

The Provident FRIEND

News from the Providence Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

April 15, 2017

A Call for Help from Uganda

In March, the Peace and Social Concerns Committee invited Diane Dicranian of Winthrop Center Friends Church, ME to tell members of our community about her work with the Friends Ugandan Safe Transport Fund (FUSTF). A small group of Friends gathered with her and her Elder, Ann Dodd Collins, to hear her powerful testimony. Here is a brief summary of what those attending learned.

In recent years, Uganda has become an exceptionally dangerous place for LGBT individuals. This is in large part because of the interference of Western agents with an explicitly anti-gay agenda--one of the individuals most directly involved is Pastor Scott Lively, a Massachusetts church leader and one-time gubernatorial candidate. Lively spent years cultivating relationships with Ugandan officials and politicians and lobbying to shape Ugandan policy according to his deeply homophobic views. As the bill took shape, gay and lesbian Ugandans began to fear for their lives. Their terror was legitimate: Under the initially proposed legislation, "the offence of homosexuality" could be punished by lifelong imprisonment; "aggravated homosexuality" could result in the death penalty.

International outrage at the bill was widespread, and under pressure from other countries the death penalty punishment was dropped. But the bill that Ugandan President Museveni signed into law on February 24, 2014 was still extremely harsh. The "offense of homosexuality" and "aggravated homosexuality" both carried life sentences. The same sentence applied to those who dared perform same-sex marriages. Those found to aid, abet or support homosexuals would be given seven years' imprisonment.

Nearly six months later, in August 2014, the Constitutional Court of Uganda overruled the bill on a technicality, finding that it failed to pass with a quorum. Facing international pressure, the Ugandan government declined to appeal.

This legal background is helpful in understanding the threat that LGBT Ugandans face today. For though the bill was overturned soon after its passage, the damage to public perceptions about homosexuality had already been done. In local municipalities, citizens have undertaken to enforce the spirit of the overturned law. Gay and lesbian Ugandans and their allies have been harassed and threatened, forcibly removed from their homes and workplaces, beaten, imprisoned, and murdered. The mere suspicion of being gay is enough to put a person's life at risk, as well as those of their friends and family.

CALENDAR

Friday, April 21

1:30 pm, Masjid Al-Rahman
18 Dunnell Ln, Pawtucket, RI 02860
[Fellowship with Muslim Neighbors](#)
(Friends can bring homemade cookies or supportive signs and share refreshments with those leaving Friday prayers)

Thursday, April 27

6:30-8:30 pm, Moses Brown School
Alumni Hall
["Evening of Advocacy"](#)
An event hosted by Moses Brown sophomore Maddy Kerr to benefit the Refugee Dream Center (See March's Provident Friend for details)

Saturday, April 29

2-5 pm, Providence Meetinghouse
[Project Peacework*](#)
An interfaith craft circle for women! Bring needles/hooks if you have them; plenty of yarn is provided. Kids are welcome.
7 pm, Providence Meetinghouse
A program to benefit AFSC SENE:
["I've Got a Song! A Living History of the McCarthy Era"](#) by Nancy Hood and accompanied by Barry Brown (\$10 suggested donation)

Sunday, April 30

2-4 pm, URI Providence, Paff Theater
80 Washington St., Providence
[Film screening: "The Sultan and the Saint"](#)
The story of the meeting between Francis of Assisi and the Sultan of Egypt during the Crusades.
[Tickets can be purchased in advance.](#)

Thursday, May 4

6:30-8 pm, Blanding Public Library
124 Bay State Rd., Rehoboth, MA
["Building Bridges" - A free interfaith discussion panel*](#)

Sunday, May 7

3-5 pm, Moses Brown School
Sinclair Room
FCNL Capital Campaign reception

Saturday, June 10 (Save the date)

Beneficent Church, Round Top Center
A benefit celebration of AFSC-SENE

* community arts/general interest events

One story we heard involved a group of some twenty-five young women currently living in hiding. All of them were participants in a health class in which they had discussed contraception. Rumors of their in-class discussion leaked to unfriendly ears, and the women were branded "lesbians." In fear for their lives and their families, they went into hiding and are now awaiting some way to flee their native country.

This is where FUSTF has chosen to focus its efforts. The project was begun in 2014 by Olympia Friends Meeting in Washington, where a group of Friends managed to create a small word-of-mouth network to help smuggle threatened individuals out of the country one by one. FUSTF is a low-tech, low-budget program with one focus: to move at-risk LGBT Ugandans across the borders of their native country to territories less immediately threatening. From there, they must make their own difficult way to a new life.

The work is very risky for those on the ground. One of the "conductors" on this secret railroad has been murdered, the other was recently beaten severely. The names and locations of those involved are kept secret, and the transfer of funds collected is done in person. To the skeptic, there are many possible causes for concern: how do we know that all are acting in good faith? How do we know that the work is effective--how do we know that people actually make it to safety?

The lives of these refugees are not easy. Many wind up in refugee camps in other regions, where they must contend with poverty and often ongoing discrimination. But stories of those who have managed to escape and begin new lives have begun to trickle out. Diane shared with us some messages of thanks that have reached the ears of FUSTF, and they were moving indeed.

FUSTF estimates that it costs an average of \$55 to move one person across the border. As one Friend observed, "What's \$55 to me, if it can save a life?" Many of those Friends listening to Diane's testimony felt moved to give to this cause. The work is not glamorous. It is not efficient. It is unsafe, heartrending, and difficult. It is not likely to end soon. But it has had a positive impact, and small though it may be, it continues to grow. With the help of Friends and other willing donors, FUSTF has so far collected \$165,870.81, and has enabled 1,859 people to begin new lives.

Please consider whether you may feel called to give. To donate, visit <http://friendsugandansafetransport.org>.

FCNL Capital Campaign Reception with Diane Randall, Sunday, May 7

by Betsy Cazden

On May 7, Friends (and others) in and around Providence have a chance to learn more about Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), the Quaker lobbying office in Washington. Diane Randall, Executive Secretary of FCNL, will be speaking at a reception at Moses Brown School (Sinclair Room) from 3 to 5 pm. There's no charge to attend, but RSVP's are requested at [The World We Seek: We Can Live It](#).

The reception is the final event for FCNL's capital campaign, which aims to expand both its physical plant and its opportunities for young adults to learn and engage in lobbying and organizing. ([Rebecca Harris](#), who attended Providence Meeting over the past few years while a student at Brown, is now a FCNL Program Assistant.)

Founded in 1943, FCNL represents Quakers from all over the US, on a wide range of issues of concern to Friends, from preventing global conflict to Federal budget priorities, climate change, immigration, health care, the death penalty, and much more. The priorities are set every two years, by the General Committee of representatives from many yearly meetings (including New England). FCNL often works with other non-profit and religious advocacy organizations, sometimes taking a lead role and sometimes supporting others who have particular expertise. On Native American issues, for example, FCNL used to be a leader, but now Native American groups provide the leadership and we are a valued ally. To learn more about how FCNL's strategic approach to lobbying gets results that help build a better world, visit www.fcnl.org/about/impact (<http://www.fcnl.org/about/impact>).

FCNL's staff does direct lobbying – visiting members of Congress and their staff to discuss issues. (Its office, which was renovated about ten years ago as a “green building,” is across the street from the Senate Office Building, very convenient.) The staff are highly knowledgeable, and often able to build bridges with members of Congress from both parties on particular issues. As FCNL says, “Our patient, persistent, and non-partisan lobbying, and the vital work we do to support the next generation of advocates, are building participation in the civil dialogue essential to mend our world.”

More importantly, however, the organization uses web resources and weekend workshops to train and guide (<https://www.fcnl.org/action/advocacy>) Friends and friends-of-Friends in how to be citizen lobbyists – how to write your Congressperson, how to visit, how to work with others to push for good legislation (and block bad bills). With a long-standing history of investing in young professionals through their internship (now Young Fellows Program <https://www.fcnl.org/updates/apply-for-the-young-fellows-program-32>), over the past few years FCNL has expanded its work empowering young people through a Spring Lobby Weekend (<https://www.fcnl.org/updates/spring-lobby-weekend-30>) and Summer Internships (<https://www.fcnl.org/updates/summer-internship-33>) in Washington as well as the Advocacy Corps program (<https://www.fcnl.org/updates/advocacy-corps-34>) in local communities across the country.

Developments in Interfaith Work

Faith communities around the Providence/SENE area are coming together in solidarity and friendship, working to build understanding and to serve those in need. Here are some of the latest updates:

Peace and Social Concerns is establishing a sub-committee on interfaith concerns to address issues like refugee and immigrant rights, sanctuary, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in a more sustained way. You need not be a member of PSC (or of Providence Meeting) in order to participate in this work! If you're interested in taking part, please email Jen McFadden (jenniferlamm@gmail.com).

Sophia Virgadamo has collected over 40 boxes of Girl Scout cookies for distribution to refugee families. Thanks to all who supported her in her work to make this happen!

Project Peacework, an interfaith craft project, had its first meeting in our Meetinghouse in March. At that gathering, women from many faith communities and nationalities gathered with needles, hooks, and mountains

of donated yarn to begin making 8" x 8" squares that will be joined in blankets to warm the homes of newly resettled refugees. The first meeting was a chance for sisters to get to know one another and kick off the crafting work (and to eat some uncommonly good food from all over the world). A second gathering will take place on April 29 from 2-5, when the squares completed so far will be assembled. All who would like to take part are welcome - plenty of knitting and crochet teachers will be on hand to teach those who want to learn, and some grown-ups have volunteered to help with the kids who accompany their mothers.

PMM continues its pop-up fellowship service at local mosques in our area. We meet at 1:30 every Third Friday to offer free coffee and cookies to Muslim brothers and sisters as they leave Friday (jummah) prayers. We met in March at the North Smithfield mosque, and there was a great turnout of members of the PMM community, beautiful weather, and a delightful sense of friendship--despite the fact that we had a minor coffee urn malfunction. Many homemade cookies were distributed, and many smiles were exchanged. Our next opportunity comes Friday, April 21, when we'll meet at the mosque at 18 Dunnell Ln, Pawtucket. Those intending to come should note that the mosque is tucked in among warehouses and seems difficult to find if you don't already know where you're going. Keep your eyes peeled for a small green sign on the left side of Dunnell Ln--when you see it, bear right and down a hill. You'll see a large parking area and a low-slung building amid several larger ones. That's the mosque.

A public library in Rehoboth, MA is hosting an interfaith panel on beliefs in everyday life. It's called Building Bridges, and will bring together teachers and practitioners from Judaism, Christianity and Islam to talk about the role of faith in their lives. Tea, refreshments and discussion will follow a brief panel presentation. The event is at **Blanding Public Library, 124 Bay State Rd., Rehoboth, May 4, 6:30 - 8 pm.**

Needs in Our Meeting Community



Ron Dass has kittens that need homes! One of his beloved cats has delivered a litter of five friendly fuzzballs, each of which needs a loving place to live. The kittens are an adorable grayscale palette from black to gray and are about three weeks away from being ready to wean from their mother and transition to new homes. All will need to be spayed/neutered and will need vaccinations. If you or someone you know needs a kitten in their life, please contact Ron by phone at 860-481-1766.

Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, Minutes, 9th of 4th Month, 2017

1. We gathered at 12:08 pm at the Providence meetinghouse, with 17 present. During Meeting for Worship, the clerk had read the following queries on “care for the meeting community,” from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s *Faith & Practice*:

Are love and unity maintained among us? When conflicts exist, are they faced with patience, forbearance, and openness to healing? Are avenues for exploring differences kept open? To what extent does our Meeting ignore differences in order to avoid possible conflicts?

Is the Meeting a safe, loving place? When we become aware of someone’s need, do we offer assistance? Are the meetinghouse and the Meeting property physically accessible to all?

Do all adults and children in our Meeting receive our loving care and encouragement to share in the life of our Meeting, and to live as Friends? Do we truly welcome newcomers and include them in our Meeting community?

When a member’s conduct or manner of living gives cause for concern, how does the Meeting respond?

How does our Meeting keep in touch with all its members?

2. Announcements.

A panel discussion of refugee issues will be held at Moses Brown School (Alumni Hall) on the 27th of this month from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. This event has been organized by a Moses Brown sophomore and is open to the public.

3. Correspondence. A letter of thanks was sent to a friend outside this meeting who made substantial contributions to the Conanicut, Saylesville and Providence Meetings. Saylesville also sent her a thank-you note. A letter of thanks was sent to the clerk of the library committee at Portland ME Monthly Meeting for returning a long-lost library book to us.

4. Assistant Clerk. For Ministry and Counsel, David Bourns brought a recommendation that Rebecca Leuchak be named as Assistant Presiding Clerk of the meeting as of June 1, with the expectation that she succeed the Presiding Clerk at the close of his service in 2018. We approve.

David also announced that Ministry & Counsel has asked Ariana Steele to serve as clerk of Ministry & Counsel as of June 1, 2017.

5. Saylesville. David Bourns reported that Saylesville Preparative Meeting has advised Ministry & Counsel that it would like to change its status to a worship group, due to difficulties finding enough leadership. This follows a lengthy discernment process over several years. Following the recommendation of Ministry & Counsel, we approve this change, effective June 1, 2017.

6. Peace & Social Concerns. For the committee, Steve Schwartz reported that the committee is seeking Friends to attend the May 3 annual meeting of RI Interfaith Power & Light, to keep climate change at the forefront of our concern and network with other faith communities. Details will be sent out on the listserv and posted on the meeting website; Friends interested were asked to contact Steve.

Steve also reported on the visit to the meeting on March 25 by Diane Dicranian, a Friend from Winthrop Center (Maine) Friends Church traveling under concern for the Friends Ugandan Safe Transport Fund that provides financial assistance to people fleeing Uganda because of violence against gay, lesbian and transgendered people and their allies. A small amount of money goes a long way; \$55 to \$180 is enough to get one person out of danger. The Fund,

which is administered by the Olympia, Washington, Friends Meeting, has to transfer money to Uganda in cash, and cannot get an accounting of how the money is used because keeping records and disclosing them would put people's lives at risk. The Peace & Social Concerns committee is considering using part of its annual budget for this purpose, and also wants to publicize this need among individuals who may feel moved to give. We encouraged the committee to provide further information in the newsletter and on the meeting website.

We note that the "Love thy neighbor – no exceptions" banner from FCNL is now prominently displayed on the gable end of this meetinghouse, and thank Peace & Social Concerns Committee for arranging it.

7. Nominations. For the Nominating Committee, Ruth Bourns distributed a proposed list of officers and committee members for the coming year beginning June 1, 2017. Several names were added to the printed list. We note that a number of committees lack gender balance, in ways that perpetuate old stereotypes, and hope that additional Friends will consider service in less traditional positions. We approve the list as presented and supplemented, and thank the Nominating Committee for its efforts.

8. Budget. For Finance Committee, Dan Lederer presented a revised proposed budget for the fiscal year beginning June 1, 2017. It is substantially as presented for comments last month. A question was raised about continuing to add to the designated maintenance reserve for the Saylesville meetinghouse, which has a fund balance of almost \$74,000, in addition to a restricted bequest for the same purpose of which \$46,000 remains. At the same time, we are looking toward taking money out of general reserves for the expansion project on the Providence meetinghouse and asking Friends to contribute more to the overall budget. With the change in status of the preparative meeting approved earlier in this meeting, we have an opportunity and responsibility to do careful discernment about our overall care and future use of the Saylesville building.

We approve the budget as proposed, and ask the Finance Committee to facilitate formation of an ad hoc committee to look carefully at the future of the Saylesville meetinghouse, and report back to the meeting for business in 10th month with the hope of having a fully developed proposal for consideration by 6th month 2018.

9. We closed with a period of grateful silence at about 2:05 pm, expecting to meet next on the 14th of 5th month at the Saylesville meetinghouse.

Mike Hirtle, clerk

Elizabeth Cazden, recording clerk

The Arts Section:

Events featuring Friends and friends

I've Got a Song! A Living History of the McCarthy Era

AFSC-SENE will host a one-of-a-kind benefit performance and multimedia presentation at the Providence Meetinghouse on April 29 at 7 pm. Massachusetts artists and performers Nancy Hood and Barry Brown will present a 75-minute musical excursion into a little-discussed corner of American history. Nancy Hood offers the following description of the program:

"I've Got a Song!" is a live performance about Nancy Hood's childhood experiences growing up in a leftist family during the McCarthy Era. Complementing her personal story, Hood performs American spirituals, union songs, haunting love ballads, and humorous tunes of social significance. A backdrop of family photographs and newspaper clippings completes this living history lesson, which spans the mid-1940s

through the early 1960s. Evoking laughter and tears, this program draws the audience into a child's courageous struggle with adversity and persecution.

A \$10 donation is suggested. The program will benefit AFSC-SENE's work and partners as the office enters its final months. All are welcome - Please spread the word!

(To learn more about Nancy Hood and her work, visit <https://ivegotasong.wordpress.com>)

The Sultan and the Saint

On April 30, our friends at AHOPE are hosting the screening of a film with a message of peace and tolerance that has special resonance today. *The Sultan and the Saint* tells the story of the historical meeting between Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik Al Kamil of Egypt, an encounter that took place against the brutal backdrop of the Crusades. The docudrama mixes reenactments with reflections from historians, art experts, religious thinkers, and scientists, and it tells a memorable story of Muslim-Christian understanding. The one-time screening is at Paff Theater, URI Providence, 80 Washington St., from 2-4pm on Sunday, 4/30. Tickets are available in advance (\$18) but are likely to sell out quickly. Please visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-sultan-and-the-saint-screening-a-upf-films-production-tickets-32123922517?aff=es2> to get yours.

Providence Monthly Meeting Contact List

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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**



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, 6:00-8:00 pm Call (508) 399-6699

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Religious Society of Friends

99 Morris Avenue

Providence, RI 02906