, with thanks for her prior service to the committee.

Friends accepted the report.

Friends held the ad hoc committee in the Light as they seek clearness on the structure of our First Day schedule.

Finance Committee:

Satchel gave a report for the Finance Committee.

"The financial commitment letter that was sent to our members and attenders in the beginning of the sixth month yielded good support, mostly in creating community awareness of the need. One of the items mentioned in the letter asked whether contributors would be interested in having funds automatically deducted from their bank account on a monthly or quarterly basis in order to simplify the process of giving to meeting. The small number of people who indicated they would consider this option does not justify the effort required to administer such a program and we will not pursue automatic withdrawals at this time.

"A side benefit of this project was to improve the completeness of our physical address mailing list.

"Contributions through the first half of 2005 total just under ten thousand dollars at \$9,974. At the same point last year, contributions totaled \$11,240. If contributions track at this rate, we can expect a shortfall of around \$12,000 (\$20,000 versus \$32,000). In 2004, contributions accounted for 84% of total meeting expenses. At that rate, we will only be able to support \$24,000 in expenses. For reference, total expenditures for Outreach in 2004 was just under \$11,000.

"Our main checking account has a balance of just over \$43,000, so the meeting has plenty of cash to cover our expenses."

Satchel distributed a written report showing our financial position at this time as well as a breakdown of contributors according to their level of contributions. This second document [see [Attachment A](#)] shows that a total of 34 different contributors have given money to the Meeting so far this year, most of whom – eleven – gave between \$100 and \$200. Ten have given more than \$500, while seven have contributed less than \$100. The report also shows that the rate of contributions for 2005 is lagging behind last year's rate by about one eighth.

The first document [see [Attachment B](#)], showing income and expenditures, showed a shortfall of over \$3000 so far this year. Satchel urged Friends to recognize that a shortfall seemed very likely at the end of the year, and that we should consider where our budget might be cut.

Responding to Friends' questions, Satchel reported that the water bill had been overpaid at some point, resulting in a less-than-usual expense in that line item, that the apparent deficit in coffee sales is due to an unusually large inventory at the moment, and that the large sum in the "worker's compensation" line includes the cost of liability insurance.

A Friend noted that our current budget is very similar to our budget of fifteen years ago, but the makeup of the meeting has changed significantly. Other Friends noted the reduction in rental income, and noted that the problem of mold and fungus makes our meeting space less desirable to renters.

Friends were moved to ask for greater encouragement of donations as well as reductions in expenses. Friends pointed out that everyone benefits from such encouragement, that the level of giving among unprogrammed Friends is miniscule compared to programmed Friends or other, more traditional denominations, that we can help one another be more prosperous – and therefore more able to contribute - by supporting each others' businesses. Friends asked that more details of our financial reports be published as part of the minutes. A Friend suggested that the location of the donation box be announced at rise of meeting each week.

In response to the clerk's suggestion of an ad hoc committee to examine fundraising, a Friend pointed out that the Long Range Visioning and Planning Committee had assumed this responsibility in the past.

A Friend noted that the report submitted by the committee was clear and concise, making the task of discernment easier to the community. In response to an inquiry about revenues from the Meeting yard sale, Satchel said it would appear in the next quarterly report. A Friend offered gratitude to Kristi Gjelfriend for her tireless efforts organizing and facilitating the event.

Friends accepted the Finance Committee's report with thanks.

Individual Concerns:

Steve Houseworth relayed a request from Agnita Dupree that the responsibilities for the continuity of the Givens Estate Worship Group not fall on her. So far the group has met every week except the current one, due to meeting for business. Steve expressed concern that we continue to support the group. Friends united in recognizing Agnita's ongoing need for visitation and support, and our responsibility as a community to look after our elderly members. The clerk asked that Ministry and Counsel look after this matter.

David Clements presented a minute adopted by this year's SAYMA Gathering, which had originated with the FGC Planning Committee, reflecting their experience with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered, and Queer (LGBTQ) Friends. After David read a short epistle from FGC, a Friend related that this minute arose from the FGC Planning Committee in response to recent policy changes being considered by Friends United Meeting (FUM) that would proscribe LGBTQ Friends from holding certain positions within their Yearly Meeting.

While Friends felt easy with the content of the minute, some were uneasy with the sense of *pro forma* approval of a minute that did not arise from our own discernment, but rather was quaker to our Meeting in a pre-digested form, leaving no room for seasoning or expression of our own community's experience. A Friend expressed resistance to having our Quaker process become reactionary, dictated by the actions of FUM. There was not unity as to whether the minute was concerned at all with issues of sexuality, rather than being a simple statement of the universality of Divine gifts. A Friend described the minute as diverting attention between inclusion and exclusion. A Friend described the sense of vulnerability that had been related to her by a Lesbian woman in a FUM. This Friend felt moved to denouncing FUM's intended policy.

An ad-hoc committee consisting of Evan Richardson, David Clements, Ellen Frerotte, George Gjelfriend, and Willie Kaylor rose up to season the matter.

Phil Neal brought to the attention of the Meeting a document from our files, which denotes the procedure for conducting a memorial meeting in the manner of Friends. He expressed regret that the document had not been available to assist the preparations for Al Dupree's memorial. In response to the clerk's inquiry, George Gjelfriend replied that the Dying and Death Committee had not been aware of the document. Alan Robinson offered to add the document to the End of Life collection on our website.

Joy Gossett reminded Friends that a Friend is needed to serve as SAYF liaison, in time for the retreat coming up next month. She asked that a request be posted in our weekly e-letter and that Friends refer any suggested candidates to Nominating Committee asap.

Kristi Gjelfriend expressed concerns about the presence of cars in the play area of our front yard - the dangers posed to our children and the possible damage to our lawn.

Close of Meeting:

Meeting ended with silent worship at 3:21 p.m.