

Meeting for Worship for the Conduct of Business
Asheville Friends Meeting
6/19/2005

Friends Please Note:

There are a couple of reports missing from this account of the business meeting. Your recording clerk is endeavoring to get them. They are reports that were read verbatim to the meeting and therefore will not affect the accuracy (or lack) of the account.

Meeting commenced at 11:40 a.m. with a period of worship. Twenty-one Friends were in attendance: Alice Brown, Peter Buck, Jim Cavener, Karen Cernek, David Clements, Barbara Esther, Lena Feldman, Ellen Frerotte, George Gjelfriend, Joy Gossett, Steve Houseworth, Grey Kirbach, Steve Livingston (recording clerk), , Laura Maynard, Phil Neal, Rain Newcomb, Ellen Oldham, Alex Proctor, Jennifer Walker (clerk), and Robin Wells.

New Attenders:

Answering to the clerk's inquiry, Alex Proctor said that he had attended business meetings at Stony Run Monthly Meeting but this was his first meeting for business among us. Grey Kirbach was also attending his first meeting for business among Asheville Friends.

News of Ourselves:

Lena Feldmann reported that Susan Oehler is making arrangements with Swannanoa Valley Meeting to bring AFSC's Eyes Wide Open exhibit to our area. Friends were reminded to donate old shoes to the collection box in the foyer for Susan's project.

Noting Evan Richardson's absence, David Clements informed the Meeting that their family will be away for the next four weeks as they are visiting relatives in WV and attending the FGC Gathering at blacksburg VA.

Jennifer Walker pointed out that this would be her last Meeting for Business before she moves to Athens GA for Graduate School.

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes of the 5th month 2005 meeting were approved as written.

Naming Committee:

Steve Livingston gave an impromptu report for the Naming Committee, offering the names of two Friends to serve on the Nominating Committee. In reply to an inquiry, Steve explained that Nominating Committee had requested that Naming Committee seek additional Friends to serve, and therefore the Naming Committee was not yet ready to be laid down.

Friends discussed term limits and Nominating Committee agreed to bring a recommendation to business meeting in August.

Friends approved Sarah Jane Thomas and Laura Maynard to serve on the Nominating Committee.

Nominating Committee:

Karen Cernek read a written report:

Friends discussed the process for staffing the Long Range Visioning and Planning Committee, and settled on continuing the practice of asking each of the Meeting's standing committees to appoint a member, as well as encouraging Friends who feel led to volunteer and allowing Nominating Committee to use its discernment process to identify other candidates.

Friends approved Lynnora Bierce, Steve Livingston, Steve Houseworth, and Satchel Loftis to form the new Communications committee.

Friends approved Steve Houseworth to act as representative to wider Quaker organizations FCNL, AFSC, and FGC.

Friends approved Kitti Reynolds as representative to Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW).

With Steve's assent, Friends who are so led were encouraged to assume one or more of the several positions that Steve had agreed to fill. Friends briefly reviewed the customary duties of representatives.

Friends approved the release of Joy Gossett from her position as SAYF Liaison.

Friends approved to form the new Long Range Planning and Visioning Committee.

Joy expressed that she was willing to continue serving until another Friend takes over the position.

Ad Hoc Committee for Bequests:

David Clements read the report:

“Report of the Ad-Hoc Committee to consider use of the bequests from Lucille Carlson and Pat Lyon.

“Background: Asheville Friends Meeting has received a total of approximately \$15,000 in bequests from two Meeting members, Lucille Carlson in 2001 and Pat Lyon in 2004. The Finance Committee brought to the attention of Meeting in January 2005 that we might want to consider possible uses of this money. An ad-hoc committee was appointed, consisting of Ursula Scott, George Gjelfriend, and David Clements.

“Report: The committee met on March 4, 2005. After some silent worship, we began with a brainstorming session to identify needs for which these gifts could be used. A list of these ideas is in an appendix. News of Ursula's untimely death prevented our presentation of this report in March. George and David have revised this report in the interim.

“After considering the various options, we agreed to recommend that Meeting spend the amount of the bequests to repair, remodel, and refurbish the Meeting House. The committee agreed that we would like our Meeting House to be a model for others, and that substantial improvements are needed to make it environmentally sound, energy efficient, safe, healthy, functional, sustainable, and esthetically pleasing. We felt that the \$15,000 would not be nearly enough to achieve all these goals. We recommended as priorities repairs to the back porch and to the basement. Our suggestions were similar to the plans detailed by the House and Grounds Committee in their March report. We recommend that Meeting transfer the \$15,000 to the House and Grounds Contingency Fund to be used for these projects.

“Several years ago Meeting had an active Long Range Planning Committee which investigated the suitability of our Meeting House and the desirability of either moving or adding on to our present structure. The conclusion at the time was that we should stay in the present building but plan to construct a new meeting room. We have accumulated about \$56,000 in our building fund, and many have assumed that we were saving that money for the new meeting room. The planning for a new meeting room has not moved forward for some time. We now realize that renovating our present structure might consume most of the present building fund as well as the two bequests. We see the need for another comprehensive evaluation of the situation and our options. We recommend to Meeting that the Long Range Planning Committee be charged with planning to meeting the goals for our Meeting House that we noted above, as well as undertaking that comprehensive review.

“At the Ad Hoc Committee Meeting, we decided that the Committee should be laid down after this report, and that further consideration be made by the Long Range Planning Committee. We are aware that the Long Range Planning Committee has not met recently. We all expressed an interest in offering to help convene the Long Range Planning Committee. We recommend that the Committee proceed with prioritizing and enabling necessary improvements to our building in cooperation with the House and Grounds Committee. We recommend that any interested friends be free to join the committee's work. We recommend that the committee proceed in its work with early and frequent input from the community.”

A Friend inquired whether Long Range Planning committee would retain any oversight over the funds if they were placed in the House and Grounds Contingency Fund. A Friend pointed out that the House and Grounds Contingency Fund has traditionally been the repository for money budgeted for House and Grounds and unspent by the end of the budget year. The clerk, speaking as clerk of House and Grounds, reminded Friends that the committee will be hosting four forums in the coming year to consider issues around our investment in our property. House and Grounds seeks not to be responsible for these long-range decisions and welcomes the rebirth of the Long Range Planning Committee, where such decision-making more properly belongs. House and Grounds has concluded that there are no pressing maintenance needs that cannot be postponed for one year, giving the Meeting time to hold the four forums and for Long Range Planning to get back up and running. The subjects of the upcoming forums will be: environmental, structural, permits and codes, and financing.

Barbara Esther, as clerk of Nominating, asked the Meeting's guidance on what extent the committee ought to facilitate the revitalizing of the Long Range Planning Committee. Friends agreed that it was good practice for the names of nominees to be brought to the business meeting. Friends agreed that service on the Long Range Planning Committee ought not be limited to those who are appointed by the other standing committees of the Meeting, but should be open to individual leadings and discernment on the part of the Nominating committee.

Friends approved that the current constitution of the Long Range Planning Committee was sufficient for them to begin meeting.

Friends approved that the \$15,000 from the estates of Lucille Carlson and Patricia Lyon be placed in the House and Grounds Contingency Fund.

Karen Cernek agreed to convene the first meeting of the Long Range Planning Committee.

A Friend suggested that we hire a house inspector to help identify our needs.

A Friend brought the concern that the driveway is in dire need of attention now, and cannot wait another year.

Ad Hoc Committee to Examine First Day Structure:

Barbara Esther read a written report:

“Thank you to all who were able to attend the Threshing Session regarding First Day Meeting time structure. Your input was very helpful in looking at a next step in considering whether or not our current structure is feeding our community needs as best as it could. In this Threshing Session, our committee heard a hunger to move forward without an overly lengthy inquiry/listening process. We also heard a desire for some concrete ideas to consider as we, as a community, discern what kind of First Day time structure might feed us best.

“Therefore we are sharing the following 'brainstorm' ideas around time structure and the following inquiries for everyone in our community to consider. This summer we will hold three worship sharing/threshing sessions to consider this issue further. Our hope is that everyone will have a chance to participate in at least one of the sessions. We will share the minutes from each session with the whole community so that we may all know what is on each others' minds and hearts around this issue.

“Dates for the worship sharing/threshing sessions are: July 31, August 7 and August 21. If you are unable to attend any of these sessions, we hope that you will share with someone on the committee what is coming up for you around these ideas and inquiries.

“Possible ways of approaching Meeting Day time structure:

“1. Continue with our current schedule

“2. ...

“3. ...

“Inquiries to consider:

“What should we be offering children in the Asheville Friends Meeting Community?

“How do we instill Quaker values in such a way for our children that when they grow up they will still consider Quakerism as a spiritual path?

“At present adults are missing worship time in order to be with our children. How is this affecting the Meeting?

“What excites you and what concerns you about joining children and adult worship time together?

“How might those concerns be alleviated?

“Does our current forum structure meet the need for our adult spiritual/religious education?

“How often do you stay for forums?

“Would you participate in an Adult Religious Education program if it were offered at a different time?

“What are your thoughts/feelings around the possibility of two worship times on First Day?

“Do you have any other ideas you would like to share around Meeting Day Structure?

Friends accepted the report.

SAYMA Epistle:

Barbara Esther shared with us the epistle of the Yearly Meeting:

Dear Friends,

Returning again to what seems like home, we gathered together 8th – 12th Day, Sixth Month, 2005, for our 35th annual session at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina.

As we have increased the length of time we are together, the tension between fellowship and business seems to be subsiding. With this expanded time the business itself has become an opportunity for fellowship and a building of the body. We were blessed by the blossoming of many blue dots on the name tags representing first time attenders, the vitality of the vibrant group of teenagers, and the joy of our Junior Gathering participants.

Our business sessions were imbued with a growing awareness of the palpable presence of the Spirit among us. This deep current of living water carried us as we progressed through our agenda.

After a couple of years of seasoning, we were able to come to unity on the Earth Charter. We minuted our endorsement of the Earth Charter, noting that although not perfect, it is “an invitation for spiritual practice and social action, recognizing that this may require us to make changes in the way we live.”

We heard a minute forwarded to us by the Central Committee of Friends General Conference about their experience of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer Friends. We were asked to go deep to see how the minute spoke to our condition.

As we labored to respond, we affirmed a deeply felt sense of unity and blessing while not knowing exactly what this will require of us, yet trusting that both the Spirit and the process will transform us and the work will be carried out. As our witness, we include the fruit of our labor here.

SAYMA's experience has been that our work has been immeasurably enriched over the years by the full participation and spirit-guided leadership of gay lesbian bisexual transgender and queer Friends. We will not go back to silencing those voices or suppressing those gifts. Our experience confirms that we are all equal before God as God made us and we feel blessed to be engaged in the work of SAYMA together.

We call upon ourselves as individuals and in our monthly meetings to take this minute into our hearts and take action as we are led.

Through our work with these minutes we affirm both the value and need of seasoning concerns, and the imperative of being faithful to the Spirit in the moment. Further, a growing understanding of Friends is that our work is not done when we commend the minute to paper. We must also write it on our hearts and live into it.

The service of Young Adult Friends continues to deepen in our meeting. This year they assisted at the Clerk's table during business sessions. The presence of YAFs and teenagers in worship sharing and workshops added richness and new perspectives. Teens are also exploring the possibility of serving on yearly meeting committees. In lieu of the usual report from the SAYMA appointed representatives to Friends General Conference, three of our Young Adult Friends shared their experiences from attending the FGC-sponsored consultation on youth ministries. Our hearts were opened by the burning truths that they learned and shared with us. Among these were the sense of isolation and grief that Friends feel when no longer in their home meetings, loss of past communities while moving into new life phases, and the desire for YAFs to be of service as well as served. Most significantly, we heard the realization that Friends of all ages yearn to be known at the deepest level.

At our first plenary session we heard some of our wider Quaker organization representatives speak with deep feelings and tenderness of the mission and work of those organizations, and how that work fits with the priorities and values of our yearly meeting. We were grateful for the reminder that these organizations are so intimately connected with the work that we are led to do. With each organization's unique mission, they are able to extend that work beyond our capacity. The representatives also shared the joys, challenges, and spiritual rewards of service to both wider Quaker organizations and SAYMA. Surprisingly, many representatives were initially called to service simply because they had been asked. (Friends, let us affirm our nominating process!)

At our second plenary session, Keith Helmuth, of Canadian Yearly Meeting and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, spoke to us from his work, "The Angel of History, The Storm of Progress, and the Order of the Soul." Despite the gravity of the trajectory we are on towards the destruction of humanity and the earth's biosystems, Keith offered hope beyond fatalism. This hope is based upon the Life in the Spirit with attention to natural history. He favored us with terminology and expressions that made fresh our testimonies by applying them to an ecological world view. We were relieved and uplifted to hear that humankind can escape the trap of fatalism engendered by the "history of Moral Will" by embracing the option of "mutually enhancing human-earth relationship."

In closing, we find great inspiration in the story of a Young Friend who viewed his relationship to his Meeting as sitting on a rock in the sea. Solidly supported by this foundation, he was able to look around in security and peace while viewing the wonders of the surrounding scenery. At some point, a transformation occurred when he felt the Spirit moving in a powerful way. In his sensing of the power of continuing revelation, his old image of his relationship to his Meeting changed. It was revealed to

him that the rock he had been sitting on, was actually the solid back of a swimming whale, carrying him through the deep current of the Spirit into an unknown and anticipated future.

Individual Concerns:

Jim Cavener brought a concern that Midweek Meeting has not been very well attended, and that more than once a Friend arrived to find no one else present. He suggested that unless Midweek Meeting reaches some sort of “critical mass” it might be better not to announce in our weekly e-letter. A Friend suggested that Midweek Meeting should be under the care of a Meeting committee.

Phil Neal, speaking as an “ancient Friend”, expressed his discomfort with our continued lack of a regular clerk of the Meeting. He expressed a concern that we are being too “creative” about not having one, and suggested that a well-defined job description would facilitate a new clerk's work.

Alice Brown, speaking as an even more “ancient Friend”, asked to be removed from the Meeting's telephone message as she feels deficient in responding to callers asking directions to the Meetinghouse.

She also pointed out that our sign at the driveway entrance is hardly visible.

Rain Newcomb offered gratitude to the clerk and recording clerk for guiding us through the meeting today despite the fact that no one had provided their agenda items in advance, making it impossible for the clerks to prepare for the meeting. She suggested that items not submitted in advance should be held over until the following month.

Barbara Esther expressed her dismay over the description of the Meeting's religious education program as written in the State of the Meeting report. She found that it did not at all resonate with her as clerk of the RE Committee, and questioned whether anyone on RE had been consulted in preparing the statement. She pointed out that a number of items in the report seemed out of keeping with the format of previous reports, especially the featuring of individual Friends as “Quakers of Note”.

Joy Gossett noted the intent of the Meeting that Pastoral Care Committee be comprised of a dozen Friends, but that Nominating has so far only been able to name four to serve on the committee. She expressed concern for those Friends who are lonely and isolated due to lack of mobility, and for those Friends who have suffered reversal and personal loss recently. Karen Cernek united with this concern, and invited those Friends who feel so led to contact Susan Mitchell, clerk of Pastoral Care.

Steve Houseworth asked if any Friend could substitute for him as clerk of rise of meeting on 7/3.

Close of Meeting:

Meeting ended with silent worship at 1:30 p.m.