

The Provident FRIEND

Providence Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

January 2017

AFSC SENE to be Laid Down

A sobering announcement has arrived from the American Friends Service Committee: The South East New England office, which has been under Martha Yager's direction and care for many years, will be laid down at the end of July, 2017. The reasons are complex and difficult, but they ultimately amount to a large budget shortfall in the national office in Philadelphia. The national Board tasked executive committees in each of AFSC's four regions with making significant cuts to offset the deficit. Throughout the country, many programs and single-staff offices were marked for closure. The office in Providence is unfortunately one of them.

Martha shared the news with members of the PMM community after Meeting on January 10. Those who attended her talk signaled a desire to know more about the conditions surrounding the office closure. To that end, Martha has forwarded the following minute to the AFSC Board from the Northeast Regional Executive Committee, dated January 14.

The Northeast Regional Executive Committee met January 13-14, 2017 at Friends Center in Philadelphia, PA to address the identification of core programming and how to implement the requested budget cuts for FY2018. During worship sharing around the topic of "What do I value about AFSC?", reflections shared included:

- *AFSC creates space to be thoughtful, radical and different*
- *AFSC is a place of evolution and revolution*
- *AFSC is a space to bring all of me*
- *AFSC provides a space to live one's deepest commitments*
- *AFSC inspires such commitment and dedication from those involved in any capacity that it is possible for decisions made by the organization to break our hearts*

It is in this way that our hearts are broken by the requirement to cut \$250,000 from the regional budget. We present here a plan that will comply with that request, but ask first in the spirit of Friends' tradition of seeking the Light together, that you consider the following reflections and concerns. It is the sense of the Northeast Regional Executive Committee that the current effort to cut programs is a mistake at this time in history. With the assault on equality and freedom expected from the incoming US administration, combined with the organic growth in intersectional social movement happening across the country, we should be fundraising on the strong social justice infrastructure that AFSC has developed over 100 years.

(Continued on page 5)

Published Jan. 26, 2017

CALENDAR

Saturday, January 21

10 am-12:15, Saylesville
Meetinghouse Bookswap

Sunday, February 5

11 am, Providence
Meetinghouse
Potluck welcoming new
member Ruffin Powell

12 pm, Providence
Meetinghouse
CPR Training

Thursday, February 9

6-8 pm, Providence
Meetinghouse AFSC-led
Bystander Intervention
Training; **8-9 pm**, Train-
the-trainers session

Sunday, February 12

12 pm, Providence
Meetinghouse
Meeting for Business

Sunday, February 26

3 pm, Providence
Meetinghouse
Shape note singing

Wednesday evenings (weekly)

6 pm, Saylesville
Meetinghouse
Worship and singing

Providence Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business Minutes, 8th First Month, 2017

1. We gathered at about 12:30 at the Providence meetinghouse, following a presentation from AFSC-SENE, with 28 present. The clerk read the following queries on meeting for worship, from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice*:

Are our meetings for worship held in stilled, expectant waiting upon God?

As we worship is there a living silence in which we are drawn together by the power of God in our midst?

Is the spirit of our worship together one that nurtures all worshipers?

How does our Meeting respond when the vocal ministry seems inappropriate, or when the meeting for worship is consistently not gathered?

2. Announcements:

At our next potluck lunch on 5th day of 2nd month, Ministry and Counsel will ask Friends to open discussion and respond to queries placed on the tables regarding the State of the Society. This input is being gathered to assist M&C in the preparation of the State of the Society Report. Additional input will be sought during a period of worship sharing at our next meeting for business.

The Providence meetinghouse will be open on 20th day of this month for Friends and attenders (and others) who wish to meet in a spirit of worship or join in informal fellowship, away from television.

Friends at Saylesville invite all to join them every Wednesday evening for a light potluck dinner and music from 6:00 to 7:00 followed by a half hour of worship.

3. Nominating Committee: The clerk presented a proposal that the Nominating Committee be made a standing committee. The clerk and the current clerk of the Nominating Committee would propose members for this year, and thereafter the Nominating Committee would be named along with other standing committees. We approve. We are reminded that the nominating process is a spiritual practice to help Friends discern vocation or calling, not simply a matter of filling slots.
4. For the Finance Committee, Dan Lederer requested approval of an overage of \$300 in the budget amount covering lawn maintenance at Saylesville. The work done so far has gone over budget by about \$170, and the extra will cover what may be needed in the spring. The difference is due to a new company being hired to do the work. We approve this overage.
5. For the Peace and Social Concerns Committee, Jen McFadden presented a proposed minute for our consideration. This language has been circulated electronically and been edited based on comments from several Friends. This minute arises from our current situation, in which Rhode Island is seeing increasing incidents of harassment, hateful speech, and deliberately divisive rhetoric. Many people are afraid of what may be coming, especially government policies that threaten the wellbeing of our neighbors, our children, and our earth. However, our commitment is not limited to the current political situation.

The committee sees the minute as part of a commitment to taking concrete actions. One of those is a planned "bystander intervention" training session, scheduled for February 9, to help members of our community and our neighbors gain skills in intervening in situations where someone is being targeted due to gender presentation, sexuality, or racial or religious animus. The open meetinghouse on Inauguration Day is another public witness, which has gotten a positive response from members of other faith communities. The committee intends that this language be available for use in future press releases and on our website, as occasion arises.

After editing, we approve the following:

Providence Friends Meeting (“Quakers”) affirms that we celebrate the Light in every person—no matter their origins, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, color, race, religion, ability status, or political affiliation. We affirm the right of each human being to worship, work, live, and love in peace, without fear of violence or persecution. Along with other faith communities that share these values, we stand with those facing discrimination, poverty, violence, stigma, fear, or isolation, and stand ready to offer safety, comfort, encouragement, and love.

Some Friends reminded us that Friends in the past have offered sanctuary for those threatened with persecution. As a meeting, we are not prepared to make that commitment at this time. We ask the Peace and Social Concerns Committee to continue to explore how we may be called to act in the future.

6. Building Expansion plans: In the absence of the Building Expansion Committee clerk due to recent surgery, Mike Hirtle made the committee’s presentation, with visuals. (The Assistant Clerk clerked this part of the meeting.) As authorized by the meeting earlier this year, the committee engaged an architect, George S. Burman, who has prepared rough plans for our consideration. The plans include an addition at the south end of the current building, with finished space on the upper level and an unfinished basement that could be finished in the future. The nursery would move into the new space, allowing for additional bathroom facilities including a shower. The committee is in conversation with the facilities manager of Moses Brown School to make sure that our plans would not inconvenience the school. The footprint of the proposed addition falls within the land currently allocated to Providence Meeting; we will need to confirm this arrangement with New England Yearly Meeting, which owns the land.

Mike then spoke to the financial aspect of the plan. The committee found that the money currently in hand (about \$175,000) would not be sufficient to do a useful project. The architect has given us an overall estimate of approximately \$300,000. Drawing the additional funds out of our unrestricted reserves would reduce our investment income by about \$6,000 per year. Any money that can be raised from contributions or grants would require less draw on reserves.

The committee is asking general approval of the direction the committee is taking, and for authorization to spend up to an additional \$20,000 out of the restricted funds to get a more detailed architectural and engineering plan and construction bids. The final plans would then be brought back to business meeting before the project goes forward.

A number of Friends raised a concern that in doing this project, we should add an elevator to improve the accessibility of our entire facility, even if we are not legally required to do so. We ask the committee to make this a high priority in its planning. We may be able to pursue special funding for this additional cost.

We also ask the committee to use this opportunity to make the new construction as “green” (energy efficient) as feasible.

We approve the general direction of this project and the expenditure of up to \$20,000 for more detailed plans. We thank the committee for their careful work and clear presentation.

7. We have just received the news that AFSC has indicated they intend to terminate the SENE program as of July 31, 2017. We ask the Peace and Social Concerns Committee to work with Martha Yager to explore how some of AFSC’s programs can be continued, and how we can effectively communicate our distress at this decision.
8. We closed at 2:35 pm, with a period of grateful silent worship, intending to meet next on the 12th of February, God willing.

Mike Hirtle, presiding clerk

Elizabeth Cazden, recording clerk

Around the Meeting

A cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) class will be held at the Providence Meetinghouse after Meeting for Worship on Sunday **February 5**. To sign up, please contact Molly Thomas at mollythomas25@gmail.com

PMM member and award-winning musician **Bill Harley** is teaming up once again with Keith Munslow to hold a **family concert** to “Sing Away Hunger.” Shows are at 11 am and 2 pm on **February 4**, at the Ocean

State Theater in Warwick (401-921-1777). Tickets are \$10 and benefit the Rhode Island Community Food Bank. If you haven’t had the pleasure of hearing this dynamic duo in concert, consider making time for this. It’s a delightful show that no one in the family will forget!

Peace and Social Concerns will be hosting a **community training on nonviolent bystander intervention on February 9 at 6-8 pm** at the Providence

Meetinghouse. Join AFSC Program Coordinator Martha Yager and learn methods for defusing and de-escalating incidents of bullying and harassment, and protecting those who are targeted in public. Those who wish to be trained to deliver this training to others can stay for an additional hour from 8-9. Please share this information with others in your communities and workplaces who might benefit from this kind of training!

Saylesville Bookswap: Opportunities to Serve Through Listening

From Rosanne Cedroni

The monthly bookswap at the Saylesville Meetinghouse has been a fabulous way for us to engage the community. We have also been able to make a positive impact in ways that are obvious (i.e. donating books to hospitals) as well as ways that are not so obvious (i.e. being a welcoming, safe place.) I have a feeling that there are some voracious readers in Providence and I'm wondering if they wouldn't mind helping out at the bookswap from time to time. Strange as it may seem, one thing we are always in need of is "listeners". This is quite a social event and we've made a kind of "vow" not to push religion, but to be receptive to whatever is on the minds of our guests. Naturally, people love to feel that they're not invisible and their ideas are meaningful. Even in months when the swaps are slow and there's not much interaction, this is a genuine way to be a Quaker presence and an opportunity to listen non-judgmentally—a skill that always benefits from additional practice. Naturally, I would also love help putting the books away!

If you’d like to help or learn more, feel free to e-mail me at: rcedroni@gmail.com

FDS Is Collecting Dishes, Silverware, Glasses for Refugee Families

During the month of February, our first day schoolers are partnering with our friends at AHOPE to collect items to outfit homes for new refugee arrivals. At the top of AHOPE’s current list of needs is tableware (NOT mugs, please!). Please bring donated dishes, glasses, cups or silverware to Meeting this month (preferably in a labeled box) and put them on the bench in the foyer so they can be relayed to AHOPE and, eventually, to the homes of those who need them.

AFSC SENE to be Laid Down (continued from Page 1)

We unite with one committee member's anguished query, "If not now, what political moment is the right one to dip into endowment or spend reserves?" The question was also raised, and none present had an answer, "why are we continuing to act as if the sky is falling when FY16 turned out better than expected [when cuts were initially proposed]?" Are we thinking outside the box?

In the spirit of Friends' process of seeking to make decisions in Unity with the Spirit, we raise these concerns and let them go, to be received as Spirit leads. As the governance body given responsibility for program choice and budgeting within the Northeast Region, we engaged with the process of identifying core programming and exploring and evaluating options for budget cuts within the Northeast. After careful assessment and review of all programs, the Northeast Regional Executive Committee considers all current programs of the Northeast to meet the criteria of Core programming. While there are identifiable areas of possible improvement in each, these are balanced in every case by important and impactful strengths.

The committee united in the following recommendation: (enumerates the program and staff cuts, not listed here as some programs are still breaking the news to their communities).

We ask the Board to consider releasing up to \$100K to support any program facing devolvement under the current budget cuts as a way to ease the transition to independence which is being thrust upon program staff with little preparation time.

Some amongst us were inclined to refuse to comply with the request to plan for budget cuts but were convinced to go forward because it is clear that if these cuts are not made by this committee, they will be decided by those with less knowledge and understanding of the Northeast region. We hold tenderly the concern that in agreeing to envision program cuts we may be complicit in undermining the work and integrity of an organization that holds our hearts.

The loss of AFSC SENE is painful, especially at such a politically turbulent time. There is reason to believe that much of its important work will continue, however. The AFSC SENE support group will continue to meet throughout the remainder of this fiscal year and beyond, including Providence Meeting representatives David Bourns, Morgan Lord, and Jen McFadden. Individuals in the Meeting community may feel led to carry forward many of the office's priorities, such as Islamophobia and criminal justice reform, even in the absence of a formal AFSC presence. Martha is devising plans to divide her current work into manageable segments that could be passed on to volunteers, and there is a possibility that some small degree of funding from AFSC may be available after July. If you have questions about the upcoming transition or other AFSC-related issues, please contact Martha at myager@afsc.org.

FDS Needs Volunteers to Teach!

The growth of our First Day School in recent months is a wonderful thing for our Meeting. We continue to need more volunteers to support that growth. Please consider spending a Sunday with our First Day Schoolers! The Religious Education Committee has done lots of work to make it easy, and lessons are planned in advance. To volunteer, contact Betsy Zimmerman at erbzim@gmail.com.

About Our Newsletter

By Dan Lederer

I'm writing this on behalf of Communications Committee. Meeting's newsletter, *The Provident Friend*, enjoys a circulation of more than 400 readers, about 85% of whom receive it electronically, the rest by regular mail. It's a valuable asset for our Meeting because:

- It effectively publicizes upcoming events in the life of the Meeting.
- It allows us to report on events that have already occurred, including our monthly Meeting for Business. - It provides a forum for Friends to share ideas.
- It serves, for historical reference, as a record of Meeting's activities.
- It functions as a goodwill ambassador to the wider community, especially for those who request information about our Meeting.

Thanks to a series of fine editors - Penny Jackim, Nina Berry, Steve Schwartz, and now Jen McFadden - our newsletter has performed all these functions well over the years, following Joseph Pulitzer's exhortation to "put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it and, above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light." However, **the newsletter could be even better with more contributions from members and attenders**. For example, it would be of interest to Friends to hear from our various committees in regard to what they're doing, which may inspire some readers to join a particular committee's activities. How about a description of an experience you've had, or an especially good book you've read? Or you might want to comment on something you saw in a previous issue via a letter to the editor. Photos, art work, or your original poetry may find a place in the newsletter.

Communications Committee doesn't have a staff of reporters; instead, I hope you, the readers, will consider yourselves to be our newsletter's reporters. Let's make *The Provident Friend* a Meeting-wide enterprise that reflects the diversity, skills, and talents of our members and attenders. It can be a way for us to get to know each other better and thereby strengthen our community.

Send your submissions to providentfriend@providencefriends.org and see your byline in print!

The next issue of *The Provident Friend* will highlight Friends' activities on Inauguration Weekend: marches, silence, community service, random acts of kindness, ordinary errands, media blackouts-- what were your Inauguration Day experiences? Write to Jen McFadden and share your stories and pictures.

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am

And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

"I, too", by Langston Hughes, © 1926/1994.

Providence Monthly Meeting

(401) 331-4218 <http://providencefriends.org>
99 Morris Avenue, Providence, RI 02906

Presiding Clerk: **Mike Hirtle** clerk@providencefriends.org
Assistant Presiding Clerk: **Dan Lederer** assistclerk@providencefriends.org
Recording Clerk: **Betsy Cazden** recordingclerk@providencefriends.org
Treasurer: **Peter Swazek** treasurer@providencefriends.org
Ministry & Counsel: **David Bourns** ministryandcounsel@providencefriends.org
Pastoral Care Committee: **Phebe Howland** pastoralcare@providencefriends.org
Finance: **Dan Lederer** finance@providencefriends.org
Peace & Social Concerns: **Steve Schwartz** peaceandsocial@providencefriends.org
Social & Hospitality: **Dede Carlsten and Kim Wiegand**
socialandhospitality@providencefriends.org
Religious Education: **Betsy Zimmerman**
religioused@providencefriends.org
Communications: **Dan Lederer** communications@providencefriends.org
Program Committee: **Nina Berry** program@providencefriends.org
Marriage Clearness: **Erin Hazlett** marriage@providencefriends.org
Library: **Rebecca Smith** library@providencefriends.org
Archive: archivist@providencefriends.org
Property: **Bob Elliott and Nina Berry** property@providencefriends.org
Funeral & Burial: **Matt Hackman** funeralandburial@providencefriends.org
Newsletter: **Jen McFadden** providentfriend@providencefriends.org
Email list moderator: **Dan Lederer** list@providencefriends.org
Website: webclerk@providencefriends.org
Moses Brown School Liaison: **Betsy Zimmerman** liaison@providencefriends.org
Young Adult Friends: (To Be Named) yaf@providencefriends.org
To schedule the Meetinghouse: **Bruce Shaw** scheduling@providencefriends.org
AFSC SENE: **Martha Yager** (508) 399-6699 or myager@afsc.org or
www.afsc.org/sene



Elizabeth Bonner Zimmerman

Newsletter of

Providence Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
(401) 331-4218 or <http://providencefriends.org>

Meeting for Worship each Sunday

Providence: 10:00 am Saylesville: 10:30 am
Conanicut: 10:30 am (Norman Bird Sanctuary, Middletown)

First Day School, Providence - Sunday. Children join Meeting for Worship from 10:00-10:15 am and then proceed to First Day School from 10:15-11:00 am.

Other Meetings for Worship (All welcome):

Monday - 12:30pm - Moses Brown Upper School

Tuesday - 7pm - Young Adult Friends
(yaf@providencefriends.org)

Wednesday - 8:25am - Moses Brown Lower School

Wednesday - 9:40am - Moses Brown Middle School

Wednesday - 10-11:30am 2nd & 4th Wed's - Saylesville

Thursday - Noon-12:45 pm Brown University in
J. Walter Wilson room 411

Potluck, Providence - each First Sunday

Sing-along, Saylesville - 11:30 am each First Sunday

Meeting for Business

Providence: Second Sunday of each month at 12:00pm

Saylesville: Second Sunday of each month at 9:30am

AFSC SENE Support Committee - Second Tuesday, 6:30-9:00 pm
Volunteers needed and welcome.

Call (508) 399-6699

The Provident FRIEND

Newsletter of

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Religious Society of Friends

99 Morris Avenue

Providence, RI 02906