

# The Provident FRIEND

November 10, 2020

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

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

Friends gathered at noon by means of Zoom technology with 18 present.

Presiding clerk Rebecca Leuchak began the period of silent worship by reading the following queries taken from North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) *Faith and Practice*, 1983, p.33:

*Do you seek the leadings of the Light in meeting for business as you do in worship?*

*Do you prepare your heart and mind for meeting for business?*

*Do you make an effort to maintain your awareness that God is with us as we work and proceed in a peaceable spirit with forbearance and warm affection for each other?*

The clerk read announcements concerning the life of the meeting. The following items of business were brought forward:

**Peace and Social Action Committee report:** The Committee held a listening session on the first of this month and have gathered a number of ideas about how the committee might proceed in the coming year. These ideas will be discussed further at a meeting to be held on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. More information will come out before then, or contact Steve Schwartz for details.

**Ministry and Counsel Committee proposals:** The Committee proposed Victoria Ekk for the position of Assistant Presiding Clerk, to begin now, with the expectation that she will later become Presiding Clerk. Friends approved, and thanked Dan Lederer for having filled the position for the last three years.

The Committee requested approval to add Martha Yager as a committee member. Friends approved.

**Finance Committee report.** The Committee has considered a point raised at last month's business meeting concerning whether to require two signatures on checks above a certain amount. For logistical reasons, they chose instead to set up alerts on large transactions.

The Committee informed this meeting that they have simplified the way that they manage reserved and endowed funds. The amount in each fund will be increased annually by the same percentage that we use to draw income from the General Fund.

### CALENDAR

**Note that the Providence and Saylesville meetinghouses are closed. All Meeting gatherings are online via Zoom or outdoors.**

**Wednesday, Nov 11, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

**Sunday, Nov 15, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and  
Outdoors)

**Monday, Nov 16, 10:00 AM,** Anti-  
Racism Dialog Series (Zoom)

**Wednesday, Nov 18, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

**Sunday, Nov 22, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and  
Outdoors)

**Wednesday, Nov 25, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

**Sunday, Nov 29,** Meeting for  
Worship (Zoom and Outdoors)

**Wednesday, Dec 2, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

**Sunday, Dec 6,** Meeting for  
Worship (Zoom and Outdoors)

**Wednesday, Dec 9, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

**Sunday, Dec 13, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and  
Outdoors)

**Wednesday, Dec 16, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

**Sunday, Dec 20, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and  
Outdoors)

## **Update on the Meeting's Covid-related donations to Providence community organizations.**

The Presiding Clerk reported that we have received letters of thanks from the Bethel A. M. E. Church and from Camp Street Community Ministries.

**Religious Education Committee report.** The middle school/ high school group meets twice monthly by Zoom with a focus on Bible study, with an average attendance of six students. Younger students receive monthly packets for home study including stories from the Bible, from other religious and secular traditions, and from Quaker history.

The First Day School traditions of the Giving Tree and Christmas Gathering will continue. The Giving Tree project provides gifts for four families through the East Bay Community Action Project; information about giving will be sent out electronically. The Christmas Gathering, with a theme of gratefulness, will be hosted online for FDS families and others, possibly on Twelfth month 12. During First Month, the Committee plans to focus on peace and Conscientious Objection to war. Friends with experiences or information to share are asked to contact the committee.

**Southeast Quarterly Meeting report.** The Presiding Clerk reported that she attended the Quarterly meeting. Several constituent meetings have ongoing anti-racism projects, and several have given donations to community organizations for Covid relief. All have made use of Zoom for worship, either alone or in combination with in-person worship. Barbara Dakota, a Friend whose training for chaplaincy was partly supported by the Quarter, reported on her present work with the Westerly police department. We are reminded that the Aldrich Fund exists to provide financial relief in certain circumstances. Two minutes were recommended to the consideration of individual meetings; the Clerk will arrange opportunities for our Meeting to conduct discernment on these topics.

No further business appearing, we closed with a period of silent worship at 1:30 p.m., intending to meet next on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Twelfth month 2020.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rebecca Leuchak, clerk  
Rebecca Smith, recording clerk

### **Address for Contributions**

The address for contributions to Meeting is now as follows:  
Providence Monthly Meeting  
c/o Peter Swaszek  
Box 1787  
Kingston, RI 02881

## **Anti-Racism Dialog Series November 16**

Friends are invited to join our continuing Anti-Racism Dialog Series. The next meeting is Monday November 16th from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. Contact Rebecca Leuchak for the Zoom link, which is the same link for all of these evening sessions. Hope you can join us!

## Peace and Social Action Session November 22

On November 1, 2020, Peace and Social Action held a listening session for our community. About 15 attended and freely discussed ideas about how the community and the committee might optimize resources to be effective in related matters. All meetings of the committee are open for attendance, but people are particularly encouraged to attend the next one, on Sunday November 22 at 11:30 AM, to help review what we learned from the listening session. Please contact Steve Schwartz [401-273-7076 (landline, no text) cell = 401-439-7281 [steve@absteve.com](mailto:steve@absteve.com)] for any questions, etc. A summary of the results will be sent to the listserve at some point before then for review by those not present and a reminder for those who were.

## In-Person Worship in the Grove

Outdoor in-person worship is continuing. Friends will follow the same procedure as they have all summer, although warm layers for sitting still in the crisp fall weather are encouraged. The Grove is beautiful this time of year! Note that in case of rain or snow we will meet on the front lawn of Moses Brown School (the Lloyd Avenue side of the campus) under a big white tent with open sides – it is labeled the “Fox” (as in George) tent! The School has chairs – so if we do move to the tent, you won’t need to bring your own chair. Look for an announcement on Sunday morning before 9:00 AM if the location is changed for inclement weather.

## Religious Education Committee (First Day School) Report

The Religious Education Committee (FDS) surveyed PMM families to determine the type of religious education format to be provided during COVID-19 safety requirements for isolation. Several families of children ages 10-high school were open to have their children meet twice monthly on Zoom to participate in classes with a curriculum focused on the Bible. Participating children received a King James version of the Bible. Classes are going well, attended by an average of six young Friends. As we move forward into winter, we are surveying the families to ensure they have a voice in the crafting of future lessons.

Most of the families with younger children (ages 4-9) were concerned about adding screen time to their children’s Sunday as many are learning virtually at least partially during the week. For these children, FDS has provided a monthly “FDS At Home” packet. Packets for September and October began with a relating of a parable from the New Testament and added similar stories from other religious and ethnic traditions to provide parents with options. For September’s packet, we focused on the parable of the Good Samaritan, but also included stories from a Native American tribe, a book of Buddhist tales and a retelling of Leo Tolstoy’s *Three Questions*. For October we looked at the parable of the Prodigal Son with an emphasis on sibling rivalry and included a Nigerian folk tale, the story of the prophet Yussuf from the Q’ran and a secular story on learning to get past jealousy. The November packet focused on how Quakers help neighbors in a peaceful way, learning about Elizabeth Fry’s prison work, Quakers feeding children after World War I and II with a note about Jeanne Whitaker, and Sara Baily’s father, Sam, retelling about his Conscientious Objector service in a Mexican village in the late 1950s during the build-up to the Vietnam War.

In December we are modeling helping others by collecting gifts, as we have for several years, for the East Bay Community Action Program’s effort to help needy families during the holidays. We have committed to help 4 families because COVID is creating more families in

need. On-line purchases, grocery gift cards, clothing gift cards will be sought from members. Our "Giving Tree" will be virtual, and packages for the tree can be left at Eugenia's enclosed porch, and online gifts can also be sent to her home address. We will be sending specific directions on how to participate in this project.

For December also, FDS will host a family Christmas online celebration with the theme of gratefulness. The gathering will be scheduled for December 12, time to be determined. We will include some music and a question for families to have a chance to share and connect. We will be happy to host this gathering for the entire Providence Monthly Meeting if it is desired.

For January, FDS will be focusing on the theme of peace and teaching the children about Quakers as Conscientious Objectors. We are currently researching resources and past curriculum on this theme and will be grateful for any information coming from our members and attenders.

## **Light Year Project at Saylesville**

Providence Friends Meeting at the Saylesville Friends Quaker Meetinghouse, 374 Great Road, Lincoln, will hold its Light Year Display again this year from Nov 15 through Jan 26. During the event the community can sponsor a solar light to represent one of the 317 continuous years of worship at the meetinghouse. The sponsorship suggested donation is \$10. Checks can be made out to Providence Friends Meeting with Light Year Display on the memo line, and checks can be sent to Light Year 2020, 199 River Road, Lincoln, RI 02865. For more information, call 508-643-0884.

## **News From Conanicut Friends Meeting**

Conanicut Friends held their last outdoor Meeting at the old Meetinghouse in Jamestown on Sunday Oct 25. Since April of this COVID year we have been able to worship outside within the shade of a small maple and in view of the new pollinator garden begun in early May.

Starting on November 1 at 10:30 AM, CFM will move its worship indoors to Mabel's Studio at Norman Bird Sanctuary (583 Third Beach Rd, Middletown), socially distanced, masked, and limited to 15 persons. The meetings are contingent upon restrictions as to gathering size as well as potential elevated COVID levels. The current contract for use of the space runs through January, with an option to continue until the May opening of the Jamestown Meetinghouse.

There were several discussions about continuing worship indoors through the winter and what the best practices would be. Being a small group, we are comfortable with silent Meetings and will be cautious in offering messages, it was decided. Some of our members have opted not to participate in person, but perhaps to join in Zoom socials that will be offered for the group later into winter. This reflects the value our members have for weekly group worship, and the support we give to each other through life's journey.

## **What Happened? What Needs to Happen?**

*from Dan Lederer*

Regardless of the presidential election's outcome, which appears to be certain despite legal challenges, it's puzzling and troubling that nearly half of those persons casting votes chose a candidate who, in the view of many of us, failed to demonstrate most of the personal qualities one would want and expect in a leader. So what then explains this candidate's durable appeal?

Clearly, some who voted for him had specific issues that they cared about passionately, such as abortion, perceived threats to gun rights, the influx of immigrants, job loss, civil unrest, or the ascendancy of non-whites to positions of power and influence, and these voters chose the candidate who they hoped could deliver the results they favored. In addition there must have been others who, rather than being appalled by his behavior, saw in the candidate much to admire because he was someone who pretty much said and did whatever he pleased without regard to tradition, norms, or even laws. To them he was a powerful person with the ability to create and communicate his own version of reality without concern for inconvenient facts. And the bungled federal response to the COVID pandemic seemed to be of little concern to these voters, perhaps because they knew few if any people who had died from it even though cases were surging nationwide and some hospitals were on the verge of being overwhelmed.

These circumstances have exposed serious fault lines in our culture and our education system that require attention and, if possible, remedial action, but do we have the wherewithal to bring about the necessary changes? For example, can we create a cultural shift that moves away from an emphasis on consumption and acquisition toward a sense of responsibility for each other and for our environment? And can we provide universal education that instills respect rather than disregard for our democratic institutions along with an appreciation of the need for our continuing support of these institutions if they're to survive?

Although the task of reaching these goals can feel daunting and overwhelming, it may help to remember these words from George Fox: "I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness." Holding that ocean of light and love in mind, there's much work to be done.

## **Meeting's COVID-19 Fund**

*from Bruce Shaw*

Providence Meeting has established a COVID-19 Fund to assist anyone in our Meeting community who is facing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are in need of financial assistance or you become aware of anyone else in our community in need of financial assistance, please speak with a member of the Pastoral Care Committee (Hans-Dieter Gomes, clerk) or a member of the COVID-19 Fund oversight committee (Bruce Shaw, Dan Lederer, Vicky Ekk). All communications regarding the fund will be considered confidential. Let's be sure we all reach out to any Friends who may be facing a variety of challenges during this strange and stressful time.

## **Clerk's Corner: Diversity**

*from Rebecca Leuchak*

DIVERSITY is very much a word for our time. We use it in the political arena, in our community engagements, in describing our nation and our society's current condition. Yet diversity has, dare I say, a "checkered" reputation. A negative take on the concept is the biblical allegory of the Tower of Babel. That story emblemizes humanity's fall from grace as a world of utter confusion marked by a daunting number of mutually unintelligible languages. The moral of that biblical episode is the undesirability of diversity.



Pieter Bruegel the Elder - The Tower of Babel, 1563 (Vienna)

But the Bible also holds very powerful and positive allegories of peaceful cohabitation across difference, references to an earthly kingdom of harmonious diversity. Perhaps best known is the passage from Isaiah 11:6-10 (New Oxford Annotated Bible):

“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.”



Edward Hicks - The Peaceable Kingdom, 1833 (Worcester)

At the Worcester Art Museum we can see one of the many paintings that Edward Hicks (1780-1849), recorded Quaker minister, sign painter and coach decorator, made of the "Peaceable Kingdom." His illustration of this Bible passage was a crowd pleaser in his own time. Initially produced for his Quaker community in Pennsylvania, his visual allegories became some of the most familiar and popular representations of American values.

The image gives charming life to the words in Isaiah. Hicks infuses the scene with the Quaker precept of the "inner Light" as the force that allows the overcoming of significant differences among living creatures. Indeed, in this Worcester example and many other renditions, Hicks expands upon the description of animal community with a parallel depiction of congeniality among human beings, specifically the meeting of Native Americans with William Penn and his party. This reference to a moment in human history where peoples of difference gather for the first time might be read as naively aspirational. Hicks is saying ... "This is what we would wish had happened in relations between the Indigenous peoples and the Europeans who arrived on their shores." That this relation of mutual respect, this recognition of the inner Light in each other, did not occur is our sorrowful reality.

I see these opposing Biblical stories and these paintings as the diametric models for a world that we choose to create. We may cling to the notion that paradise is accomplished only by enforcing a unity of shared perspectives, or we may learn to hold our own views while embracing and treasuring the rich multiplicity of other perspectives in the world. What matters is how we choose to characterize the unalterable fact of human diversity. The story of the Tower of Babel or the Peaceable Kingdom? As a community of Friends and as citizens of this nation, the choice is ours.

#### **Providence Monthly Meeting Contact List**

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Questions and Information: **Steve Schwartz** [info@providencefriends.org](mailto:info@providencefriends.org)

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

**Current activities are listed on  
the Calendar on page 1.**

**The Provident FRIEND**  
Newsletter of  
Providence Monthly Meeting of the  
Religious Society of Friends  
99 Morris Avenue  
Providence, RI 02906