

MINUTES FOR ELEVENTH MONTH OF WORSHIP WITH ATTENTION TO BUSINESS
Asheville Friends Meeting
11th month 11th day, 2007

Attendance (22)

Philip Neal, Gjeorge Gjelfriend, Kristi Gjelfriend, Ellen Frerotte, Pete Sutherland, Becca Dion, Sam Rizzo, Joy Gossett, Alice Powell, Rusty Maynard, Evan Richardson, David Clements, Lila Richardson, Laura Maynard, Katherine Kowal, Gary Briggs, Raelin Hansen, Bobby Carter, Adrienne Weir, Robin Wells

Clerk: Barbara Esther
Recording Clerk: Julie Moser

12:10 We began with a period of worship.

Reading:

“ . . . should (we) work only on ourselves? No. Work equally in the visible and the invisible world, advise Islamic mystics. Participate fully in the bazaar of life – buying, selling, marrying, raising children, and doing ‘abiding good deeds.’ But complement this outer work daily with an inner practice that nurtures and nourishes the soul – prayers, silence, music, nature, play. Everything in the visible world, reveals the Quran, has its roots in the invisible world. Water those roots regularly. . . One way to do our spiritual work is to cultivate the art of listening. The ultimate listening is, of course, hearing the inner voice of the soul in us. But we must listen to other voices as well. We begin by making an effort to truly listen to others: family, friends, colleagues at work, voices in the community we disagree with.”

The Heart of a Muslim by Jamal Rahman
from *Making Peace, Healing a Violent World*
Edited by C. McConnell & S. van Gelder

The agenda was accepted as presented.

The Clerk apologized that minutes from the tenth month of Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business were not available for review and approval, but would be forthcoming.

Treasurer’s Report

Adrienne Weir presented the Treasurer’s report to the Meeting. She reported that expenditures were below 50% of what was budgeted to date and that income was below the 75% that the calendar would indicate we need. Several clerks of committees met to support the work of the Finance Committee on the 2008 proposed budget on Friday, November 9, 2007. Adrienne requested that any additions or changes be brought to the attention of the Finance Committee this week, as the Finance Committee meets on third First Days and will be preparing a draft budget on November 18.

Friends accepted the Treasurer’s report with gratitude.

Christmas Gathering

Friends began a dialog about our annual Christmas Gathering. Traditionally, the Meeting comes together to share a meal and engage in fellowship. Friends discussed planning, including securing a date for the gathering, and five Friends volunteered to help organize the event.

Friends approved the ad hoc Christmas Gathering Committee, consisting of Evan Richardson, David Clements, Adrienne Weir, Joy Gossett and Gary Briggs.

This group of Friends will find a date that will work and communicate plans to Friends.

Retreat Reservation

Katherine Kowal reported that the Ministry and Counsel Committee recommends a residential retreat for 2008 and seeks volunteers to serve on an ad hoc Retreat Committee. Since it has been some time since the last retreat, Ministry and Counsel feels the Meeting would benefit from an overnight retreat to strengthen fellowship among Friends.

After some discussion Friends approved the formation of an ad hoc retreat exploration committee consisting of Katherine Kowell, Margaret Normile, Rusty Maynard, Bobby Carter and Raelin Hansen, and approved that committee to research, choose, and place a deposit on a reservation for the 2008 residential retreat.

Marriage Procedure, Part II

The Ad-Hoc Committee on Marriage Under the Care of the Meeting presented its draft revision of Part II of the Marriage Procedure for the Meeting's review and approval.

The clerk asked Friends to look only at the portion brought to this Meeting for Worship with attention to business.

Evan Richardson presented the draft revision to the Meeting, and stated she looked forward to each section being reviewed independently for thoughtful consideration, and hoped the process would work as a community-building experience to bring hearts together and form unity. Evan gave the following brief history of the committee's recent activity:

Gary Briggs, David Clements and Evan Richardson met on 10/28 to continue our work of revising the Draft Marriage Procedure for consideration by the Meeting. We are presenting a revised draft for the portion of the procedure entitled "Overview of the Marriage Process" for consideration at the November Meeting for Business. We want to remind Friends that we would like to keep the focus of our corporate discernment on this section and to try to stay away from discussions about other sections of the original draft.

We will bring revisions of these sections as we move along. We hope this approach will allow us to use our time together most effectively.

It is important for Friends to understand that we have heard different opinions about the role Membership plays in our being willing to take a couple's marriage under the care of our Meeting. In sitting with the differences we find ourselves led to offer a general requirement for Membership with an openness to exception, should Spirit allow. We do this with a sense of wanting to respect both the tradition among Friends to require Membership and the leadings among some in our Meeting to intentionally not seek formal membership as witness to a sense that it is how we live our lives that makes us Friends and not formal membership. We feel the presence of God in both of these perspectives.

Evan then presented Part II, "Overview of the Marriage Process":

Draft Paragraph 1: A couple wishing to be married under the care of the Asheville Friends Meeting is asked to send a letter requesting this to the meeting addressed to the clerk and signed by both individuals. They are advised to approach the meeting in a spirit of openness and patience refraining from scheduling a wedding until the meeting has formally accepted their marriage request; this process usually takes several months to complete.

Evan explained that asking the couple to refrain from scheduling a wedding until the Meeting has formally accepted is intended to help the Meeting conduct a thoughtful clearness community without undue time constraints.

One Friend pointed out that scheduling has to be done far in advance of an event, and recommended including language that conveyed the process may take a long time without asking that a venue not be reserved for the wedding.

Friends approved the first paragraph of "Overview of the Marriage Process" with following revision:

A couple wishing to be married under the care of the Asheville Friends Meeting is asked to send a letter requesting this to the Meeting addressed to the clerk and signed by both individuals. They are advised to approach the Meeting in a spirit of openness and patience. Couples should be advised that the process for clearness and approval can take several months to complete. Couples are asked to keep this in mind when making their plans and to respectfully give the Meeting adequate time for considering their requests.

Draft Paragraph 2: Our clerk will read this letter of request at the next Monthly Meeting for Business, and the meeting will be asked to hold the couple in the Light, making a friendly outreach to them in this endeavor. The couple's letter, along with the names of anyone expressing a desire to serve on a clearness committee for marriage for them, will be forwarded to our Ministry and Counsel; this standing meeting committee then officially appoint a clearness committee and report the names of those serving on it at the next Monthly Meeting for Business. Anyone with affirmations or concerns about the marriage request may forward them directly to this Committee.

A Friend commented that there may be a concern about privacy related to the openness of the process, and that it might put couples in a position of being embarrassed if the marriage did not occur.

One friend recalled that historically couples were given encouragement to select several members to be on a Clearness Committee and to allow Ministry and Counsel to add more members if desired. The Friend said it would be good if the couple could have some choice in formation of the Clearness Committee.

Another friend also had this thought and stated it would be appropriate to amend the last sentence to say: “directly to this Clearness Committee,” to avoid confusion.

After hearing the revision, one friend wanted to be sure it was clear that the couple has a chance to offer at the outset names of those they would like to serve on the Clearness Committee.

Friends approved paragraph 2 of “Overview of the Marriage Process” as revised: 2.

Our clerk will read this letter of request at the next Monthly Meeting for Business, and the Meeting will be asked to hold the couple in the Light, making a friendly outreach to them in this endeavor. The couple’s letter, along with the names of anyone expressing a desire to serve on a clearness committee for marriage for them, will be forwarded to our Ministry and Counsel; this standing Meeting committee will seek additional names from the couple and then officially appoint a clearness committee and report the names of those serving on it at the next Monthly Meeting for Business. Anyone with affirmations or concerns about the marriage request may forward them directly to the clearness committee.

Draft Paragraph 3: The clearness committee will meet promptly with the couple in a Worshipful spirit to explore the couple’s leading for marriage. They will meet as many times as needed to establish clearness, using the guidance provided by the below queries for marriage and by leadings of the Spirit. In some cases the committee may discern a need to meet with others potentially affected by a marriage request, such as children of one of the couple or an ex-spouse involved with the Meeting. As needed, the committee may seek the support of Ministry and Counsel in their discernment process. M & C should be informed of the committee’s progress, and when its work is complete the Clearness Committee will report directly back to the Monthly Meeting for Business whether or not the Meeting should take couple’s request for marriage under its care. The report should include a broad description of the process used to come to clearness about the marriage request, the status of the couple’s intentions regarding marriage, and the Clearness Committee’s recommendation about whether or not the Meeting should take under its care the couple’s request for marriage.

One Friend commented that new ground is being broken in the second to the last sentence and suggested that a clearness committee’s role is not to sit in judgment, but rather to determine if the couple is clear in their request.

A Friend responded that a clearness committee for marriage was different from other clearness committees. By taking a marriage request “under its care,” the Friend stated, it was a two-way commitment.

Another Friend stated that a problematic word might be “request” for marriage, and asked if removing the word “request” would avoid the perception that the Meeting was commenting on the marriage itself.

One Friend said that anticipated situations might include a request from a couple where the individuals aren’t members or a request from those who have a history of behavioral issues. Friends discussed the difficulty of responding to marriage requests from couples with known behavioral issues. It was commented that if the Meeting recommends against accepting a marriage under its care, other individuals in the family, including children, may lose an opportunity to be cared for by the Meeting. One Friend stated that either decision should be made with great care as it has a profound impact on human lives, and the Meeting remains an important source of support to all involved.

One Friend wondered about adding a friendly and kind disclaimer that the Meeting might decide not to approve a marriage under its care. A Friend replied that the

language “whether or not” expresses that the Meeting might turn down the request and might suffice to convey that information; another Friend said s/he felt it may not be necessary to amend it or supply examples of scenarios that would be cause for deciding against approval.

A Friend reiterated that the role of the Clearness Committee is to determine if the couple is clear, and if it has any other agenda it has the ability to compromise those requesting the marriage. The only thing the Clearness Committee can say, according this Friend, is that the Meeting doesn’t think the couple is clear.

A Friend reminded the Meeting that “marriage under a meeting’s care” is not only about the couple, but also about the clearness of the Meeting to support and nurture those who are married under the care of Meeting for the long haul. When the Meeting extends “marriage under our care,” the Friend said, it is making a commitment, too.

A Friend asked whether the Meeting may have to think a little more deeply about the purpose of the Clearness Committee for marriage.

One Friend asked: if the Meeting takes a couple under its care, does the Meeting then expect the couple to take the Meeting under their care?

Friends approved paragraph 3 of “Overview of the Marriage Process” as revised:

The clearness committee will meet promptly with the couple in a worshipful spirit to explore the couple’s leading for marriage. They will meet as many times as needed to establish clearness, using the guidance provided by the below queries for marriage and by leadings of the Spirit. In some cases the committee may discern a need to meet with others potentially affected by a marriage request, such as children of one of the couple or an ex-spouse involved with the Meeting. As needed, the committee may seek the support of Ministry and Counsel in their discernment process. Ministry & Counsel should be informed of the clearness committee’s progress, and when its work is complete the committee will report directly back to the Monthly Meeting for Business. The report should include a broad description of the process used to come to clearness about the marriage request, the status of the couple’s intentions regarding marriage, and the committee’s recommendation about whether or not the Meeting should take the couple’s marriage under its care.

Draft Paragraph 4: If it accepts the marriage under its care, the Meeting will appoint an oversight committee to assist in the marriage arrangements. After the wedding ceremony is complete, this committee will make a report to the Meeting and then be laid down. At this time, the marriage is officially recorded into the Meeting records.

A friend reminded us that the Meeting had stopped using the term “oversight” and asked if there was a better word. After some discussion, Friends agreed that the role of the committee should be determined first and be named at a later date.

Friends approved paragraph 4 of “Overview of the Marriage Process” with the understanding that the committee working with the couple to prepare for the wedding will be named at a later date:

If it accepts the marriage under its care, the Meeting will appoint an oversight* committee to assist in the marriage arrangements. After the wedding ceremony is complete, this committee will make a report to the Meeting and then be laid down. At this time, the marriage is officially recorded into the Meeting records.

Friends approved the addition of paragraph 5 of the “Overview of the Marriage Process”:

If the Meeting chooses not to accept the marriage under its care, the couple may choose to continue with plans to marry and to request assistance from individual members and attenders assistance for a marriage ceremony "after the manner of Friends" as mentioned below. The Meeting will continue to offer loving support for the couple and the individuals as it does for all relationships that bless the Meeting community.

Draft Paragraph 6. Our Meeting is presently not in unity about the nature of the commitment to our Meeting or to the Religious Society of Friends our Meeting that the couple would require before we take their marriage "under the care" of the Meeting. Certainly, "care" should entail a reciprocal relationship. At least one of the couple should already be a formal member of the Religious Society of Friends. If their membership is in another Meeting, then Ministry and Counsel shall consult with that Meeting's clerk regarding that Meeting's level of support for the marriage. In some cases the home Meeting may provide the clearness process and report directly to our Meeting. We also recognize that some non-members manifest commitment to our Meeting and to the Society equal to that of a formal member. In such cases we may, following leadings of the Spirit in our Monthly Meeting for Business, still offer them support in the form of an appointed clearness committee and then also be open to leadings of the Spirit regarding offering them marriage after the manner of friends as described below.

One friend reported that some members felt membership should be required for marriage under the meeting's care. It was commented that some people who are members are not necessarily as engaged as those who practice Quakerism in their lives but are not members. Another Friend reported that they also felt membership should be required and felt that if a person rejects membership for whatever reason, he or she is playing by a different set of rules. This Friend also expressed concern about erosion of procedure and said this issue requires a loving attitude, not exclusion, but that those who choose not to be members should not expect to have all the perks and prerogatives of a member.

A Friend reminded the Meeting of the Faith and Practice procedure and noted a discrepancy regarding the case of a member from another meeting, and asked if the Meeting wanted to continue with the paragraph as stated, which is not in keeping with the Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice protocol.

Another Friend asked how the Meeting distinguishes associate membership from full membership and wondered if the Meeting has failed to mentor Young Friends toward membership.

A Friend reflected that the Ad-Hoc Committee on Marriage Under the Care of the Meeting has worked hard to reflect the sense of the meeting, especially regarding the first sentence of paragraph 6, and feels the ability to "allow for exceptions" will provide the Meeting with the ability to respond to individual cases where there are questions of membership and marriage under the care of the meeting. This Friend also supported the paragraph as written knowing not everyone is 100% in agreement but feeling that the paragraph created a space where unity can be found.

One Friend stated they understood and shared the view that those who reject membership may lose perks, but also felt that those who have been involved with the Meeting for a long time deserved care for clearness.

A Friend felt that elders had a specific function, and that as a member one becomes a custodian of Friends' tradition. As such, this Friend felt a leading to protect the Religious Society of Friends from certain influences, which in the Friend's opinion are chipping away the Society's foundations. Allowing certain variances may not be in accord with the Friend's leadings to maintain the Society's integrity.

Draft Paragraph 7. Couples with no formal membership in the Religious Society of Friends may also request assistance for a marriage ceremony. This ceremony may be one “after the manner of Friends,” the basic element of which is marriage vows spoken by the couple out of the context of unprogrammed worship. Such assistance does not require formal Meeting approval but depends on the willingness of individual members and attenders to help carry out the ceremony. Such willingness may depend on the degree of participation of the couple in the life of our Meeting.

A Friend remarked that if the Meeting has non-friends making use of the Meeting house in the manner of Friends, the Meeting might be willing to offer considerable variation on those occasions when a couple may want a slightly different ceremony.

One Friend stated that the alternative phrasing “after the manner” needed some definition, and that the wording expresses the basic elements of a wedding after the manner of friends.

One Friend said they would be open to approving the entire document once revisions are made with the provision that after a time to be determined that the procedure be reflected upon and reviewed to make changes when necessary to create a living document. Another Friend agreed and expressed that continued revelation was part of the historical tradition of the Religious Society of Friends.

Friends also stated that those who are not members but are active in our meeting community may still ask for a clearness committee to guide them if they so choose, but that it would not be automatically provided.

Friends approved paragraphs 6 and 7 of “Overview of the Marriage Process” as follows:

Our Meeting is presently not in unity about the nature of the commitment to our Meeting or to the Religious Society of Friends that the Meeting would require of a couple before taking their marriage under the care of the Meeting. Certainly, “care” should entail a reciprocal relationship. At least one of the couple should be a member of the Religious Society of Friends. If their membership is in another Meeting, then Ministry and Counsel shall consult with that Meeting’s clerk regarding that Meeting’s level of support for the marriage. In some cases the home Meeting may provide the clearness process and report directly to our Meeting. We also recognize that some non-members manifest commitment to our Meeting and to the Society equal to that of a formal member. In such cases we may, following leadings of the Spirit in our Monthly Meeting for Business, still offer them support in the form of an appointed clearness committee and then be open to leadings of the Spirit regarding offering them marriage “after the manner of Friends” as described below.

Couples with no formal membership in the Religious Society of Friends may also request assistance for a marriage ceremony. This ceremony may be one “after the manner of Friends”, the basic element of which is marriage vows spoken by the couple out of the context of unprogrammed worship. Such assistance does not require formal Meeting approval but depends on the willingness of individual members and attenders to help carry out the ceremony. Such willingness may depend on the degree of participation of the couple in the life of the Meeting.

Evan commented that she respects the input by the Meeting as well as the process of review, and views continuing revelation as one of the aspects that appeals to her about the Religious Society of Friends.

Committee Reports:

- The House and Grounds Committee reported that the wooden staircase in the back of the meetinghouse was felt to be unsafe and asked the Meeting's permission to tear it down and put up a barrier on the porch. There are no current plans for replacement. The clerk reminded Friends that the Fire Marshal does not require that staircase to meet the fire code.

Friends approved that the House and Grounds Committee remove the staircase at the back porch with a decision to be made at a later date about what to do, if anything, in its place.

- The Religious Education Committee reported that there will be a simple meal to benefit Right Sharing of World Resources on November 25, which is Sandwich Sunday. Friends accepted the Religious Education Committee's report.
- The Pastoral Care Committee reported that Bridget O'Hara requested that she be released from the Pastoral Care Committee due to time constraints. **Friends approved, with regret, Bridget O'Hara's request to be released from the Pastoral Care Committee. We look forward to a time when she will be able to be more active on that or another committee.**
- The Communications Committee reported that it will meet monthly. Keiron Mann has been working on a much-improved web site that is slated to launch in January 2008. Julie Moser has joined the Communications Committee and has volunteered to become the newsletter editor, with the first issue appearing in January. The Meeting House computer is still in limbo because of faulty monitors, but the committee is working to find a viable replacement using a mix of personal funds and a limited pool of remaining funds in the budget. The Communications Committee will also be conducting a survey for its listserv members to get feedback about whether it meets the needs of those who are part of the listserv. **Friends accepted the Communications Committee's report with thanks.**

Other

A friend reported to the meeting that a call had been received for help from a woman staying in Asheville. A Friend reported that one week ago a similar call was received. Gjeorge Gjelfriend stated that Pastoral Care will take under consideration developing an official referral procedure.

Gary Briggs reported that his experience with City View Quaker Church was very positive, and expressed a desire to continue some kind of interchange with them. Gary will place the full report on the web site. Barbara Esther expressed that we may want to consider ways we can reach out and find more areas of unity with that Friends church. Ministry and Counsel will explore this in its regular meetings.

Personal Concerns

Love and support was extended to Steve Livingston and his family as he visits his mother.

The meeting closed with a brief period of worship at 2 p.m.