

## **Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business**

### **Asheville Friends Meeting**

3rd Month 8, 2020

**Clerks:** Robin Wells, Clerk of Meeting  
Satchel Loftis, Recording Clerk

**Present:** Jim Barham, Pat Campbell, Bobby Carter, Jim Cavener, Beth Eddy, Mike Eddy, Barbara Esther, Rylin Hansen, Patti Hughes, Pat Johnson, Katherine Kowal, Gita Larson, Steve Livingston, Rusty Maynard, Morgan Murray, Margaret Normile, Edie Patrick, Bob Smith, Scotty Utz, Adrienne Weir

#### **Agenda:**

- Opening Silence
- Announcements
- State of the Meeting Report
- Ad-Hoc Committee for Supporting Individuals in our Meeting Community
- Supporting the SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) Committee
- Peace and Earth Committee Report
- Closing Silence

## Meeting opened with silent worship.

The Clerk challenged Friends to think deeply about the following Quaker saying:

*Have faith and the way will open.*

The meeting continued with more silent worship. The agenda was reviewed and accepted.

### **Minute #1:**

**Friends approved the second month minutes with no corrections.**

## Announcements

Our Racial Justice Committee will be continuing the discussion of the book, *White Fragility* with Chapter 5.

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.

**[Clerk's note: SAYMA Annual Sessions have been canceled due the Coronavirus pandemic.]**

The Long-Range Planning and Visioning Committee has put a Dream Board in the foyer to gather our visions for Asheville Friends Meeting. Paper and markers are provided for people to share their ideas. The board will be up for about three weeks.

The Center for the Study of White American Culture is facilitating a 3-part webinar entitled “Decentering Whiteness and Building Multiracial Community.” It will be held on April 15, 22, 29. More information about the webinar will be posted on the Digest. There is a registration fee of \$95. If you want to participate and need help with this fee, the Meeting can help defray the cost.

Itzel Garcia Ruiz, who used to be our childcare provider before she went off to college, has sent a request to us for our consideration. She has an opportunity to travel to the US/Mexico border with a group being led by her political science professors at Queens University. The goal of the trip is to strengthen their faith and deepen their spirituality, learn more about the issues facing our southern border, and to offer their assistance to local nonprofits. Copies of the letter she sent are available if you want more information about helping Itzel.

Mark your calendars: Gita Larson announced an event scheduled for next month. A workshop with the returning Vahisha Hasan -- 9am to 4pm on Saturday, April 25, 2020. To include all generations. More details to come from Gita.

**[Editor's Note: The status of this workshop is uncertain due the Coronavirus pandemic. Gita will send updates as details emerge.]**

## State of the Meeting Report – Robin Wells

A draft State of the Meeting report was presented to the meeting for consideration. This is the second presentation of the report and it contains the recommendations made at the last business meeting and also incorporates comments given to the Clerk in the weeks following our Business Meeting. This is the last time for revision, since the report is due to SAYMA by the end of this month.

## Asheville Friends Meeting

### 2019 State of the Meeting Report

**3-8-20 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 individual 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 more 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!

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 surrounding racial injustice. We are determined to do the work needed to bring about change. 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 Racial Justice Committee distributed copies of *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo. Asheville Friends are 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. Sharing our “joys and concerns” during our final moments of worship continues to be rich as Friends open up and share from the heart. It demonstrates a level of trust and brings out the love of the community in response. We also find that Spirit is alive in the mundane moments of meeting life – when we wash dishes, do committee work, come together for workdays, 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.

We have had many discussions about our finances and our desire to maintain a significant level of outreach in our budget. However, our commitment to outreach must be balanced with the necessary upkeep of our aging meetinghouse, if we are going to responsibly shepherd our Meeting for future generations. We unfortunately had to trim our outreach by 10% in 2019 due to budgetary constraints. Our Treasurer agreed to help keep us on track by including all of our Meeting reserve funds in future reports, so we can have more clarity and be proactive with our meetinghouse needs.

One important task that was begun in 2019 is the development of a long-range plan. The revitalized 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 and what we hope to accomplish; 2) how we can nurture our community and become welcoming to all. The final worship sharing 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.

Our Peace and Earth Committee's passion informed and guided our Meeting to lean into living our Testimonies in several important ways. With humility and respect, we acknowledged Indigenous Elders who have shepherded this land throughout the generations. We understand that there have been indigenous people on this land for thousands of years and thus many different indigenous nations may have lived in this area. The most recent nation is the Cherokee and we announced publicly that we are on Cherokee land. We are 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. We submitted a letter to local papers encouraging people to see the movie, *The Report*, which brings to light the torture and subsequent cover-up.

We are increasingly concerned about the deteriorating situation in Gaza where human rights abuse continues. We work to inform ourselves so we can influence our country's relationship with Gaza and be mindful how our purchasing decisions can affect life in Occupied Palestine.

There is so much that needs to be done and we are seeking ways to support each other in this important work.

Activism is not limited to our adult members and attenders but is alive with our 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 imprinted 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 its presence in Meeting.

We welcomed two new members in 2019 and are grateful for 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 want 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.

*Discussion:*

*Much discussion about the opening sentence in paragraph 3, particularly around the use of the phrase “white supremacy.” Its academic definition refers to the political and socioeconomic systems where institutions, laws, policies, habits, and ideologies privilege white people over non-whites, independent of the presence of racial hatred. The more common dictionary definition describes the phrase as a racist belief that white people are superior to people of all other races and therefore should be dominant over them.*

*Friends discussed alternate language to the phrase, their evolving understanding and acceptance of the academic term, and the recognition that we are called to address these societal realities regardless of the words used to describe them. Friends also recognized the real pain connected to the phrases “white supremacy” and “white supremacist,” and the lasting impact that hate groups have created by terrorizing LGBTQ, Jewish, and immigrant individuals and communities, among many others.*

**Minute #2:**

**The Meeting approved the report with the following changes:**

**In the third paragraph:**

- **Striking the sentence beginning with “We know we have a long way to go...”.**
- **Moving the second sentence – “We are determined to do the work needed to bring about change.” – to follow the sentence that was originally third.**

**In the report’s next-to-last paragraph:**

- **Replacing the phrase “look forward to” with “are grateful for.”**

## Ad-Hoc Committee for Supporting Individuals in our Meeting Community

We are facing an uncertain time with the threat of COVID-19, better known as Coronavirus disease. It is important that we be prepared here in our Meeting and able to reach out to members of our community who may be at risk should we need to isolate ourselves.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has recommendations for how to sanitize surfaces. We need to establish protocols for our Meetinghouse and figure out how we are going to follow them.

In addition, we need to think about the people in our Meeting community who may need assistance during this time. The Ready.gov website recommends that all families have at least two weeks of food, water, and prescription refills. Do we want to collect supplies to share with people who are in need at a time of mandatory isolation? Should we reach out to people to help them prepare? Do we want to create an ad-hoc committee to coordinate these efforts?

*Discussion:*

*Friends were in agreement about this measure. A friend noted the need to consider the emotional and psychological impacts of social distancing and self-quarantining on individuals.*

**Minute #3:**

**An *ad hoc* committee composed of Barbara Esther, Patti Hughes, Morgan Murray, and Bob Smith was approved. No clerk was named at this time.**



## Supporting the SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice (URJ) Committee – Bob Smith

The Racial Justice Committee sat with their minute presented last month and has decided to resubmit it again for Meeting's consideration. This is in response to SAYMA Ministry and Nurture's request that we familiarize ourselves with the issues surrounding the SAYMA-URJ Committee.

*Asheville Friends Meeting (AFM) supports the work of SAYMA's Uplifting Racial Justice committee (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.*

### *Discussion:*

*Much discussion was held regarding the issues within SAYMA related to its URJ Committee, as well as the above statement from the Racial Justice Committee. Some Friends were in support of the SAYMA-URJ committee's plans and activities, while others were very much opposed to further financial and official support of the committee.*

*Friends were reminded that SAYMA's request was for us to consider the issues as a Meeting, but that SAYMA did not invite or expect responses from its member Meetings. A few monthly meetings have recorded minutes as a result of their own discussions.*

*Our SAYMA Representative, Morgan Murray, shared that his focus has been to listen deeply, so that he could represent the truth of our Meeting in the upcoming Representatives' meeting on Saturday, March 15, 2020.*

*Even though Meeting currently is not in agreement about the details of the situation, we are working through it. Several members expressed their happiness with the sense of closeness felt in Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.*

**Note: We did not approve a minute related to this discussion.**

## Closing Silence

**We closed with a period of silent worship. We agreed to meet again as way opens in fourth month, 2020. The Peace & Earth committee report was postponed until then.**