

The Provident FRIEND

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

March 10, 2020

Providence Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business 8th of Third Month, 2020 Minutes

Friends gathered at the Providence meetinghouse at noon with 20 present.

Presiding clerk Rebecca Leuchak began the period of silent worship by reading the following queries taken from New England Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice*, queries on Peace and Reconciliation:

Do you “live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars”?

Do you strive to increase understanding and use of nonviolent methods of resolving conflicts?

Do you take your part in the ministry of reconciliation between individuals, groups, and nations?

The clerk then read announcements concerning the life of the meeting.

For Ministry and Counsel Committee, Bruce Shaw brought a draft of the State of Society report for 2019. With the change of one word, Friends approved the report with thanks to the preparers.

The relationship between Providence Monthly Meeting, New England Yearly Meeting, and Friends United Meeting has been the subject of considerable discussion and disruption as a result of FUM’s personnel policy and recent actions by NEYM. Bruce Shaw brought a recommendation from Ministry and Counsel that the Meeting appoint an *ad hoc* committee of members and attenders to consider the issues involved and bring recommendations to our Meeting. Friends approved. Those interested in participating should contact Bruce Shaw or Rebecca Leuchak.

Bruce Shaw requested that the Meeting approve adding Bob Elliott as a member of Ministry and Counsel. Friends approved.

On behalf of Ministry and Counsel, Bruce Shaw reminded the meeting of our policy considering the announcements at the end of meeting for worship. Friends approved reminding our community of these guidelines.

For the Finance Committee, Steve Thomas brought a preliminary proposed budget for the coming fiscal year. It includes certain reductions in expenses, specifically a smaller-than-desirable amount to go into the reserves set aside for the upkeep of the meetinghouses and a reduction in the contribution to New England Yearly Meeting. Friends expressed some concerns about these reductions. We recognize the need to

CALENDAR

Saturday, March 14, 4:00 PM,
Crystal Singing Bowls,
Saylesville Meetinghouse

Sunday, March 15, Noon,
Southeast Quarterly Meeting,
Smithfield Friends Meeting

Sunday, March 15, 11:45 AM,
Session for Newcomers,
Providence Meetinghouse Library

Wed, March 18, 6:00 to 8:00 PM,
Cultivating Generous Faith
Communities,
Providence Meetinghouse

Friday, March 20, 1:30 PM,
Fellowship with Muslim Neighbors,
Masjid Al Kareem, 39 Haskins St.,
Providence

Saturday, April 4,
NEYM Living Faith Gathering,
Portland, ME

Sunday, April 5, 11:30 AM,
Potluck Lunch, Providence
Meetinghouse

Sunday, April 12, noon,
Meeting for Business,
Providence Meetinghouse

Sat, May 2, 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM,
May Breakfast,
Providence Meetinghouse

Friday, May 15 – Sunday, May 17,
N.E. Junior Yearly Mtg Retreat,
Woolman Hill, Deerfield, MA

increase our income, and we ask the Finance committee to educate the Meeting community about contributions and ask the Fundraising committee to look for ways to support our budget. Finance committee will bring a report and/or proposal to the next monthly meeting. We thank the committee for their work.

Bruce Carlsten reported that the lift has been functioning properly for the last few weeks and asks Friends to let him know immediately if any further difficulties arise.

No further business appearing, we closed with a period of silent worship at 2:00 p.m., intending to meet next on the 12th of Fourth month at the Providence meetinghouse.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Leuchak, clerk
Rebecca Smith, recording clerk

State of the Society Report for Calendar Year 2019

As we do each year in early February, Providence Friends recently gathered to reflect on the state of our Society.

Friends expressed gratitude for the friendship, fellowship, and support found in our meeting. Individuals in our meeting bring diverse experiences, energy, wisdom and insight, and this creates a vibrant community with rich spiritual and practical resources. The gifts of members and attenders are shared widely with the meeting and with the world, and many shared their appreciation for the ways in which our community supports and enables their work. The work of pastoral care and hospitality is seen by many as central to our experience of community, as committee members work to welcome attenders new and old, support our fellowship, and comfort the sick. The inclusion of Friends of all ages in our community is an important source of our vitality, and the learning they are exposed to through First Day School filters outward through families and friends to the wider world.

We welcome the opportunities for ongoing personal and spiritual growth that our community provides. Worship offers the gift of silence amid the tumult of our current world, and Friends find great value in listening together. We are grateful for the inspiration that we find in the silence and in the messages that arise from it, and we are blessed on occasion by the transformative experience of a truly gathered meeting. Some Friends find regular inspiration in messages, and others look for more diverse voices or more seasoned messages. Are we careful that our messages proceed from authentic leadings, and that we heed the call to speak when we hear it?

Many find purpose in the meeting's commitment to social justice and in the many efforts of our community to bring about positive change. Our antiracism reading group, monthly mosque fellowship, donations for those in need in Providence and abroad, programs to support climate justice, the work of our local FCNL committee, our efforts to support immigration sanctuary, and our presence at Pride are just a few of the initiatives that Friends named as important demonstrations of our faith in the world. Some Friends note that in our worship, we tend to focus on the social more than the spiritual – perhaps assuming that by focusing on the former, we develop the latter. Some Friends hunger for more structured opportunities for dialogue and learning about religious practice and spiritual journeys – for children and adults alike. How might we bring more explicit attention to Friends' spiritual traditions without being dogmatic?

We struggle to come to terms with our relationship with Friends United Meeting, whose personal ethics/personnel policy prohibits sexual intimacy outside “traditional marriage, understood to be between

one man and one woman.” In April 2019, because we could no longer in good conscience support an organization which does not treat our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters equally, we found unity to request that no part of our annual contribution to NEYM be paid to FUM. In August 2019, NEYM laid down its longstanding mechanism for meetings to withhold funds in this way, causing our meeting considerable pain. How can we find a path forward that allows us to act with integrity while also maintaining our commitment to community?

Some have a concern that our meeting could do more to recognize, raise up, and support the gifts of individuals. Are we doing enough to identify and develop the gifts among us? Others note that members and attenders of our meeting are engaged in a wide variety of endeavors, but few of them can truly be called “corporate.” As one Friend noted, “We serve the community as individuals but not as a group.” How can we strengthen the sense that we act as a body while also honoring individual leadings? Adult involvement in First Day School continues to be an area of identified need. Friends clearly value the presence of children in our community, yet as a meeting, we tend to rely on one small group of dedicated individuals to teach every week. FDS committee frequently expresses a need for more adult volunteers. Are we hearing that message? How are we called to respond? How do we meet the needs of those between FDS and adulthood?

We are grateful for the recent additions to our meetinghouse and its grounds: the added meeting and play space, the new bathrooms, the parking area, and especially the accessible lift (when it is working). All these improvements not only serve PMM; they also allow us to better support the activities of other community groups working to add light to the world.

Some Friends express a desire for more of the group activities that serve to support our sense of community and fellowship – for example game nights, potlucks, Friendly Eights, and singalongs. How can we facilitate wider participation in events of this kind, while keeping the logistical burden manageable?

Friends continue to be uncomfortable with the amount of time devoted to announcements at the close of meeting. How can we address this longstanding concern?

As always, we find that our life as a meeting is an imperfect blessing. We see the need to address imperfections with thoughtful work and Divine guidance, and we are grateful for the blessing of our community.

A Revised Meeting Directory

from Communications Committee

The next edition of the Meeting Directory will come out in April. If you have had a change in your contact information since the October 2019 edition or if you aren't listed in the directory but would like to be, contact Dan Lederer (dlederer1@verizon.net).

Communications Committee maintains several other means of communication for Friends: We have two email groups, one being the Meeting Email List, often referred to as "the listserve", which functions as our electronic bulletin board via notices of upcoming events and other items of interest to Friends, and the second being the Meeting Social List, which is for more personal messages and for back and forth dialog. Yet another means of communication is our newsletter, The Provident Friend, published ten times per year. And finally there's our website, accessible to all at www.providencefriends.org.

In order to engage fully in the life of the Meeting, it's helpful to be listed in the Meeting Directory, to be on the email lists, and to receive the Meeting newsletter. If any one of these is not happening for you, please contact Dan.

Message from Nominating Committee

Nominating Committee will be making its annual report to Meeting for Business on April 12. As everyone is aware, Meeting has no paid staff, so the work of maintaining Meeting's activities and infrastructure is the responsibility of our 18 committees, and participation on committees is essential to the life of our Meeting. If you want to make a change in your current committee assignment, such as adding a committee or switching to a different committee, or if you're not on any committee but would like to be on one or more, please contact Dan Lederer (dlederer1@verizon.net).

Containing the Coronavirus

While we await further guidance from the State Department of Health (RIDOH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Meeting is asking Friends to take a few precautionary measures in order to reduce the risk of transmitting the coronavirus. First and foremost, we must abandon, for the time being, our time-honored tradition of hand shaking (and hugging) and instead find some other way to greet each other. Also, try not to be touching food or utensils to be used by others, and, if you must, be sure you've washed your hands first. We now have five bathrooms, so washing one's hands is more convenient than in the past, plus we can make liberal use of hand sanitizer. And finally, if you're having a respiratory illness (cough, fever, shortness of breath), stay home and call your doctor.

Crystal Singing Bowls March 14

Come hear crystal singing bowls on Saturday March 14, 4:00 to 5:00 PM at the Saylesville Meetinghouse. There will be refreshments and conversation to follow. Donations will go to Meeting.

Southeast Quarterly Meeting March 15

Have you ever worshiped with Smithfield Friends Meeting in Woonsocket? Now's your chance! Our Southeast Quarterly Meeting will be held there on Sunday March 15. Worship begins at 10:00 AM followed by a potluck brunch and then the Quarter's meeting for business. Details will be sent out electronically but get this on your calendars now! A great chance for inter-visitation and making new friendships among Friends! See Rebecca Leuchak if you have questions or want to carpool.

Session for Newcomers March 15

An information session for newcomers or others interested in learning a bit more about the Society of Friends will next take place on Sunday, March 15, starting about 11:45 in the library and lasting no more than an hour. All are welcome. The program will be repeated on the third Sunday of each month. For more information, contact Rebecca Smith (acelinebarrett@aol.com), Betsy Cazden, or Rebecca Leuchak.

Cultivating Generous Faith Communities March 18

Cultivating Generous Faith Communities – an informal get-together for information and networking - will take place here at the Providence Meetinghouse, Wednesday, March 18, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. See Rebecca Leuchak for more information.

Fellowship with Muslim Friends March 20

Fellowship with our Muslim Friends will happen again on Friday, February 21, at 1:30 PM at the Al Kareem Mosque, 39 Haskins Street, Providence. This is a particularly important time to offer this outreach of goodwill, considering current events unfolding in the world at large. We'll provide coffee and makings for tea; feel free to bring baked goods if you're able, or just come to share in

friendship. Please RSVP to Wendy Virgadamo or Bob Watt so we have an idea of numbers.

NEYM Living Faith Gathering April 4

Plan now to attend the NEYM's next Living Faith Gathering in Portland, Maine, on April 4. Living Faith gatherings are full-day events for all ages and are intended for deepening worship, growing community, and strengthening witness. See the NEYM website for more information and to register: <https://neym.org/events-calendar/2020/04/living-faith> or speak to Rebecca Leuchak about your interest.

Potluck Lunch with Cuban Flavor April 5

The delegation of four New England Quakers to Cuba went well. Your donations of medical supplies were very welcome and needed...thank you. Please join us for a report-back with some pictures and Cuban-flavored lunch on Sunday, April 5 (our potluck day).

May Breakfast May 2

Special Events Committee is planning another May Breakfast, to be held on Saturday, May 2, from 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM. John Lord and Bruce Carlsten will coordinate purchase of food. An appeal will be issued for volunteers for prep, serving, greeting, collecting.

New England Junior Yearly Meeting Retreat May 15 - 17

New England Junior Yearly Meeting – for children grades 2 through 6 – will be having its last retreat of the year the weekend of May 15-17 at Woolman Hill in Deerfield MA. These retreats are a wonderful opportunity for our children to spend a weekend with other Quaker kids and adults in an accepting, supportive and fun environment. There are a few flyers on the back table for parents who may be interested. Financial support is available. For more information see <https://neym.org/about-jym-retreats>

Clerk's Corner: Planting the Seed

from Rebecca Leuchak

Gardening time approaches. I know *The Farmer's Almanac* advised date for planting peas. On the farm in Pennsylvania, it was always Saint Patrick's Day when we started working the soil. Here in southern New England I have always tried to wait just a week or two longer to begin. But the warm sun and the birdsong of late call me to dig in the dirt now with hopes that there will be, as the Punxsutawney groundhog predicted, an early spring this year.

For the past few years now, I have felt a greater freedom to experiment with the timing of garden chores. I have planted late into the fall in hopes of results way past the conventional dates of harvest. One particularly mild winter the spinach seeds I sowed in November stayed dormant, but protected, and burst into a bumper crop in

early March. And I have been starting earlier in spring to get seeds in the ground. Perhaps this new daring comes as one consequence of my awareness of global warming, with its increasingly erratic shifts in weather events. The new unpredictability results perhaps in an opening up of an uncharted space into which I jump with my own very small-scale experiments in agriculture. My logic is that if little is lost, only a packet of seeds, why not give unseasonal gardening a try?

There could be another way to react to the perceived instabilities of climate change. One might retreat from action because of uncertain outcomes, circling the wagons in a protective move. But if my pea planting example has taught me anything, it is that in uncertain times daring to move into action can sometimes reap rewards.

The story above is a rather insignificant personal anecdote perhaps, but as so often is my experience, seemingly mundane personal affairs can lead me to ponder bigger things. In this case I am drawn into appreciation of the considerable courage of early Friends, as they sowed and reaped.

The first Quakers living in the climate of unrest during the Civil War and Cromwellian Period of mid-seventeenth century England experienced considerable social and political uncertainty. Yet what daring actions they took in that uncharted space that opened before them. Perhaps it was the very loss of stability, the uncertainty of what the future would hold, that animated their transformative ideas and gave impetus for their courageous actions.

For George Fox, Margaret Fell, James Nayler, and the Valiant 60 who traveled throughout England preaching a new living faith, their risk was far greater than my small packet of seeds! They suffered exclusion, imprisonment, and corporal punishment. They were planting not spinach, but the seeds of a spiritual movement! Yet their descriptions of their work return us to the simple act of gardening. They speak of the inner seed carefully tended and of "men's hearts as the fallow ground unbroken up, and not plowed nor sown with the good seed of Gods kingdom." *

I will continue to ponder their example as I begin my garden this year!

* From George Fox, *The Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded* [1659], cited in Erin Bell, "From Ploughing the Wilderness to Hedging the Vineyard: Meanings and Uses of Husbandry Among Quakers, c. 1650-c. 1860" in *Quaker Studies* 10/2 (2006) pp.s 135-159. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1128&context=quakerstudies>

Providence Monthly Meeting Contact List

Presiding Clerk: **Rebecca Leuchak** clerk@providencefriends.org
Assistant Presiding Clerk: **Dan Lederer**
Recording Clerk: **Rebecca Smith**
Treasurer: **Peter Swazek**
Ministry & Counsel: **Bruce Shaw**
Pastoral Care Committee: **Hans-Dieter Gomes**
Finance: **Steve Thomas**
Peace & Social Action: **Steve Schwartz**
Hospitality: **Eugenia Marks**
Religious Education: **Victoria Ekk**
Communications: **Dan Lederer**
Special Events Committee: **John Lord**
Library: **Rebecca Smith**
Archive: **Dan Lederer**
Property: **Bob Elliott and Nina Berry**
Burial Grounds: **Matt Hackman**
Newsletter: **Jen McFadden and Dan Lederer** providentfriend@providencefriends.org
Email list moderator: **Dan Lederer**
Website: **Sam Schiffman** webclerk@providencefriends.org
Moses Brown School Liaison: **Ariana Steele**
Adult Religious Education: **Ben Lamm and Carol Smith**
To schedule the Meetinghouse: **Dan Lederer**
Questions and Information: **Steve Schwartz** info@providencefriends.org

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
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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 are welcome):

Monday - 12:30pm - Moses Brown Upper School

Wednesday - 8:25am - Moses Brown Lower School

Wednesday - 9:40am - Moses Brown Middle School

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

Wednesday - 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
(At Saylesville Meetinghouse May, June, Sept, Oct. At Providence Meetinghouse November through April.)

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Religious Society of Friends

99 Morris Avenue

Providence, RI 02906