

The Provident FRIEND

June 14, 2021

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

Providence Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business 13th of Sixth Month, 2021 Minutes

Friends gathered by Zoom technology at 11:45 a.m. with 28 present.

Presiding clerk Rebecca Leuchak began the period of silent worship by reading the following queries taken from Westerly Friends Meeting posted on 2/7/2020 at: <https://www.fgcquaker.org/cloud/westerly-friends-meeting/resources/meeting-worship-concern-business>:

Is the meeting for business held as a meeting for worship in which we seek divine guidance for our actions?

Do I speak in meeting for business only when I am led to speak?

Are we tender and considerate of different views, coming to a decision only when we have found unity?

Do we give prayerful support for our clerks that they may be sensitive to the movement of the Spirit among us?

The following items of business were brought forward:

1. Ministry and Counsel committee brought a proposed memorial minute for John Gaffney. Friends approved the minute, and requested that it be forwarded to our Quarterly Meeting and to New England Yearly Meeting, and also to John's close friend Cathy Gorman.

2. Ministry and Counsel committee brought a proposed memorial minute for Edward Turco. Friends approved; it, too, will be sent on to Quarterly Meeting, and also to the Skyscrapers Astronomical Society.

3. The Meeting Treasurer brought the end-of-year financial report for fiscal year 2020-2021. Despite the pandemic, we received generous contributions from members and also more income than expected for the use of our meetinghouses, and expenses were lower than budgeted. This enabled us to increase our contribution to New England Yearly Meeting in accordance with our decision of Third month 14, 2021. Friends approved the report with thanks.

4. Ministry and Counsel Committee proposed Carla Dowben as a new member of that committee beginning in September; Friends approved.

5. Ministry and Counsel recommended that Friends accept the transfer of membership of Valerie Reishuk from Cleveland Monthly Meeting of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting; Friends approved.

CALENDAR

Wednesday, June 16, 7:30 PM,
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

Sunday, June 20, 10:00 AM,
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and
Indoors)

Sunday, June 20, 10:30 AM,
Southeast Quarterly Meeting
(Zoom)

Wednesday, June 23, 10:00 AM,
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

Sunday, June 27, 10:00 AM,
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and
Indoors)

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

Sunday, July 4, 10:00 AM, Meeting
for Worship (Zoom and Indoors)

Wednesday, July 7, 10:00 AM,
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

Sunday, July 11, 10:00 AM,
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and
Indoors)

Wednesday, July 14, 7:30 PM,
Meeting Social Hour (Zoom)

Sunday, July 18, 10:00 AM,
Meeting for Worship (Zoom and
Indoors)

6. The Providence Meetinghouse Management Committee brought a proposal for re-opening the meetinghouse beginning next Sunday. Only certain parts of the main floor would be used; masks would be required; and specific procedures for ventilation, sanitizing, and contact-tracing would be followed. No childcare will be available; First Day School will be on summer schedule and families with young children should contact Victoria Ekk for information. The committee would have the power to make changes to these rules to meet changing circumstances. Zoom meetings will continue to be held. Friends approved.

7. The working group considering what our manner of worship should be after re-opening proposed a trial period of combined in-person and virtual worship alternating with weeks when the two forms of worship occur separately. Friends would be asked to participate in the experiment and to share their reactions with the working group, which will report to Ministry and Counsel committee in September. Friends approved this experiment, with permission for the working group to explore additional possibilities as way opens.

8. The Membership Committee submitted the annual membership report for calendar year 2020. We gained no new members during that year and lost one by death. Participation in most meeting activities has been substantially diminished during the Covid period.

9. Ministry and Counsel Committee brought a proposal from the Covid Relief working group that we lay down the Meeting's Covid Relief Fund, as demand seems to have been met. Friends did not feel easy to conclude that the fund is no longer needed, and ask the working group to report again by the end of 2021.

10. Funeral and Burial Grounds committee observes that the price of our burial lots has not changed in many years and is now far below typical market value. The committee proposes that we determine new prices and procedures, and that reservations and sales of lots be handled only through the Meeting committee. We direct the committee to bring proposed revisions to that effect to our next monthly meeting and we approve a moratorium on sales until then.

11. Peace and Social Action Committee brought their proposed revisions of New England Yearly Meeting's draft Apology to Native Americans, which NEYM sent out for discernment. Friends approved sending this on to Quarterly Meeting next week. The committee is soliciting additional comments and suggestions, which will also be forwarded to our Quarter and to NEYM. Such comments may be sent to Steve Schwartz.

12. Ministry and Counsel Committee brought a proposed State of Society Report for 2020. Friends approved the report with some small revisions. No further business appearing, we closed with a period of silent worship at 2:30 p.m., intending to meet next on the 12th of Ninth month 2021.

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

Meeting for Worship Inside the Providence Meetinghouse Resumes June 20

Rhode Island has determined that as of May 21st, houses of worship may return to pre-coronavirus capacities and any restrictions are at the organization's discretion. Meeting for Business has approved in-person worship in the meetinghouse begin June 20th throughout the summer following the guidelines outlined below. The Zoom online gatherings will continue while we gradually return to

full activities at the meetinghouse. The Management Committee will continue to monitor the State COVID numbers and guidelines and determine if changes need to be made. We will begin slowly, and Management Committee will announce any changes as the situation warrants.

As we resume in-person worship inside the meetinghouse, Friends must understand that until the virus causing COVID-19 and its variants are controlled, any gathering of people indoors still entails some risk of transmission. While we are hopeful that all attending will be vaccinated, we cannot guarantee that everyone will be. Children are not yet vaccinated. Also, we are a welcoming community, and we invite people unknown to us to attend worship. In an effort to minimize the risk, the following guidelines will be in place.

Preparation for In-Person Worship:

Property Committee will provide:

- 1) Hand sanitizer at the entrance
- 2) A notepad for contact tracing at the entrance
- 3) Disinfecting wipes for the bathrooms

Hospitality Committee will organize:

Two greeters for each Sunday inside the meetinghouse. Greeters at the meetinghouse will arrive 30 minutes early to raise the shades at least above the level of the first windows, open all the windows, and turn on the air purifier to Level 2. The air-conditioners will not be used. Two fans are available for use to aid ventilation.

Ministry and Counsel will organize:

One greeter for the online Zoom worship.

Conducting In-Person Meeting for Worship:

- 1) Two Friends will serve as greeters, one of whom will remain in the foyer during Meeting for Worship while the other serves on the Facing Bench. If two greeters cannot be found to fulfill these roles on Sunday morning, there will be no Meeting for Worship inside the meetinghouse. An announcement will be made through the list-serv.
- 2) All entering and exiting of the building will take place at the front doors only. No one is to walk through the building from downstairs. The parking lot will be available, but you must walk around the building to the front to enter. There are two handicap parking spaces in front of the building and parking on the street is available.
- 3) Everyone will be required to wear a face mask covering the nose and mouth at all times while inside the meetinghouse. Friends will be expected to bring their own face mask. No exceptions will be made even for persons who cannot wear a face mask for medical reasons.
- 4) Upon entering the building, participants will sign the contact tracing logbook with their name, telephone number or email, and will then use hand sanitizer.
- 5) Friends will use only the worship room, the foyer, and main floor restrooms. Disinfecting wipes will be available in the restrooms, and Friends will be asked to wipe down any surfaces they have touched. (The wipes need to go in the waste basket in the hallway, not the toilet.)
- 6) During the summer, there will not be any First Day School classes or Nursery. If children come, parents will be asked to share their supervision on the MB playground. In inclement weather, children may be in the worship room with their parents, but no indoor supervision will be available.

- 7) Family groups may sit together. Individuals and family groups will maintain social distancing to the extent possible.
- 8) Greeters will deny admission to anyone who appears ill, is not wearing a face mask, declines to sign in, or fails to use hand sanitizer.
- 9) In the unlikely event that someone becomes ill during Meeting for Worship, the greeters will escort that person to the library and then call either Rescue or a relative to take that person to a health care facility. The other participants will be asked to leave, and the building will be locked. The greeters will report this to the Presiding Clerk and the clerk of the Management Committee for further action.
- 10) At the rise of Meeting for Worship, there will be no hand shaking, and all participants will exit the building through the front doors. Socializing may take place outside either in the front or in the back of the meetinghouse without refreshments. Social distance should be observed with the consideration that not everyone may be vaccinated or comfortable with closeness.
- 11) If we find out that someone who has attended has tested positive for the virus (Friends will be asked to self-report), or if any of the conditions detailed above are not met, the meetinghouse will be closed, and the Management Committee will re-convene to decide on the next course of action.

Closing Procedures

Once Friends have left the meetinghouse, the greeters will close the windows, lower the shades, turn off the air purifier, and lock the building.

Southeast Quarterly Meeting Sunday June 20

Our Summer Southeast Quarterly Meeting for Business will take place the following Sunday, June 20th, hosted by Smithfield Friends Meeting via Zoom. Join Friends of our Quarter in worship at 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM, followed by fellowship and lunch (BYOF), with meeting for business beginning at 12:30 PM. The Zoom link will be sent closer to the date along with the agenda for the meeting and advanced documents. This also will be a very full and rich meeting for business of our Quarter! Do plan to worship with Friends from our Quarter – Smithfield, Westerly, and Worcester Monthly Meetings.

New England Yearly Meeting Sessions August 7-12

from the NEYM Presiding Clerk and the Clerk of the Sessions Committee

Why do Friends gather together? We gather because we understand on some level that we learn from each other, and do better at discerning God's will for us. And, because in most cases, we like each other! Why do Friends gather together for the Annual Sessions of New England Yearly Meeting? While there are different aspects of Sessions that appeal more to one or another, ultimately, it's the same thing: We hear voices and perspectives we don't hear in our own meetings. We meet people we come to love and respect. We are challenged in new ways to live more fully into the life that is intended for us. We find that when Friends gather, God shows up in unexpected ways. [For the full text of their message, go to <https://neym.org/welcome-2021-online-sessions>]

John Kevin Gaffney (May 15, 1949 - April 12, 2020)

John Gaffney, a life-long activist for justice and equality and a beloved member of Providence Monthly Meeting, died at his home in Providence, RI on Easter morning, 2020. [To see the full memorial minute, go to

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I_0kqHQLb6nWjk4GXjphZpvxfYClwoYN/view?usp=sharing]

Edward Franklin Turco (March 23, 1945 - March 28, 2021)

Truly a Renaissance man, Edward Franklin Turco lived a full and well examined life. Edward, at 76 years of age, passed away peacefully with his wife by his side at their home in Lincoln, Rhode Island on March 28th, 2021. [To see the full memorial minute, go to

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZDwYO4WphRkmXsxqDeXEENKNQWgfoldU/view?usp=sharing>]

State of the Society 2020

“Wherever two or three are gathered...” This year has called us to consider what “gathered” truly means. This February, we did not meet in person to reflect on the past year, as our Meetinghouse was closed, much like other public spaces across the country. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to find other ways to gather, and this year we extended queries on the State of our Society via email to our community and our committee clerks. Unsurprisingly, the response was mixed, with some deep responses and many absent voices. This, in many ways, reflects the broader themes of the year that was 2020.

While our immediate spiritual community has been graced with few losses, the world at large has suffered tremendously from the COVID-19 pandemic. Friends have done work to reach out to those in need and to set aside resources for members of our community who might be affected. Some Friends do wonder if we have done all we should in the face of such unusual suffering, but they remain grateful for what we have done.

Friends have struggled, and had some success, finding alternative ways to gather in the Spirit. Some have gathered amongst the grove of trees near our Meetinghouse. Some Friends found the necessary social distancing at these Meetings to be a significant hindrance to the entrance of the Spirit. All Friends found the New England climate to be a hindrance during the winter months.

Friends also “gathered” via online platforms, particularly Zoom. In this way Friends found new definitions of Spirit-led worship, where physical proximity was not present. Friends instead gathered in silence from their homes, seeking together over video conferencing platforms. Again, the success was mixed. Friends that attended were truly grateful for the ability to connect and worship, but some felt it was inadequate to their spiritual growth. All look forward to the day when we may embrace again in person.

However, Friends did note that this online worship was not without benefits. There were those

who took the opportunity to worship with distant communities they found spiritually fulfilling. This included former attenders of Providence Meeting who had moved away, but were now able to join our online gatherings, as well as members of Providence Meeting who have traveled far and wide without leaving home. Friends rejoiced at the ability to include those who might otherwise be unable to attend, including those for whom disabilities have made fellowship inaccessible even before the pandemic.

At the same time, many Friends were not led to join these online Meetings. Some found they lacked the gathered Spirit that settles on those sitting in physical proximity. Still others found that too much of their lives was being spent in online interactions, and that online worship was too much like the rest of their lives – they longed for a separate spiritual space. Still others lacked the resources to join. This has led to some fracturing of our community.

Friends have found fellowship and spiritual growth through activities beyond Meeting for Worship. Many Friends met online during a social hour each week. Still others connected via a phone tree that encouraged one-on-one conversation. Additionally, Friends mentioned receiving great sustenance from two programs: a continued dialogue on racism and a Quakerism 101 course.

The business of the Meeting has continued as committees have also been meeting online. Some committees, like Library and Property, have found significant reduction in the work they need to do. In some cases, they are meeting less frequently. Other committees, like Meetinghouse Management, have found the opposite due to the need to identify appropriate responses to the pandemic. Friends have repeatedly struggled with how they might meet in person safely, but no suitable solution has yet been found, and Meetings for Business were all conducted over Zoom.

Our physical spaces have not gone entirely unused. A small group has continued to meet at the Saylesville meetinghouse, and we held our annual candle-lit Christmas Eve celebration there, successfully including friends on-line in a hybrid fellowship in the Light. Saylesville also completed its second “Light Year Project,” a fund-raising effort to celebrate 300 plus years of worship in the meetinghouse. Additionally, Moses Brown School has brought in small pods of students to worship in the Providence meetinghouse. Friends express gratitude to Moses Brown for care of the grounds and for their attention to appropriately disinfecting the building.

Many expressed sorrow over the separation from the younger generation. Although in-person First Day School has not been possible, the Religious Education committee worked to provide packets that were sent to each child’s home. Also, they have arranged some successful online activities, including a well-attended workshop on conscientious objection to military service.

While the restrictions imposed by the pandemic have had serious impact on Friends’ spiritual practice, the political turmoil during this election year has stretched us even further. Many Friends struggled with a tumultuous campaign and the stress of waiting for results. While other election years have been stressful, this year Friends felt particularly vulnerable in the face of hate and fear. Our faith is based on the corporate working of the Spirit within us and our

community. On a massive scale that faith was tested this year as voters chose between such radically different viewpoints and Friends were left to cling to the rock.

As the year 2020 fades into history, there are few who would say it was a good year. However, Friends are grateful for gifts we have received - among them, the fact that our community has done as well as it has in weathering the storm. We all look forward to the time when we are able to safely worship in proximity to the Spirit and our fellows. Until that time, we find joy in the good things that have been provided, and take comfort in the continued faith that knits us into community.

Clerk's Corner: Caring Friends Create Community

from Rebecca Leuchak

As I look back over these several years in service to Providence Monthly Meeting as your Presiding Clerk, I am struck by the deep care for our community that I have witnessed among all of you. This fills my heart with gratitude and also teaches me lessons of appreciation for the myriad, multi-faceted ways that this caring is made manifest. I am reminded, in the complexity of this dynamic, of the eco-systems of our natural world. We are truly interdependent, humans and other species of animals, varieties of plant life and bacterial and microbic forms, alike. None can exist without the others. The dependence is symbiotic and rhythmic.

And so it is in our Quaker circle. We too support and are supported in the right time and degree within this dynamic gathering of Friends. How many times have I felt and been deeply appreciative of your support! How many times have I sought to support others! These actions whether large or small lead to stronger bonds and greater love among us. In the last year and a half of pandemic challenges, this has become only more salient. We have as a monthly meeting redoubled our efforts of connection and care.

Thank you!

Of course, there are times when we rub up against each other's differing views of things, preferred ways of dealing with matters, personal hopes for our beloved community. Yet time and time again, what I have witnessed are personal passions for the health and welfare of our Providence Friends Meeting tempered by a commitment to patient and faithful listening to each other and the leadings of the Spirit. Friends hold both commitment and confidence that we will find a compassionate way forward.

The most rewarding times in our Meeting life when these dynamics have been in play have been our monthly meetings for worship for the purpose of business, those second First days when we work together expressly to discern how we are led to act as a Monthly Meeting. This month's meeting for business is a clear example with a robust agenda full of the good work of many committees of our Meeting. Those present brought their full selves to the gathering and held themselves grounded in Spirit and stayed the course during a very long and very productive meeting.

It seemed as each issue was presented, examined, and way forward discerned, that we were clarifying for ourselves individually and as a body, who we are as Providence Friends. Thanks to the emergence of both unity of guiding action, and of instances where unity was not found, we have seen ourselves more clearly. That revelation will continue as some things we considered in this June meeting will continue to be before us in the coming months, indeed even years.

I believe that we are strengthened by the exploration of our differences and the discovery of our commonalities as we seek Spirit-led consensus. My hope is that we never back away from this engagement.

Presiding Clerk: **Rebecca Leuchak** clerk@providencefriends.org
Newsletter: **Jen McFadden and Dan Lederer** providentfriend@providencefriends.org
Website: **Sam Schiffman** webclerk@providencefriends.org
Questions and Information: **Steve Schwartz** info@providencefriends.org

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

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