

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

Asheville Friends Meeting

Second Month 12, 2023

DRAFT

Present in the Meetinghouse: Pat Johnson, Clerk, Barbara Burke, Recording Clerk, Joel O'Brien, Adrienne Weir, Jim Barham, Sarah Jane Thomas, Kitti Reynolds, Nick Mimken, Margaret Farmer, Scotty Utz, Katherine Kowal, Steve Livingston.

Present via Zoom: Rylin Hansen, Morgan Murray, Gita Larson, Barbara Esther, Ellen Carr, Ellie Cox, Satchel Loftis, Jim Cavener.

The Meeting opened with Silent Worship.

The Clerk shared a reading out of silence.

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation, February 03, 2023; Adapted from Richard Rohr, Ronald Rolheiser, and Edwina Gateley's *Loving the Two Halves of Life: The Further Journey* (Albuquerque, NM: Center for Action and Contemplation, 2011).

In her Loving the Two Halves of Life talk, author and poet Edwina Gateley tells of the secure attachment to God she experienced as a child, a result of her first-half-of-life container:

I didn't even question that I was loved, it was like an entitlement. Well, of course, God loves us, and the church will teach us and guide us and protect us and help us to become holy. We were simply loved and secure and trusting.... God knows, God understands, God loves you with an enormous love and only wants to look upon you with that love. Quiet, still, be, let your God love you. And God was always there, even if I went out to play....

Religion, in that first stage of spiritual life, [meant] we're safe. An eternal invitation to rest and play in love and knowing the security of God with us. We are, each of us, a bit of God, a scrap of divinity. If only we could know it, we would walk the earth in awe, eyes shining in splendor, heart suspended in delight, at the miracle of the living God gracing our days and nights.... The joy, the innocence, the energy, and the hope of childhood!

Gateley reminds us that while our experience of faith changes, God's love remains steadfast throughout our lives:

We forget as we grow older; we leave behind the spontaneity and often the joy of our early years. And the words of Meister Eckhart, of course, ring true for us, "God is at home. It is we who have gone out for a walk." [1] Out we go into the world, often looking for God and we are told, God is out there somewhere and if we do certain things and behave in certain ways, well, we might connect with God, we might glimpse a little of God. And so we try and we try to attract God's attention and we try and we try to be good and to be faithful and to do the right thing. And often we fail and we hurt and we get disillusioned. We have forgotten: God is at home; it is indeed we who have gone out for a walk. The dance and the play are abandoned as we address the serious issues of adult life and discipleship. The faith of childhood, the innocence, is often forgotten....

But it is important for us to know that no matter how much life and circumstances may batter and bruise us on this journey of life, the God of our childhood is also the God of our adulthood and is also the God of our old age. God is faithful on this developing journey, ever seducing us along the way to remember who we are and from where we come. Who we are, the daughters and the sons of God, called to reflect the face of God in a suffering world.

Approve Agenda

Minute #1: The agenda is approved.

1st Month Business Meeting Minutes

Minute #2: 1st Month Business Meeting Minutes were approved, with the addition of the thanks to Ellen Carr and Satchel Loftis for their work on the budget.

Announcements: Pat Johnson

Pat received a letter from Margaret Edds, A Friend from the Richmond, VA Meeting about a talk being given at Malaprops on March 7, 2023, about her book *What the Eyes Can't See: Ralph Northam, Black Resolve, and a Racial Reckoning in Virginia*. This will be a hybrid event. Further information is available in the February 8th Digest. The following is the letter from Margaret:

Hello Pat,

My name is Margaret Edds. I'm a longtime member of Richmond (VA) Friends Meeting—including a stint as clerk some time back. I'm also an author and retired political and editorial writer for the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot. I have a book talk coming up at Malaprop's on March 7 that may be of interest to the Quaker community there.

The book (my sixth) is entitled *What the Eyes Can't See: Ralph Northam, Black Resolve, and a Racial Reckoning in Virginia* (University of South Carolina Press, 2022). You may recall the scandal that occurred in February 2019 when a photo of two people—one in blackface, the other in a KKK shroud—turned up on Governor Northam's medical school yearbook page. Inexplicably, it had gone undetected for decades. Within 24 hours, virtually every national Democrat of note had called on Northam to resign. For a combination of reasons, he did not. Instead, he resolved to immerse himself in understanding White privilege and what it means to live as a Black person in America. Through a combination of Black activism and Northam's personal evolution, his term wound up as the most racially progressive in Virginia since the 1880s.

The book is more than a recounting of that story, however. Its primary purpose, in my mind, is to challenge other White people to similarly examine their blind spots around race. And it's how even a White man with a lot of Black friends and a good record on civil rights could be "race ignorant" about ongoing, systemic racism. As we know, he is far from alone.

Committees:

Library: Ellie Cox

Interest has been expressed in having a dedicated Library space. Since COVID, the Library has become a repository for things that do not have a home, and as the Library space was used in the past as a First Day school area for children under the age of 2½, there are safety concerns for those children who may be using that space. A Friend thought that there was a

requirement by the Fire Marshall that children under a certain age must remain on the first floor, and this will be clarified. A member and a former Library clerk have cleaned out the Library and Ellie, the interim clerk, and other members met to organize the place and to formulate future plans. The committee would like to hear from the Meeting what value it would put on having a Library that is current and active. Ellie states that a dedicated space for the Library is not meant to exclude anyone and asked that other committee clerks contact her with what needs they may have for the Library space. A member said she would like to see the Library as a comfortable place for all to use. Ellie asked that the Committee Clerks discuss at their next meetings their needs for use of the Library space, and that both individuals and Committees Clerks contact her with their needs for their activities, and if there are other places within the Meetinghouse that could accommodate those goals. This would be followed by a work-day in which the people involved would come and give feedback as to their goals and how to accommodate them in the space available, or if they might need a different space.

A Friend thanked the Library Committee for all the work they did on the Library, and said that the Religion and Education Committee will work with the Library Committee on their endeavors.

House & Grounds: Jim Barham

Jim stated that some tools had been left on the porch by the workmen removing the gutters, and they did not return to retrieve them. They are currently in a box in the Library, and Jim suggests that if people want them, they take them home, or they can be donated to Habitat for Humanity. Now that the gutters have been removed and a new roof installed, riprap is being placed in front of the building, where water comes off of the building but more stones are needed. Buckets have been left out front if members would like to take them and bring back more stones to finish putting more riprap in. The contractor for the repair of the steps is coming this week.

A new faucet for the sink in a bathroom has been purchased, and a plumber is also coming this week to install it. The water heater needs a new sacrificial anode, which has been purchased, and either Jim or the plumber will replace it.

A Friend thanked Jim for coming to the Meetinghouse during the week to help get the back door locked, and he repaired the lock the following day. Since Jim has spoken with the Fire Marshal in the past, he will contact him to clarify whether children under a certain age are permitted to attend activities on the second floor.

Finance: Ellen Carr & Satchel Loftis

Satchel shared a screen showing the expenses for the gutter removal and installation of a new roof. These figures are shown in the attachments included at the end of the Business Meeting notes. The Building Fund had \$31,365.28 in it. The roof and gutter work was \$25,515.34, which leaves us a balance of \$5849.94. A member asked about the cost of the upcoming repairs to the steps and the faucet, and what fund will it come from. The clerk for H&G responded that we don't know yet what the bill from the plumber will be. The estimate for repairs to the front steps was \$272, but we need additional work done on the side steps, which he estimates to be around \$100. The contractor has agreed to do repairs to the side steps when he's here. The H&G clerk also reminded the Meeting that we had the annual furnace cleaning done, and that bill is \$338 plus tax.

Satchel said if there are additional expenses he will update the Meeting with new balances. The year end results for 2022 have not been finalized yet but the revenue plan for last year was \$28,278. The amount received came to \$32,268, for a difference of \$3940, which is a surplus for the year 2022. The surplus will roll over into the General Fund. Next month the final report for the actual surplus will be available as there may be additional unaccounted expenses. The amounts for the gifts, rental income and interest are final. The full amount of the budget for General Outreach,

Quaker Outreach and Racial Justice Outreach (\$9000) has been expended for 2022.

A Friend asked if the high water bill from the water leak in December had been adjusted by the city, and the Treasurer said she will contact the city about this.

The Meeting accepted the Financial report, and thanked Ellen and Satchel for their work.

2022 State of the Meeting Draft

Queries from SAYMA for our State of the Meeting includes the following:

What challenges did our Meeting face during the last year?

How did we support and lift each other up?

How did we breathe new life into our testimonies and responses to turmoil in our community and the world?

How did we deepen together spiritually over the past year?

Thank you for this opportunity to assess our rich and fulfilling 2022 year. Often we tend to continue our activities and functions without fully addressing and acknowledging lessons to be learned. We're grateful for the queries that guided us and to all who participated in sharing ideas and thoughts for this summary.

Let us begin with the ways we supported and lifted each other up. As we all know, COVID-19 is still with us and affects everything in our lives. So we've been very careful to search for ways to keep all of us safe and healthy. In particular, we gave care and attention to members' health when deciding on when it was safe to meet indoors. We continued our hybrid Meetings with a Zoom connection for those who preferred virtual attendance or were unable to attend in person. We purchased a better microphone and camera, and a bigger TV to benefit Zoom attenders, and late in the year added high speed internet and WiFi capabilities to further enhance their experience.

Kudos to our treasurer and the assistant treasurer (who lives in Brazil but still remains very active in our Meeting) for keeping our finances in good order. The Zen Center of Asheville now rents space in our Meetinghouse several times weekly for their meditations. This unexpected rental income added to our generous donations in 2022 to give us a healthy year-end balance allowing for an increased budget in 2023. We are especially glad to have contributed \$4,000.00 to General Outreach and \$2,000 to Quaker Outreach since we felt especially moved to address local needs, plus \$3,000 to Racial Justice Outreach and \$4,050.00 for our SAYMA Assessment giving a total of \$13,050.00 in 2022 Outreach.

We continued our efforts from 2021 to be especially welcoming to our visitors. Two Ministry and Counsel members participated in the Friends General Conference Spiritual Deepening webinars on ways to integrate newcomers into the life of the Meeting. M&C as well as Religious Education and others reached out to people we had not seen lately to check in and see how we might help with any needs. Our clerk visited Friends who couldn't come to Meeting. Folks in general supported Friends who needed assistance. Some examples include frequent contact, gifts of food and travel assistance to a family facing serious illness, care for each other through surgeries and loss of loved ones, help with preparation for an individual moving to a new home, aid in reorganizing living space and offering ride sharing (enabling non-drivers to attend Meeting in person). We offered support with cards, notes and visits to an incarcerated Friend as well as care packages sent to her and to some other inmates whom she suggested would welcome them. Many of us participated both personally and financially in business projects initiated by an attendee who is a Black racial justice activist in the wider primarily white Asheville community. She offers tremendous gifts as we continue addressing our white prejudices, biases and privileges, i.e. white supremacy.

The youth in First Day School supported each other and grew in their relationships as they involved the meeting in fun activities that they led. Intergenerational events such as Simple Crafts, Secret Pals and the Christmas play followed by a feast, built connections and deepened all of our relationships. Parents and children spent time with each other and the energy and dedication of the Religious Education Committee exemplified love and respect for our children. Our childcare provider worked with and mentored our youngest Friends while providing care for them and our young families. We gave love and support to our Junior Business Meeting, recognized their Light and empowered them to follow their leadings. Our Junior Business Meeting carried concerns about a number of issues both in our local community and in the world. Our children initiated and sponsored a service project for the homeless by making "warming packets" to hand out.

They invited all of us to contribute items for these packets. They also initiated a food collection for Asheville community members who didn't have enough to feed their families. While we recognize the need for more people to be involved upstairs in First Day School, we are blessed with dedicated Friends who minister to our children, who in turn minister to us.

Young Friends discussed their concern and suggested some ways to address human trafficking. Another discussion included finding ways to keep pets with their owners. We supported Southern Appalachian Young Friends by hosting one of their retreats and renting a van for transportation to another retreat. The loss of some teens whose families stopped attending Meeting left a gap. Currently we have two active teens. Much to our delight we approved contracting with a Young Adult Friend to be a part-time youth leader. We welcome Young Adult Friends who add a needed perspective and energy to the Meeting. In addition, Young Adult Friends are taking steps to form a supportive, spiritual and enjoyable community through monthly dinners that include silence, support, and check-ins.

Everyone values our vibrant sharing of joys and concerns after the rise of Meeting which often leads to conversation and offers of help. Fellowship after meeting for worship helps us get to know each other and enriches our lives. When a new member joined us we welcomed him with a potluck. We are happy to report that new attenders are actively involved in our Meeting. Our work in committees strengthens spirituality in practical ways and builds personal relationships. Committees worked well together and helped each other with their various activities. Many of our committees don't have clerks but on the bright side, our committees are getting new members. We encouraged Friends to speak their truth and listen with open hearts to each other.

Some of the above actions carried over into the wider community and world. Here are some thoughts on breathing new life into our testimonies and responses to turmoil in our community and the world, as we listened to those who felt that they were not being considered. Families continued to support each other in both spiritual and practical ways which reflects our testimonies in action. Our Peace and Equality Testimonies became more real when we gathered with the larger Asheville community at the Martin Luther King Prayer Breakfast and placed a co-sponsoring ad in the souvenir program booklet. Other testimony revelations include the following actions:

- We held a racial justice discussion group weekly on Zoom. We read books together and dug into the issues affecting our local Black community.

- We scheduled speakers from Indigenous and Black communities for our second hour Spiritual Enrichment programs and we continued building relationships with our Indigenous and African American neighbors.
- Faithfully sticking to our postcard writing on fifth Sundays including topics such as thanking Buncombe County Commission members for ongoing reparations funding, supporting gun safety and stopping gun violence, stopping single-use plastics and thanking the January 6th Committee for their work while encouraging our North Carolina legislature to strengthen the criminal code against electoral counts disruption.
- We remembered to bring our Manna Food Bank barrel out to the porch to collect food for those in need throughout our community.

A good example of our response to turmoil as we sought to be as radically just and as ethical as possible included assisting with bail funds, addressing prison conditions and supporting the food workers union. We joined other organizations in co-sponsoring the International Day of Peace in September. Many of us are conflicted about the war in Ukraine and how it relates to our Peace Testimony. We felt led to schedule a time of worship-sharing for us to grapple with this complicated and difficult situation. There are no easy answers and we continue to struggle with this issue.

One big challenge during 2022 involved the continuing incidence of COVID. As mentioned above, it was difficult deciding how to hold Meeting for worship safely for all of us. We spent much of our time worshiping outdoors to maximize safety for our vulnerable members and attenders. Parents with young children helped us realize that they felt left out of some COVID decisions and were not able to join Meeting for Worship because we were not holding First Day School in person. Eventually we decided to use the CDC COVID Community Level for Buncombe County to determine mask use while in the Meetinghouse. We lost some families during COVID, some of whom have not returned. We questioned how to keep people on Zoom involved. Sometimes people online dropped off due to inadequate internet connection. Personal grief, grief for our suffering planet, grief over tension in the Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting Association and the feeling of loss from our nearest neighboring Friends Meeting, Swannanoa Valley Friends Meeting leaving SAYMA, all weighed on us.

Another big challenge, already mentioned, was the war in Ukraine causing many to feel conflicted about our response to the war and how to live out our Peace Testimony. Some

feelings of sorrow, frustration and guilt for not having helped to avoid this conflict rose. Our children remind us that we need to hold Russia, as well as Ukraine in the Light. Some asked if we feel the same about war in countries other than Ukraine. How is it that we support Ukraine against the aggressor Russia, but then support the Israeli Zionist aggressors more than Palestine * {A member of Ministry and Counsel suggested M&C meet to construct a statement before the next MFB.}

*This will be reworded. Suggestions welcomed.

[One suggestion is: We grappled with how to respect & honor our Peace Testimony and at the same time support sovereignty and self-determination in Ukraine and many other oppressed countries.

Another suggestion: We acknowledge the contradiction between our silent acquiescence to the use of military force in Ukraine's resistance to Russian occupation at the same time as we unequivocally oppose the use of military force in Palestine's resistance to Israeli occupation.]

A series of Meetinghouse repairs/improvements were needed this year which reminded us to always budget resources to maintain our more than 100-year-old space. The Library room became a storage room during COVID and part of it housed space for children under 2½ and their toys. Books were left off shelves and some were in bad shape and/or outdated. Many hours of effort by several people were required to restore the Library to good order. Since we didn't meet inside for such a long time, all of our space shows some signs of neglect.

Moving on to spiritual aspects of our meeting in 2022, some noted that there are more "gathered meetings" than in past years with fewer "popcorn" meetings, indicating a deepening in our spirituality. We also deepened our spiritual relationships by meeting in small groups, focusing on a variety of issues important to the community. Getting back to worshipping in person has been wonderful.

M&C purchased several copies of the Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *Beyond Consensus, Salvaging Sense of the Meeting* by Barry Morley for us to read and share with each other. We then scheduled a second hour to discuss what we learned about essential components in discovering a sense of the meeting and how it differs from consensus. As we discern a way forward, the release after sharing a message, long focus and transition to Light all result in a valuable spiritual experience.

Keeping community members informed and connected through the online Weekly Digest contributes to our spirituality. Sharing our struggles with each other and reaching out when someone wrestles spiritually brings meaning and usefulness to our meeting. Getting together to reflect and write this State of the Meeting report helps to deepen our spirituality, as well. And we mention one more time the continuing concern and worship-sharing on our Peace Testimony. One of our newer members states “Joining the community has deepened my spirituality and my identity as a Quaker. Becoming a contributing member of the community has deepened my spirituality even further. Having space with the young adults, the SAYF community as well as the larger community as a whole have all been deeply spiritually rich.” Another Friend concludes that a good part of spirituality involves silent prayer and recognizing the Divine’s presence throughout the day, and that actions that one is involved in can be spiritual as well. Our work last year was done with good intention, extended to inward and outward actions that are important to us, to the rest of our Quaker community, our wider community and the world. When we treat both each other as well as our work with reverence we believe that deepens us spiritually.

The meeting closed with silent worship until the way opens for our next business in the Third Month of 2023.

ATTACHMENTS:

■ **AFM - Business Meeting - Finance Report - 2023-02-12.pdf**