

**Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business
Asheville Friends Meeting**

Tenth Month 9, 2016

Present: Edie Patrick; Bob Lackey; Sharon Smith; Jim Barham; Pat Johnson; Katherine Kowal; Margaret Normile; Gail Hipkins; Jim Hipkins; Steve Livingston; Lynnora Bierce; Paul Hibshman; Jim Cavener; Barbara Esther, Recording Clerk; and Patti Hughes, Presiding Clerk.

Meeting began with a period of silent worship from which clerk, Patti Hughes, read the following:

It is by our "imperfections" that we move towards each other, towards wholeness of relationship. It is our oddities, our grittiness, the occasions when we hurt or are hurt, that challenge us to a deeper knowledge of each other.

Practicing Peace Catherine Whitmire
quoting Kenneth Barnes

Friends accepted the agenda as prepared.

The clerk brought forward a minute of thanks as follows: We offer a minute of appreciation for Gail and Alan for the time and care they have given to our community over the last couple of years. They have clerked during some challenging times in our meeting. We give our love and appreciation as we release them from this duty.

Although we are thankful for the service of these two Friends, one person did not unite with the sentiment. Another Friend spoke of some difficult times and troubling ways that one of the clerks acted upon occasions during the past two years. Another Friend said she feels an appreciation for a clerk who feels compassion for the suffering of those in our meeting. Another Friend spoke of saying thanks for any work given to the meeting whether or not they were able to do the work to everyone's satisfaction. The clerk will take the minute back to Ministry and Counsel Committee for further seasoning.

Two letters of transfer

A letter of recommendation for transfer was received from Greenville Monthly Meeting for Chris Foreman which approved his transfer on September 11, 2016.

Another letter of recommendation was received from Atlanta Friends Meeting for the transfer of Bob Lackey approved in their monthly meeting of September 2016. We look forward to formally welcoming these two new members to our meeting in the near future.

Friends did not approved the minutes for Eighth Month. A Friend said that her behavior was characterized as bad whereas others who also showed bad behavior were not

described in that way. This was perceived by her as a personal attack. The working group will address these concerns and others before approval of Eighth Month Minutes is sought. The request for housing in the meetinghouse is also to be corrected from rental to a housing request.

Treasurer's Report: There was no report for either Eighth Month or Ninth Month. The clerk will check with the treasurer on the status of his reports.

Minute 1: The Ninth Month Minutes were approved as written.

Committee Reports:

Nominating Committee-Jim Cavener

Minute 2: The committee brings forward Scotty Utz to be a member of Ministry and Counsel Committee. Friends approved.

Racial Justice Committee - Adrienne Weir

1. The RJC recommends that Asheville Friends approve the Racial Justice Committee's mission statement, revised as follows:

The mission of Asheville Friends' Racial Justice Committee is to address white supremacy* within Asheville Friends Meeting, the town of Asheville and SAYMA.

*Racial prejudice + institutional power = white supremacy, a.k.a. racism.

Discussion of 1: The clerk reminded us that last month the committee was asked to define the term white supremacy. One Friend asked for a mission statement which reflects the work of the committee similar to the one approved by the yearly meeting. This would include wanting to create a safe and welcoming place for people of color, providing spaces for listening and talking about our experiences of race and racism, compiling and disseminating resource materials, and coordinating workshops and training. A Friend wants us to revisit the descriptions of the other committees since she has noticed some terms such as Ministry and Counsel Committee "supervising" rather than some other descriptor of its charge. Another Friend has experienced a great deal of growth in recognizing racism in our midst as well as in understanding the term white supremacy. A Friend spoke of his experience in another meeting when gay marriage was being explored. We were reminded that we need humility as we approach racism. A Friend spoke of her introduction to Quakerism; she did not like powdered milk, and made elaborate arguments against its use at a meeting gathering. When her dislike was accepted without discussion, she was very surprised. What she noticed is that this series of discussions regarding the Racial Justice Committee has been destroying our community, with Friends taking a harder, more entrenched stance as the discussion continues. She counseled us to listen and do the hard work of community building. Another Friend stated that it is racism, not any one person, which is causing dissension in the meeting. She also told us that the committee is and has been operating under the

mission statement brought forward today. Another Friend spoke of her learning and feeling that while words were charged, the fact of being white provides those of us who are not people of color not to have to deal with the daily realities of being a person of color in our society. We were reminded that meeting for worship with attention to business is not a place for threshing, but for loving, open consideration in the present. Friends are asked to take the discussion in today's meeting home and hold each other in the Light as we do this work, being open to each other in ways that we have not always been up to this time.

2. The Racial Justice Committee recommends that Asheville Friends "endorse"*** Sharon Smith's ministry, since she has completed a clearness process and written a statement of ministry as follows:

What is my Ministry?

Q: If ministry is sharing one's spiritual gifts, what gifts am I being called to share? How will I share my gifts in the service of Spirit?

A: I believe we all come from the same Divine Source. In the Indigenous Pagan world view, Mother Earth, and all her creatures, animal, vegetable and mineral, are related. The Lakota people say, "mitakuye oyasin," literally, "all my relatives," in recognition of the creative power and connection of all that is. I believe we live in a conscious universe, that all life is sacred and that each being is a unique conception of the divine spark, worthy of due respect. I see social hierarchies (racial, economic or between species) as evidence of dysfunctional family values, and that domination of the Earth and all her creatures by one small group of power addicted individuals, bent on exploiting and/or destroying whoever and whatever does not capitulate to their lust for power and control, should not go unchallenged. Seen in that light, Quakers, and other people who say they believe in Peace, Love, Equality and Integrity, must, as a matter of conscience, work for Justice.

As a mixed race woman of color, I have been given an embarrassment of possibilities and challenges. As Seeker of Truth, born under the weight of a concern for Justice, I practice cultivating that unique spark of Divine Life and Light that is mine to live up to. I consider it a precious gift and a solemn responsibility to be the bearer of three ancestral legacies, Black-Indian and Quaker. Given the weight of these responsibilities, I am thankful to be an independently minded deep thinker who enjoys solitude and creativity over casual social interactions and attachments. Why? Because walking in three worlds has its challenges, yet it has afforded me unique insight into our fractured society.

This ministry evolved over time, having simply risen to the occasion of life's challenges. For example, every outward sign or exhibition of the divine spark within me has been consistently challenged by society at large, and by other Friends. Thus, the racist and classist assumptions I've encountered among my Friends, whether conscious or unconscious, have cried out to me to be addressed. It wasn't like I had the luxury of choosing to challenge bigotry, based on what issues moved me. Those issues came to me—more like they crash landed on me. White supremacy challenged every area of my life; my basic survival invariably placed me at the center of one hot button issue after another. Then, when presented with the option of accepting the unacceptable or standing for Justice, I chose the latter. Though I was consistently led to

speak Truth and work for Justice, I never saw a separation between the personal, the political and the spiritual. Furthermore, I see my impulse toward justice as a fulfilment of ancestral karmic responsibilities, and no accident.

However, one cannot forge steel without fire or make a beautiful quilt without cutting some cloth, so my ministry has been forged through hard experience. It is through the fire of constant testing, that I learned to trust and depend on my own deep well of Spirit guidance and support when support from other human beings was scarce. I have been reviled for everything from being comfortable with myself, to speaking unhappy truths out loud, for calling my Friends to be faithful to what they say they believe in, and for expecting them to take up their own ancestral responsibilities, to right historic wrongs and do justice.

As I see it, being thrown out of Sandwich Monthly Meeting was a good sign that my Orenda, my Qi, my Witness, is a powerful one. At first, I was genuinely puzzled by the extreme reaction Sandwich Friends had, to the obvious fact that racism was indeed an issue among us. They made it absolutely clear that I was unwelcome, and quickly characterized me as a threat. I don't think I'll ever get over the shock of being escorted off the Meetinghouse property by the police and falsely accused of assaulting another Friend, over a simple difference of opinion. Through that experience, I acquired quite an education in just how far privileged white women might go to assert their dominance. Granted, I was a bit "out of the box" for these Friends. I insisted on acting like an equal, and refused to submit to the meeting's authority when they asked me to put my "cultural and political issues aside" to find "unity" with them in Christ. It apparently drove them to madness, when I said, "I submit only to God." I could not have imagined Friends actually barring the door to Worship while proclaiming to anyone who would listen, that they had to protect the meeting, because I was so "dangerous." Their acts only made it obvious to everyone, not blinded by denial, that these New England Friends couldn't see the light of God shining through me, due to their assumption of racial superiority--their racism.

This and other occurrences, were clear signs, to me, that the Universe was trying to get my attention. My witness to Quaker racism in Sandwich Massachusetts, left a profound impression on me and all concerned--even if all do not see it yet. When I left Cape Cod, I was in bad shape. Living through such intense hatred and fear for a prolonged period, compounded by a severe lack of support, affected my health. Then way opened for me to stay at Pendle Hill for seven months.

I went to Pendle Hill to reflect on my journey in a Quaker context, and to heal my wounded spirit. I took all the Quaker studies courses. I meditated, did Yoga, wrote poetry and tried to be about the business of healing. In the process, I learned that Sandwich and New England were not exceptions in the Quaker world. Some Friends were offended when I said my experience of Quakerism had not been anything like the loving and affirming experience they described. In fact, Friends in general, reacted to my story of Quaker racism defensively, and with much discomfort. Plus, there didn't seem to be anyone there, qualified or if qualified, willing to help us appropriately process what was happening. So I spent more time in solitary reflection--which was fine with me. I enjoy my solitude, and thankfully, my self-esteem does not depend on the opinion of others.

Then I took a workshop with Marcelle Martin, called, "Experiment with Light." We explored early Friends' experience of the Light and experimented with waiting on the Light to see what it would

show us. In our Light meditations we focused on personal, relationship, and worldly concerns. It was an extraordinary experience.

As I waited on the Light to show me what it would be about our world, this is what I heard. "We are in denial of the sacredness of all life, all existence. It is the root of our problems." When I asked, why it was this way, the answer was, "We have become so focused on our physical existence that we have confused the physical with ALL REALITY. We have forgotten that we are Spirit beings inhabiting the flesh and we believe our physical existence is our only existence. We believe in linear time, we believe in death and we have come to believe the Spirit is insubstantial--not real." I asked why this was so, and was told that we "have been taught this by religion and science."

I asked, "What am I being called to do?" The answer was instant, "You are being called to Ministry; to call the people back to recognizing the sacredness of all Life and the reality of their eternal spirit." It was pointed out to me, that this was the flip-side and resolution of our focus on all the ways we have failed to recognize the fact that ALL EXISTENCE IS SACRED and that the ceremony is LIFE itself.

That week, in morning in worship, I was holding the idea of Ministry in the Light, to see what it might look like, in my particular case, when Friend Rob, sitting next to me, stood and spoke of honoring the prophets who are not appreciated in their own time and persecuted for speaking Truth to us. His message brought me to tears, because it felt like he was speaking directly to me. It felt like I was being called out, exposed. Then at the rise of worship, Friend Linda, had the courage to stand and announce that during the Experiment with Light, she felt she had been called to "preach." She said she did not know what that meant yet, that she was afraid and asked us all to pray for her. Again it felt like I was being called out, so I stood and told the Meeting that I too had been called.

Afterward, I was so shaken I sequestered myself in my room for a while. Though I always knew, deep inside myself, that ministry was indeed what I was meant for, I had never openly framed myself in those terms. Until that morning, I had kept the words ministry and most of all, prophesy, successfully to myself. I struggled with openly expressing these gifts, talents and abilities which lay dormant, due to criticism and non-acceptance. Now part of my healing was to pick them up and accept them. I remembered describing myself as fearless, just the week before, and wondered how long that would last.

Before I left Pendle Hill, I asked for a clearness committee on the matter of my call to ministry. Four Friends sat in worship for clearness with me. That meeting was clerked by Friend Larry Ingle, of Chattanooga Friends (SAYMA) who can affirm that I am carrying a Quaker ministry for Justice, challenging Friends to be faithful to what we say we believe in: That of God in everyone, continuing revelation, and the Testimonies we claim to live by: Peace, Truth/Integrity, Equality/Justice, Simplicity and Community.

In Friendship,

Sharon Smith
Asheville NC

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Discussion of 2: Ministry and Released Friend are terms we can explore as this request is being considered. The endorsement of the above statement would allow Sharon to request funds to travel in her ministry. A Friend shared how he grew in understanding sexism with the help of his wife, and how similarly, he is growing in understanding of racism in our lives through Sharon's ministry. Some comments made include that: we may not have always reacted well in our meetings, our concern to become a welcoming and safe place for people of color could be addressed in all our proceedings, and we all need to be open to change as Spirit leads. The clerk reminded everyone that during Ninth Month meeting for business, Ministry and Counsel Committee was charged with working on the way forward with support for Sharon's Ministry. She shared that that work has begun.

A meeting of the Board of Directors of Asheville Friends Meeting is in the process of being scheduled.

The clerk reminded us that committees can bring names of Friends who are active on committees and want to be approved as committee members to the attention of the Nominating Committee.

The clerk also informed us that Ministry and Counsel is beginning to write, revise and add to the Asheville Friends Handbook.

We closed with a moment of silence to meet again as way opens on Eleventh Month 13, 2016.