

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

Asheville Friends Meeting

2nd Month 9, 2020

Present: Robin Wells, Clerk; Beth Eddy, Recording Clerk; Steve Livingston, Barbara Esther, Morgan Murray, Bob Smith, Gita Larson, Jim Cavener, Katherine Kowal, Kitti Reynolds, Edie Patrick, Mike Eddy, Pat Johnson, Margaret Normile, Bob Lackey, Bobby Carter, Rusty Maynard, Laura Lane, Lucy Lane, Nancy Lynn Sharpless

Meeting opened with silent worship. Then the Clerk read an inspirational writing shared with her by a Friend and parent of young children:

It is a source of solace and courage to feel that I can look to Quakerism for how to “do the right thing” or at least to help shape the intention to do the right thing. The wider culture is full of confusing and sometimes seductive messages and Quakerism has a kind of centripetal force that brings me back toward the center--toward love and caring and right relationship with the world.

The agenda was reviewed and Meeting accepted the agenda.

Minute #1: Friends approved the 1st month minutes with the following corrections:

Kitti Reynolds is spelled with an ‘i’ not a y.

Use of a Capital F when referring to a Quaker Friend, and a small f when referring to an acquaintance.

Announcements

The Secret Pal program will wrap up on February 16th when the last gifts are given in the reveal circle at rise of meeting. Everyone in Meeting is welcome to stay and enjoy the meal that will follow.

Our Racial Justice Committee will be continuing a discussion of the book, *White Fragility* and will announce upcoming dates when they are set.

The SAYMA Yearly Meeting planners are seeking workshop leaders for the upcoming annual session. The workshops will be held on June 12 and 13th, 2020. For more information, see the announcement in the Digest.

The next SAYMA representative meeting will be held in Atlanta on March 14th. Participants can register online using the SAYMA website and the deadline for registration is **February 22nd**.

State of the Meeting Report--Robin Wells

A draft State of the Meeting report was presented to the meeting for consideration. Comments and suggestions for revisions are welcome and can be received until the end of 2nd month. A final draft will be presented in our 3rd month business meeting. It must be submitted to SAYMA by the end of 3rd month. The Clerk will accept changes to this draft up until **February 21st**. (See Appendix A)

Following clarifications and additions were suggested:

- 1) Qualify our use of the word activism with adjectives such as ‘constructive and kind’.
- 2) After meaningful discussion over our concern on the situation in Gaza, Steve Livingston agreed to rewrite the paragraph to be more inclusive and clear.
- 3) Add that we recognize there were possibly other indigenous nations who lived and used our land in the past. The Cherokee nation being the most recent nation. We announced publicly that we are on Cherokee land.
- 4) Add ‘revitalized’ in front of The Long Range Planning & Visioning committee.
- 5) Add a paragraph reflecting our many discussions surrounding our finances, and reorganizing our reporting for clarity and understanding.

Additional changes and additions are to be sent to Robin by **February 21, 2020**.

Junior Business Meeting--Alice Lane, Clerk

Junior Business Meeting met last month with about ten kids and two adults present. They opened with silence and then approved their agenda. They are focusing on service projects and secret pals right now. Currently they are collecting packaged food items, toiletries, over-the-counter medical supplies, and camping gear to donate to Beloved Asheville. They plan to collect trash when it gets warmer.

Our Junior Business Meeting meets bi-monthly and after serving for three business meetings a new clerk is selected.

Committee Reports

RE report -Laura Lane

Laura agreed to give the RE Report, even though the committee is currently clerk-less. They meet on the 4th Sunday every month and would welcome new members. Laura reported on some of the things the committee has been discussing. The Committee would like to increase the adult interaction with the children and they are proposing to have a second adult work with each teacher weekly. The Committee is exploring ways to shift from a structured learning space similar to school into something more fun for the children. They also want to plan more activities outside of the regular meeting time to help build community (e.g., game night, movie night, etc.). Someone suggested that they organize a “Parents Night Out” to give parents and children time to themselves. The Committee is deciding on a book they will give families at the Youth Celebration.

The curriculum this year has been following a faith and practice format in the elementary and youth group programs. One week they focus on an aspect of our faith and on another they explore how to put that faith into practice. In response to an interest expressed by the children, they are also exploring a different country each month.

The Committee would like to propose a minute to increase the pay for the childcare provider from \$15/hour to \$20/hour (matching the pay for the meetinghouse cleaner). Our childcare provider, Patty Burgess, is extremely caring and is actively involved with each child. You can see it on the children’s faces when they are greeted by Patty each morning. Satchel reported that our budget can accommodate the increase

Minute #2: Friends approved the pay raise of our childcare provider to \$20/hour retroactive to January 2020.

Nominating Committee-Kitti Reynolds

Nominating Committee would like to nominate Steve Livingston to serve on the Racial Justice Committee.

Minute #3: The meeting approved Steve Livingston's nomination to the Racial Justice Committee.

The Nominating Committee is asking representatives from AFM committees to stand up at the rise of Meeting to give a short description of their committee's responsibilities, who is currently serving on the committee, and whether they need more members. (Kitti has organized the schedule of committee sharing at rise of meeting.)

All are welcome to sit in on a committee meeting of their choice, except for Ministry and Council due to the confidentiality of issues being discussed.

Peace and Earth Committee--Pat Johnson

P& E would like to give the whole Meeting the opportunity to co-sponsor a series of programs put on by Paula Palmer, who travels in the ministry of Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples (TRR) rather than just the P & E Committee. Swannanoa Valley Friends Meeting has committed to donating up to \$1,000.00 to help cover our budgeted expenses of \$1,500. Individuals in our Meeting have already donated \$270 plus RJC has committed to donate \$50 from their line-item budget for a total of \$320. We're asking Meeting to commit to \$280.00.

Minute #4: The meeting agreed to support Paula Palmer coming to Asheville and support up to \$280 if needed.

SAYMA Business

We continued the discussion about SAYMA-URJ that we started in our 12th month 2019 Business Meeting and continued into first month 2020. And as requested by the SAYMA Finance committee we reviewed their proposed SAYMA draft Conflict of Interest policy.

Supporting the SAYMA-URJ (Uplifting Racial Justice) Committee--Bob Smith.

We were asked by SAYMA Ministry and Nurture to familiarize ourselves with the current situation. (SAYMA Finance asked us to review the draft Conflict of interest policy.) New text has been brought to us by the Asheville Racial Justice Committee:

Asheville Friends Meeting (AFM) supports the work of SAYMA-URJ. AFM understands the moral imperative to disburse funds in good faith and trusts that SAYMA-URJ will spend those funds as they see fit, to best advance their mission.

The RJC committee spent much time discerning and reviewing the mission of SAYMA URJ and the tensions in SAYMA. They questioned why URJ expenditures were being reviewed when SAYF's never were? Suggested we look at the activities not the money flow. (Fear is that money will be used for personal gain.) RJC sees action is needed to address individual racism, cultural white supremacy in both the Asheville meeting and in SAYMA.

RJC proposed that their statement also addressed the SAYMA conflict of interest policy. Many were confused in the combining the two topics into one response.

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Proposed SAYMA Conflict of Interest Policy--Robin Wells

SAYMA sent us a draft conflict of interest policy that is being proposed by the SAYMA Finance Committee. The Clerk read the following from the SAYMA email:

Currently SAYMA has no such policy. The finance committee has two reasons for proposing a conflict of interest policy:

1. The past year has revealed differences in expectations within SAYMA about how financial decisions should be handled when individuals involved in the decision might benefit personally. We hope that developing a conflict of interest policy will help SAYMA Friends find common ground on how these situations should (be) addressed.
2. We continue to plan for an external review of SAYMA's finances. In preparation, we have been looking for gaps or other issues that we can address ahead of time. A conflict of interest policy is not a legal requirement. However, it is a common practice among Quaker organizations as a tool to a) ensure that they operate in a manner consistent with their charitable purposes, and b) maintain the confidence of supporters and the public.

The finance committee is concerned that there may be ways in which typical conflict of interest policies produce racist results – an outcome that we want to avoid. We hope that by offering a simple policy, without a lot of hoops to jump through, we have taken a step in the right direction. In developing the attached draft, we looked at policies from other organizations, including FWCC Section of the Americas. The policies varied on details and to some extent on the degree of formality, but all included the following requirements.

1. That individuals disclose personal, business, organizational or familial relationships that might benefit from the organization's financial actions.

2. That individuals refrain from participating in decisions when there could be financial benefits based on their relationships.
3. That there be a written record of disclosures of conflicts and/or of nonparticipation in related decisions.

The following draft incorporates these elements.

DRAFT: 1/18/20

SAYMA Conflict of Interest Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that SAYMA's financial decisions are made by Friends who do not stand to benefit financially from the decisions. Avoiding actual and potential conflicts of interest is important to SAYMA's culture of financial transparency and to the confidence that monthly meetings and donors place on SAYMA's financial management when they provide funds to SAYMA.

This policy applies to expenditures of SAYMA funds including but not limited to purchases, contracts, scholarships, stipends, compensation, grants, and contributions. It does not apply to routine reimbursements for travel covered by SAYMA's travel policy, or other reimbursements such as for small purchases of supplies.

All SAYMA staff, officers, committee members, and other volunteers (in this policy, "Friends") are expected to avoid any actual or potential conflict of interest. This includes financial decisions that could benefit relatives, including children, spouses, and committed partners.

Friends are welcome to request and advocate for funding that will or may appear to benefit themselves, their relatives, or organizations with which they are affiliated. When doing so, they should explain their connection to the proposed

financial arrangement. They may answer questions and otherwise participate in the discussion. The key distinction is that other Friends must make the decision. Friends who may or will benefit from the transaction should remove themselves from the actual decision. In committees or similar small groups, both the connection to the transaction and the removal from the decision should be recorded in minutes, emails or whatever other format the record of the decision takes. In representative meeting and yearly meeting, if a Friend who has a potential conflict of interest has been an active advocate or participant in the discussion prior to the decision, the relationship should be noted in the minutes. However, since decisions at representative meeting and yearly meeting are taken by a large body, it is not necessary to record removal by individual Friends.

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Following is AFM Discussion:

Some AFM Friends were confused by the policy, and during the discussion they questioned what was behind it. They felt that they did not have enough knowledge to address the questions being raised.

Satchel mentioned that AFM finance committee does not have a policy. SAYMA came out with a policy that follows the standard tax exempt guidelines based on the Colonial Capitalist System. The policy is documented for transparency of financial interactions. It allows groups to make informed decisions and protect individuals who receive money.

RJC questioned the timing of the policy creation plus the content. They see that it will be perceived as racist. They felt it would be better to document how to be better in relationships and community.

RJC recognized that rules were made by corporate Colonial America living with the history of stolen land and enslaved people. These rules are in conflict with indigenous ideas of land rights. They see this is an opportunity to change the sense of ownership and to be a more supportable community. It requires us to let go. One friend offered up the model used by Beloved Asheville.

Our meeting did not come to unity on a response to the SAYMA Finance Committee. (RJC can respond on their own if they feel so led).

We closed with a period of silent worship to meet again as way opens in 3rd month, 2020.

Appendix A

Asheville Friends Meeting

2019 State of the Meeting Report

2-7-20 DRAFT

As we reflect back on 2019, we find we have made some progress toward becoming the meeting we hope to be. Our meeting members and attenders are active and committed to bringing about change in our world, both locally and globally. We find ourselves inspired by the work of other Friends in Meeting and are grateful for their passionate commitment to bringing about justice and honesty in all of our dealings. We are humbled by the work that still needs to be done and hope that we can become more efficient with our efforts and figure out how to provide support to each other.

The rift in our community is beginning to heal, but we have some deep listening to do to fully come together. We are slowly developing the resiliency to sit with our challenges and work together. We want change to happen quickly, but as Friends we know that we often need to sit with an idea and let Spirit do its work. We are learning to be gentle with each other and honor the experience and perspective that each of us brings. What a blessing to spend time together and learn from each other!

We know we have a long way to go to acknowledge and make amends for the racial injustice and white supremacy that has been a part of our lives. It saddens us, but we are determined to do the work needed to bring about

change. In 2019 our Racial Justice Committee gained several new members and continued to provide ways for the Meeting to reflect on our practices and communication. We continued our book discussion using, *Becoming an Anti-Racist Church: Journeying toward Wholeness* by Joseph Barndt. It is clear that we have a lot of work to do as a meeting and we will work to bring more people into the discussion. Our challenge as a meeting is to bring these concepts into practice in a tangible and explicit way. To further our reflection, the RJC committee distributed copies of *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo. People seem open to continuing this important discussion.

Our meeting for worship has been deep and we find Spirit speaks to us in many ways. Many meetings have been silent, yet others held deep, heartfelt, and illuminating vocal ministry. Our “joys and concerns” time after meeting has become rich as friends share from the heart. It says a lot when a Friend opens up to share a sorrow. We also find that Spirit is alive in the mundane, moments of meeting life--when we wash dishes, do committee work, and join in the social time after meeting for worship. We are grateful for those who keep showing up to do the important work of the Meeting. Unfortunately, we have several committees without clerks at this time and that tells us that we need to focus on building up our committees. Our meeting attendance is up, so with some attention we can bring these new members and attenders into our committees.

One important task that was begun in 2019 is the development of a long-range plan. The Long-Range Planning & Visioning Committee began its work in 2019 by facilitating a series of worship sharings designed to explore 1) what our purpose is as a meeting, what we hope to accomplish; 2) how we can nurture our community and become welcoming to all. The final worship sharing took place in 2020 and focused on how we want to be active in the community. These worship sharings will inform the committee’s work as it develops its long-range plan for the meeting.

The meeting also began discussing the need for some shared understanding about how we communicate and interact in our meeting. Many people have been hurt by well-meaning, but insensitive communication in Meeting for Worship, Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, and other more casual interactions at Meeting. Our goal is to come up with a shared understanding for community living, so that we can create a space where difficult issues can be explored in a safe, compassionate environment.

Activism is alive in Asheville Friends Meeting as we struggle to live into the Testimonies. Our Peace & Earth Committee was very active in 2019 and the committee's passion has informed and guided our meeting in many important ways. With humility and respect, we acknowledge Indigenous Elders who have shepherded this land throughout the generations and announce publicly that we are on Cherokee land. We're partnering with Cherokee Natives to build right relationships, engage in dialogue, and educate ourselves and others about our history including the Indian Boarding Schools. We financially supported the Speaker Series of the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program at UNCA to bring Dr. Rangi Matamua, a New Zealand Maori astronomy professor to lecture on campus.

In addition, our meeting felt it was important to raise awareness of our country's use of torture following 9/11 and submitted a letter to local papers. We encouraged people to see the movie, *The Report*, which brings to light the torture and subsequent cover-up.

We also remain concerned about the deteriorating situation in Gaza where human rights abuse continues. We work to inform ourselves so we can influence our country's involvement in Gaza and be mindful not to purchase things made in occupied areas. There is so much that needs to be done and we are seeking ways to support each other in our work.

Activism is not limited to our adult members and attenders, but is alive with our growing community of children in the Meeting. Our meeting has a vibrant junior business meeting that helps our children understand clerking and how to conduct business in the manner of Friends. Their focus is on improving meeting life and impacting our community. They have an ongoing concern for the homeless and those facing food insecurity. In 2019, the First Day School focused on the “expanded” testimonies: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, Education, and Ecology. At our Youth Celebration in May, we gave each family the book, *Sitting Like a Frog* so families could incorporate mindfulness exercises into their family life at home. Youth group inductees received Bibles engraved with their names. The number of children is growing, and our First Day School’s opening circle is often standing-room-only as we gather the children before breaking into our three age groups. We are thrilled to have a youth group again and look forward to their presence in Meeting.

We welcomed two new members in 2019 and look forward to their involvement in our meeting. Our hearts were saddened by the deaths of Jim Hipkins and Ellen Oldham and we miss them. We are reminded of the lasting impact Friends make when they are with us.

As we wrap up our reflection on 2019, we find ourselves longing for better connection. We realize our work in racial justice would be far more effective if we joined forces with other groups doing similar work in the area. We are also eager to connect again with other Friends’ meetings in the region and also with other faith communities. First and foremost, we are wanting to connect with each other in meeting and are looking for ways to build community and get to know each other on a deeper level.