

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

Asheville Friends Meeting

Third Month 12, 2023

Present in the Meetinghouse: Pat Johnson, Clerk, Barbara Burke, Recording Clerk, Barbara Esther, Kitti Reynolds, Steve Livingston, Zoe Wallace, Jim Barham, Robin Wells, Jim Cavener, Suzannne Junkin Friedrichs, Margaret Farmer, Katherine Kowal, Bobby Carter, Sarah Jane Thomas.

Present via Zoom: Mike Eddy, Beth Eddy, Adrienne Weir, Susan Oehler, Margaret Normile, Satchel Loftis, Joel O'Brien, Rylin Hansen, Anne O'Brien.

The Meeting opened with Silent Worship.

The Clerk shared a reading out of silence.

Swannanoa Valley Friends Meeting Pamphlet; *The Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business* by Dan Snyder, p 8.

Quaker Process

Quaker process stresses inward spiritual work over outwardly visible results. None of us has the wisdom or perspective to know with certainty which direction will bear the full mark of Truth, and perhaps the surest sign that we are wrong is when we are most certain that we are not. Quakerism is grounded in the vision of a truly Spirit-led community such that in the workings of our daily lives and in the caring for the business of our Meeting, we strive to practice and bear witness to the present activity and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Quaker business procedure resonates deeply with Proverbs 3:5-8: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones."

Minute #1: The agenda was approved.

Minute #2: Second Month Business Meeting Minutes were approved.

Announcements: Pat Johnson

The Library and Religious Education Committees agreed to move the toy shelves upstairs to free up space in the Library. They will need help for this move. Please volunteer if you feel strong enough to assist with the shelves. A member suggested carrying things up the steps outside which might be easier than using the inside steps

House & Grounds reports that we still need 5-6 buckets of stones to put behind the shrubs out front. Fist or grapefruit sized stones would be best.

A Friend asked if the Fire Marshall had been asked about allowing small children on the second floor, but he has not yet been contacted.

A Friend asked if Meeting members could bring a box or basket of toys so that the Library space could still be safely used by small children. Alterations to the space will allow better access to the card catalog and will allow more room for a workspace.

Committees:

Finance: Satchel Loftis

Satchel shared the Finance report for 2022 on screen. Final numbers showed a surplus in the regular annual budget which includes: care of the Meetinghouse on an annual basis, Meeting and committee activities and Outreach.

Revenue in 2022 was \$32,268 from gifts and rent, and interest on our bank accounts. The amount spent for the Meetinghouse was \$8,996.74. The amount spent on Meeting support was \$3,377.07

General Outreach, Quaker Outreach, Racial Justice and our SAYMA assessment totaled \$12,950. Transfers to other Funds: \$2,400 to the H&G Meetinghouse Improvement fund, \$17 to College Age Support Fund, \$400 to Ministry and Counsel, and \$200 to the Scholarship Fund.

A Member asked what we should do with the surplus. Satchel said the surplus rolls over into the General Fund. We could take some or all and transfer to H&G or anywhere else, as needed. The Member also asked if our insurance was adequate with changes being made to the landscape and the children's playground. She also brought up that members of the neighborhood come onto the property, and does this expose us to more liability and do we need signs or warnings posted? Satchel agreed that the insurance agent can be contacted about these concerns.

A Friend stated that H&G had anticipated roof repair needed in their budget and said the H&G committee can meet and determine if they need additional funds. Another Friend said we may need the second furnace replaced, and there have been talks of kitchen improvements so it would be wise to build up the Meetinghouse Improvement or Building Funds for these purposes.

A Member asked for clarification on what the Building Fund and Meetinghouse Improvement Fund are for. The Meetinghouse Improvement fund was initially for smaller repairs such as replacing steps, roof repairs or replacement, furnace replacement etc. The Building Fund was for larger items, such as the mortgage. When the mortgage was paid off, we continued to put money in the fund in case the Meeting might want to move to a different building. With the decision to remain in the current Meetinghouse the decision was made to put that money into the Building Fund to invest into the current property. Another Friend mentioned that there was some thought, after the decision not to move, of building a worship space separate from the current building, and the remaining area we use now could be more of a Fellowship hall.

A Member said he would like to hear from the H&G and Long Range Planning Committees as to what would be the best thing to do with the surplus funds before the question is brought to MFB.

No update needed at this time to the 2023 budget.

Minute # 3: Report accepted, with thanks to Finance Committee

Ministry and Counsel: Pat Johnson

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 attender 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 worshipping 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 and Association and the feeling of loss from our nearest neighboring Friends meeting, Swannanoa Valley Friends Meeting leaving SAYMA, all weighed on us.

We also grappled with how to respect and honor our Peace Testimony and at the same time support sovereignty and self-determination in Ukraine. Friends expressed feelings of sorrow, frustration and guilt. Our children reminded us that we need to hold Russia, as well as Ukraine in the Light. Some among us asked whether we feel the same about war in countries outside Europe. Some among us pointed out the contradiction between our silent acquiescence to the use of military force in Ukraine's resistance to Russian occupation, even though our Meeting has consistently opposed 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 rich and fulfilling. It extended to inward and outward actions that are important to us, to the rest of our Quaker community, our wider community and the world. We’re excited about the rejuvenation of our Meeting and we look forward to seeing where the renewed energy leads us in 2023.

Minute #4: The State of the Meeting report is accepted with gratitude expressed to the Clerk for her work on the report.

FCNL Request on Reproductive Health and Abortion - Katherine Kowal

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) is Friends' presence in Washington, DC and advocates for various policies that align with our values. They are seeking help from Meetings to discern what to say about reproductive health care in its policy statement. They offer 4 queries to guide our discernment:

- What does reproductive health care look like in the world that you and your community seek?
- How are the Quaker values and testimonies relevant to the issue of abortion?
- Should the FCNL Policy Statement be revised on the issues of abortion and reproductive health and abortion?
- If so, what should the Policy Statement say?

The first two queries are being addressed today:

After a moment of silence, Friends shared their thoughts:

A Member spoke about her feelings as a woman and mother, and as a biologist.

Another Member spoke of this controversy as being framed as a right to abortion, rather than a right to make choices for oneself. As a man, he would not presume to make these decisions for women. He trusts people who have children to make decisions for children. He doesn't question or consider whether it is right or wrong for women to have abortions, but questions whether it is right or wrong for women to have bodily autonomy, as men do.

A Friend found this sharing difficult because he questions what is our business on speaking on this. He questions why a religious organization would write policies for lobbyists to influence our government. He feels if our Meeting or Quakers felt called to minister to the subject of abortion or more broadly, women's health, that is one thing, but it is another thing for us to speak on it. If, as a Quaker he is to let his life speak for him, he did not feel that, as an individual, he had any business to write a policy on an issue that does not affect him as a man. But he does feel that he cannot restrict a person's individual choice. He thinks the queries are irrelevant to him.

Another Friend questioned if a religious society should be making a policy statement at all, and another felt it should be the right of a woman to make the choice, except that right has been taken away.

Another Friend feels it is important for women to have medical support while pregnant, and for her and the child post pregnancy, and that there needs to be information available and medical support for women and men in this issue of reproductive health.

A Friend feels the communities of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color have less access to medical care and support, and we need to address all women and their right to healthcare choices.

A Friend, who describes herself as "a female human" spoke of working as a nurse in a psychiatric ward who had 2 patients, one who had a child she did not want, the other had an abortion she did not want.

She spoke to her feelings after miscarriages, and a third pregnancy that occurred when finances were tight and she was over 40. Though she declined an amniocentesis because she would not have an abortion, she does not feel she could make a decision for someone else. Women are losing the right to choose and it is a human rights issue. FCNL is asking us how we are led and it is going to be different for each person. This Friend longs for the willingness in all of us to be led by the Spirit.

Others mentioned that reproductive health should protect all of us. Doctors should be able to recommend proper treatment without fear of retribution. Children should be wanted and we should not go back to the situation of unsafe abortions. Many women, especially women of color, are unable to get good reproductive care today, and this is not right and Quakers should not support this. These are difficult choices and safe reproductive health care should be provided for all.

Another member spoke of becoming a mother at the age of 16. She became pregnant again at age 23 and felt she had the right to make her own choice and should have access to a medically safe abortion if desired. She feels that so many other religious organizations speak out against free choice, and that perhaps we need to speak out for the right to make a free choice. Just as many Quakers in the past spoke out against slavery, we should speak out against preventing women from making their own choices about healthcare, which is tantamount to slavery.

The Clerk asked if anyone here wants to draft a statement about this for discernment by our Meeting? The statement to FCNL does not need to be complex. Two Friends volunteered to work on a draft statement.

Racial Justice Committee: Steve Livingston

The Racial Justice Committee has been influenced by Desmond Tutu's observation that if we are silent in the face of oppression then we are siding with the oppressor.

The RJ Committee distributed funds to 17 organizations, most of them local. The following organizations received funds: The Racial Justice Coalition of Asheville, The Center for Participatory Change, Sistas Caring 4 Sistas, Youth Transformed for Life, Positive Changes Youth Ministry, Umoja Health and Wellness Center, The Asheville Peak Academy, Colaborativa La Milpa, My Daddy Taught Me That, My Sistah Taught Me That, The Christine W. Avery Learning Center, Different Strokes Performing Arts Collective, Hood Huggers International, LEAF Global Arts, Building Bridges of Asheville and Buncombe County, Proverbs 22:6 and The Paul Cuffee Abolitionist Center.

Minute #4: Meeting accepted the Racial Justice Committee Report,

Peace and Earth: Kitti Reynolds

Activating Indigenous Beats: *Hip Hop Nativo Festival*

UNC Asheville Cultural Events/Equity & Arts Series

April 11-14, 2023

A collaborative effort with faculty and students from multiple departments across campus (i.e. Humanities, Music, Art, Languages, and AIIS) as well as with Indigenous peoples (Cherokee and Hñahñü), and the African American and Latinx communities in Asheville is underway to present a real cross-cultural educational gathering. Partners also include the Museum of the Cherokee Indian and local hip hop artists and community leaders

During the weeklong residency, hip-hop Indigenous artists, graffiti artists and DJs will meet at UNCA to share and exchange their music and language with our community. This is a unique opportunity for the university and community to engage with contemporary Native American and Indigenous musicians. The three main rappers and artists will visit from Chile, Mexico and the US. After years of various trans-Indigenous projects, the importance of Indigenous hip-hop in dismantling stereotypes about indigeneity is clear. In bridging popular culture, political agendas, and spirituality, Indigenous youth embrace rappers who have explained through their poetry/lyrics how singing and improvising are part of their "being indigenous".

Economic support comes from the Key Center, Institutional Equity, NEH Professorship, and Global Studies but they are still short of US \$10000 in the budget. They are wondering if Asheville Friends can support this Festival. This information will be put in the Digest. P&E working on an indigenous support fund

Minute #5: The Meeting approved raising funds to support the Hip Hop Nativo festival. The goal is to raise \$1,000 by March 31, 2023. Friends should make checks payable to Asheville Friends Meeting, and put AIIS on the memo line.

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

ATTACHMENTS:

■ **AFM - Business Meeting - Finance Report - 2023-03-12.pdf**

■ **AFM - Operating Activity FY2022 (FINAL).pdf**