

# The Provident FRIEND

May 12, 2021

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

## **Providence Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business (Called Meeting) 9<sup>th</sup> of Fifth Month, 2021**

There being no pressing business to bring before the Meeting, the planned meeting for business did not take place. Friends intend to meet next on the 13th of Sixth month 2021.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rebecca Leuchak, Clerk  
Rebecca Smith, Recording Clerk

## **Anti-Racism Dialogs Meeting: June 1**

The Anti-Racism Dialogs continue with our next meeting on Tuesday June 1 at 7:00 PM. All are welcome. Contact Rebecca Leuchak for more information.

## **NEYM Sessions August 7-12**

Please mark your calendars for August 7 to 12 for Sessions 2021, where we will gather as Friends from across New England and will dig into the theme "A Time for Healing: How Are You Called?"

Advance planning for this major event is well underway. Not surprisingly, due to pandemic conditions this year we will be primarily gathering for Annual Sessions on Zoom as we did last year.

While health and safety concerns continue to limit the ways we can gather, we also know that much has changed since Sessions 2020. Considering what we learned last year and are learning about the course of the pandemic, this year we recognize that gatherings in person may be possible, following CDC and local communities' safety guidelines. We are thus hopeful that, if so led, individual monthly meetings and/or quarterly meetings might plan for in-person events as they feel comfortable doing so.

With that possibility in mind, we are planning the schedule for Sessions so that major groupings of events may be easily participated in, of course via Zoom but also in some local gatherings. You can preview a *draft* Sessions schedule

### CALENDAR

**Note that the Providence and Saylesville meetinghouses are closed.**

**Sunday, May 16, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and Outdoors\*)

**Wednesday, May 19, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

**Sunday, May 23, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and Outdoors\*)

**Wednesday, May 26, 7:30 PM,**  
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

**Sunday, May 30, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and Outdoors\*)

**Tuesday, June 1, 7:00 PM, Anti-Racism Dialogs Meeting (Zoom)**

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

**Sunday, June 6, 10:00 AM,**  
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and Outdoors\*)

**Wednesday, June 9, 7:30 PM,**  
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

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

**Sunday, June 13, 11:45 AM,**  
Meeting for Business (Zoom)

\*weather permitting

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## Some Thoughts About Ed Turco and Spinoza

*from Bill Monroe*

*[Editors' note: A memorial service for Ed Turco took place on May 1.]*

Whenever I attend a memorial meeting I am always struck by what I learn about our departed Friend, whether I knew that person or not. So often, I go away thinking, “I wish I had known all this about them while they were here with us.” This was the case recently when I participated in the memorial meeting for Ed Turco, who attended the Saylesville Meeting. I did not know Ed very well. I had some conversations with him some ten to fifteen years ago, but not recently. As people spoke about Ed and his interests, I was impressed with his enthusiasm for astronomy and for learning in general. Ed had made his own telescopes, including grinding the lenses and mirrors, and made telescopes for other people as well. He chased eclipses (as did another friend of mine who departed in the past couple of years). He was someone who read voraciously and thought deeply about what he had read. Listening to all that was said about him made me think of Benedict Spinoza.

If you know me, you will probably know how I regard Spinoza as a great prophet. He was probably the most important European philosopher of the second half of the seventeenth century. The descendant of Portuguese Jews who had found asylum in the Netherlands after the expulsion from the Iberian peninsula, he participated in his family’s business in Amsterdam. But he fell out with the authorities in his synagogue and was expelled, though we do not know the exact reasons. He was labelled a blasphemer, and an atheist. But he was not an atheist -- he simply believed that God is everything. God is nature, God is the universe itself, and we are all a part of God. This may sound a little like Quakerism’s “there is that of God in every person,” and this is no coincidence. Spinoza moved to the small town of Rijnsburg after his expulsion, and he would regularly meet there with a small discussion group that included a couple of Quakers. I believe that he was very much influenced by Quaker thought, and Quakerism was also influenced by his theology as it was expressed in his two most important books, the *Ethica* and the *Theological-Political Treatise*.

So, as I heard about Ed Turco’s love for astronomy, I wondered whether he had, in his wide reading, encountered Spinoza and what he might have thought. I was tempted to speak in the

meeting, and raise this question, though I did not. Had I done so, I thought I would have closed with the most relevant parallel: after Spinoza moved to Rijnsburg, he made his living by grinding lenses.

## **Tending the Spiritual Soil of Our Monthly Meetings: a New England Yearly Meeting Saturday Workshop**

*from Rebecca Leuchak, Eugenia Marks, and Steve Schwartz*

The Friends serving on New England Yearly Meeting's Spiritual Life & Ministry Host and Elders Team (Jeremiah Dickinson, Marty Grundy, Jen Higgins-Newman, Jennifer Hogue, Janet Hough, Richard Lindo, and Nia Thomas) planned and offered a deeply rewarding all-day workshop on Saturday, May 8<sup>th</sup> on the theme: Tending the Spiritual Soil of Our Monthly Meetings. We were over one hundred New England Friends attending; three of us from Providence Monthly Meeting were there for all or part of the day and want to share what we learned.

The topic addressed how we as monthly meetings might support the spiritual life within our local faith communities. We began with introductions that included naming the Indigenous lands from which we all were gathered. After an introductory presentation about the importance of fertile soil for the promotion of healthy growth, whether in the vegetable garden or the spiritual garden, we settled into deeply grounded waiting worship. Breakout groups followed in which we discussed queries relevant to our theme: What in your own meeting experience nourishes spiritual life for you?

- Have you experienced learnings/resources that moved you forward on your path?
- How have your gifts of ministry been identified, held up and nurtured?
- Have you had opportunities to embrace conflict with love, helping yourself and the meeting grow?
- Is a spiritual practice/preparation outside of worship encouraged and in what ways has it enriched your experience in worship?
- Have you experienced eldering from someone in your meeting that enhanced your understanding of your ministry?
- In what ways have you reached out to others in your meeting that brought you to a deeper understanding one of another?

In the afternoon, participants had a choice of Interest Groups. The topics were:

Group 1: Using Art to Capture the Wisdom from Our Experiences Tending the Soil with Maggie Nelson

Using a preferred creative practice (drawing, collage, painting, etc), Friends took time away from screen and reflected on how one can use visual art to express the wisdom each person holds about

how to tend the soil in our monthly meetings.

Group 2: A Discussion with Early Friends: Do They Have Something to Teach Us Today? with Marty Grundy

This was a look at the history of the early Friends movement: what drew people to join; the organic development of leaders, elders, ministers, and a structure. It included a quick overview of elders and why they were eliminated in the early 20th century and are cautiously reemerging today. Discussion revolved around what this past history of Friends offers to Friends in New England today and how we nurture meetings?

Group 3: Digging into the State of our "Soil": The Richness of Recent State of Society Reports with Jennifer Hogue

Questions covered were: How can we dig more deeply into "soil conditions" in our monthly meetings? How can we better understand and tend the ground which nurtures our spiritual life? Although State of Society reports can sometimes feel like a form without much life, Friends' efforts to put the state of their spiritual life and ministry into words can be revealing and inspiring. Participants looked closely at a collection of excerpts from recent State of Society reports from the member meetings of NEYM. They shared connections, new insights, and challenges, and looked for nuggets of wisdom to take home to their monthly meetings.

Group 4: Contemplative Reflective Practices in Small Groups with Richard Lindo

This group in two different breakout periods of randomized groups of three deeply explored, through responses to repeating questions and shared monologues, their experiential understanding of selected themes that arose during the morning session.

Group 5: The Minister's View of the Meeting with Brian Drayton

A person with a concern for the ministry does most of his or her work in silence, watching with a spiritual eye both inwardly and outwardly. This group spent some time reflecting on 3 autobiographical episodes which illustrate this mind at work in particular situations in hopes that this would open pathways to spiritual growth in ourselves and in our meetings.

All in all, it was a full and wonderful day in the company of Friends young and old from all over New England. A day filled with worship, deep discussion, poetry, music, and even inspirational drawings. If you want to know more about our experience, we'd be happy to share what we learned!

## **Betsy Cazden's Chapter**

Betsy Cazden has a chapter in the just-released volume, *Quakerism in the Atlantic World, 1690–1830*, edited by Robynne Rogers Healey, now available from Penn State University Press. This is part of a series reimagining and renarrating Quaker history, with particular attention to issues around gender, race, and regional diversity. Betsy's chapter, growing out of her research on Rhode Island Quaker slave-holding and slave-trading, is entitled "'Within the Bounds of their Circumstances: The Testimony of Inequality among Eighteenth Century New England Friends.'" The book can be purchased directly from Penn State Press: <https://www.psupress.org/books/titles/978-0-271-08940-9.html> (use code NR21 for 30% off).

## **The 02906+ Interfaith Clergy Association**

On the sunny spring morning of Tuesday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, the Central Congregational Church on Angell Street hosted a first-time gathering of leaders from different houses of faith in our local area 02906 zip code: Catholic and Protestant churches, our Quaker Meeting (represented by Rebecca Leuchak), synagogues, and the non-denominational Vedanta Center. They met in-person outdoors for an informal talk about their faith communities. The goal was simply to create a space to get to know each other. Participants compared notes about their respective faith communities, how they are coping with pandemic times, and what they are planning for the future. This group hopes that by forming new friendships among others who do sacred work, they might find ways to collaborate in the future. The group plans to meet on a monthly basis starting in the fall.

## **The National Day of Prayer**

Thursday, May 6<sup>th</sup> marked the annual National Day of Prayer. Here in Providence, organized by the RI Council of Churches and Mayor Jorge Elorza, faith leaders of the City gathered to offer prayers for our neighborhoods, our City, and the wider world. Thirty of us participated representing churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples from all areas of Providence. Reverend Howard Jenkins, Pastor of the Bethel A.M.E. Church, opened with a welcome message and introduced each speaker. Invocations were offered in English, Spanish, Arabic, and Khmer. Friends were asked to participate, and each speaker was asked to focus on one aspect of our social life. Rebecca Leuchak's assignment was to offer support for those who work in the media and the arts, and she offered the following message:

"Dear Friends - Let us hold in the Light all those who are working in the media and the arts who are communicating the information, the truth, and the beauty we need to build healthy communities. May they express love for all by respecting all people, recognizing in each individual that inner light of the Divine that unites us all and answering that of God in every person. Let us together lift them up in their work of sharing inspirational stories that illustrate the power of love to transform the world."

## **Expressions of Gratitude**

*[Editors' note: We asked Friends to tell us one or more things they were grateful for over the last year.]*

I am grateful for my many friends and Friends.

Immense gratitude for the Friends who come to Zoom Meeting for Worship and a longing for those we don't see, who are still in our hearts. Glad that outdoor in-person worship has been provided by our clerk. Grateful connection to my spiritual well, gardening, and that Friends made possible gardening all winter in the cold frame built for the Sharing Garden on Camp Street.

I have found the quality of worship very enriching and meaningful. The speaking has always given me something to work on each and every week since the pandemic.

This winter, we hunkered down in our new, downsized city flat, joined by our daughter for a awhile. And oh, we three cooked glorious meals! We tried new recipes from the NYT and Washington Post. We perfected coq au vin and paella. Sunday afternoons, stews simmered in the heavy, old Dutch oven, releasing fragrant smells. Pear upside down cake, oatmeal cookies, apple pie! Much bonding, much sociable tabletime was enjoyed.

While I am sick of using platforms like Zoom for classes and Meeting for Worship, I am enormously grateful to be able to communicate with my family via audio-visual platforms during the pandemic. I haven't seen two of my children and one of my grandchildren for more than a year, and I've seen my other child and grandchild far too infrequently. Thank goodness for communication devices that would have made Captain Kirk and the crew of the Enterprise jealous! Moreover, there was a time when long-distance telephone calls were expensive. Now, we call each other -- and see and hear each other! -- without even thinking about cost of the individual call. There are many wonderful things technology has brought us; during these difficult times, this has been one of the best.

Keep it simple, stay in the moment, appreciate the full range of one's interpersonal connections, respect nature and its daily gifts.

Our Meeting community, holding together virtually and outdoors in person.

The scientific effort that produced the vaccines and the many workers who are making sure they get delivered. More time to read. Spending time with grandkids even if it's at a distance. Just being able to breathe!

## **Clerk's Corner: Where We Worship Among The Trees!**

*from Rebecca Leuchak*

We have all been pondering how our lives have changed over the more-than-a-year experience of the Pandemic. Frankly, we come to our own conclusions and are at the same time hearing much of the same from friends, family, and public figures. Isolation, loss of jobs and homes, the hunger for in-person contact with others, stresses of living in close quarters with family, challenges of maintaining work and school commitments, etc. But I am struck by how many positive reflections I have heard. Discovery and pursuit of new interests, appreciation for the technology-based means for staying in touch with perhaps more frequent connection with far-flung friends and family, people helping one another to cope, enjoyment of cooking, availability of entertainment and news programming through virtual platforms.

The repetition of these observations seems proof to me that we are all much more similar as human beings than we are different. Our needs whether thwarted or fulfilled in this time are pretty much the same! It should be very clearly noted though, that some are experiencing far

greater hardships than others. I want to name and feel the weight of the inequalities and call us all to work to change our social system that creates such injustice. (More on this in the June Clerk's Corner, my last as your Presiding Clerk!)

One remark that I hear many people making is their rediscovery of the joy of being in nature. And that strikes the strongest chord with me in a number of ways. I have been taking (almost) daily long walks for months now. With the arrival of spring I have been outdoors much of the time preparing and tending to my gardens. I am grateful for the big front porch at our house which is in fair weather our main "living room."

And I would add that an especially important experience of nature has been the ability since last March of worshipping with you all in-person in the open air in the Grove at our Providence Meeting. We have gathered there every Sunday with the exception of the cold spell of January and February. And when I am in that green space, usually sunny and filled with bird song, I am transported always back to the early days of our faith tradition.

As Friends know, it was in the politically and religiously tumultuous seventeenth century English Mid-lands that Quakerism emerged. And it did so out of doors. We know that George Fox and other early adherents proclaimed their faith in fairs, marketplaces, and fields. The most noted sites are Pendle Hill, where Fox first experienced the Spirit's directive to go out and speak to "the great people...", and shortly after at Firbank Fell, where he addressed 1,000 seekers at the spot now known as "Fox's Pulpit." This event is credited as the beginning of The Society of Friends.

To sit out of doors in waiting worship with fellow seekers is for me an immediate and deep connection to early Friends! I invite you to join us!

## **Address for Contributions**

The address for contributions to Meeting is as follows:

Providence Monthly Meeting  
c/o Peter Swaszek  
P.O.Box 1787  
Kingston, RI 02881

Presiding Clerk: **Rebecca Leuchak** [clerk@providencefriends.org](mailto:clerk@providencefriends.org)  
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Website: **Sam Schiffman** [webclerk@providencefriends.org](mailto:webclerk@providencefriends.org)  
Questions and Information: **Steve Schwartz** [info@providencefriends.org](mailto:info@providencefriends.org)

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