

Called Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business
Asheville Friends Meeting Minutes
10th Month 26, 2025

Present in the Meetinghouse: Joelle Swaggert O'Brien, Presiding Clerk; Barbara Esther, Interim Recording Clerk, Deanna Hatch, Sarah Jane Thomas, Bob Lackey, Barbara Burke, Rylin Hansen, Suzanne Junkin-Fredericks, Margaret Normile, Katherine Kowal, Bonnie Seigel, Chris Garrigues, Nick Mimken, Helen Whiteside, Patricia Johnson, Laura McCullough, Jim Cavener, Adrienne Weir, Bobby Carter

Present via Zoom: Margaret Farmer, Gita Larson

The meeting opened with Silent Worship.

Out of the silence, the Clerk shared a reading from the *New American Bible, the book of Mark 12:29*

Jesus replied, "First is this: 'Hear, O Israel! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Presentation of the Agenda

Minute #1: The Agenda was accepted.

AFM Has Been Asked to Join Faith Communities in Asking for Immigrant Support

Reverend Sara Wilcox, Pastor of the Land of Sky United Church of Christ has recently sent out an Op-Ed calling on the faith leaders and faith communities of WNC to show support for immigrants within our community. Bob Lackey came forward asking the clerk of Meeting to sign on behalf of Asheville Friends. Since we all share the responsibility and joy of being ministers to our meeting we've called a Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business so that we may consider what is said in the Op-Ed and choose how to move forward in unity. The Op-Ed is as follows;

"As pastors, rabbis and leaders of faith-based organizations rooted here in WNC, we represent a diversity of religious traditions and beliefs. We are united in our

commitment to God's teaching to Love Thy Neighbor. Today we call on our wider community to put these intentions into action by prioritizing the ethic of love for ALL our neighbors, and in particular, our immigrant neighbors.

As a policy matter, immigration is a complex issue, on which neighbors may disagree. As people of faith, however, we agree to basic tenets that unite us across our diverse traditions, across any politics. We believe that all people are Beloved Children of God, important and vital members of our community, and deserving of the full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity, regardless of race, nationality, language, or immigration status. We believe in welcoming the stranger, providing asylum for those fleeing violence in their own countries, caring for the vulnerable among us, and standing against injustice. In short, we believe in loving one's neighbor, regardless of homeland or address.

We know how to come together to care for one another, to make sure everyone has their basic needs met, to ensure that everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity. In the bold and beautiful acts of love following Helene, no one asked for anyone's ID or immigration papers before extending a hand. Today, many in our community are once again at risk and living in fear. The danger is not coming as damaging winds, but as a narrative that seeks to divide our communities by demonizing and dehumanizing our immigrant neighbors. The danger is not unbridled floodwaters, but overreaching policies that terrorize communities and separate families from their loved ones. The danger is not failing dams and bridges, but unaccountable and failing institutions that are bending to strip away basic protections from all of us - citizens and non-citizens alike. Parents are afraid to leave for work, fearing they may not see their families again. Children are afraid to go to school, fearing they may be taken by unmasked men while walking to football practice. Our faith in our democratic ideals and institutions, in the rule of law, in the humanity of every person is being tested.

Now is the time when we lean on our faith traditions to embolden us to rise to this test. Today we invite faith leaders and people of faith across our region to come together to shift the narratives that are harming immigrant families in our region and beyond. The time to speak up and use our voices is now.

We seek first, to make a clear visible commitment to love thy neighbor – ALL our neighbors.

We will do this by signing on to a public statement in defense of immigrant rights, and by proudly displaying “Love Thy Neighbor - Defend Immigrant Rights” banners and yard signs outside our places of worship and outside our homes.

We also seek to breathe life into our faith through concrete action. Our sacred texts call us to love our neighbors. We do this through the care of foreigners as if they were native-born, through provisions of hospitality for strangers, and by seeing the imprint of God on every person before us and in need. We commit to mobilize our faith communities and our collective resources toward these important truths. We will stand with our immigrant neighbors through advocacy, accompaniment, and mutual aid. We commit to do this work in coordination with and following the leadership of local immigrant organizations and communities, and rooted always in our shared values of love, justice and beloved community.

Our faith calls us to Love our Neighbors. We have seen WNC stand together with ALL our neighbors; we know what is possible. We invite faith institutions and people of faith across the region to join with us by visiting www.lovethyneighborwnc.org.”

Reverend Wilcox co-labored with Gretchen Gordon (of her congregation) to write this.

We are being asked to sign this document as a faith community. One Friend commented that there is an unbreakable relationship between words and actions. This document is expressing advocacy, accompaniment and mutual aid. As we sign it we are committing to actions that demonstrate that.

Minute #2: The Meeting thanked Reverend Wilcox and Gretchen Gordon for creating this Op-Ed and thanked Bob Lackey for conveying it to us. A member of Meeting suggested changing the wording to express that children fear either “unmasked or masked” people, representing themselves as having authority. Meeting agreed to having the Clerk of Meeting and the Clerk of PEJA signing this

document on our behalf. We agreed to the Op-Ed's additional calls to action, including proudly displaying a "Love Thy Neighbor - Defend Immigrant Rights" banner outside our Meeting House. We also committed to continue mobilizing our Meeting and its resources to advocacy, accompaniment and mutual aid in coordination with and following the lead of local immigrant communities and organizations.