

Providence Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business 11th of Ninth Month, 2022 Minutes

Friends gathered via Zoom technology at 12:15 pm with about 20 present. In the opening worship the clerk read the following queries, from NEYM Faith and Practice (2011):

- *What calls us into a Religious Society? Do we grow together in faithfulness?*
- *Do [we] recognize divinely inspired insight? Can [!] distinguish between divine leadings and [our] own needs or desires?*
- *Can we learn to worship together using the different languages of our diverse beliefs and traditions? (Consultation and Renewal Working Group, 2006)*

The clerk then read a number of announcements in the life of the meeting, which have also been distributed electronically.

Marriage request: Ministry and Counsel reported that our members Sally Freestone and Tom Marino have requested marriage under the care of Providence Monthly Meeting. Following our normal practice, Ministry and Counsel has named a clearness committee consisting of Dan Lederer, Martha Yager, and Elsie Morse to meet with the couple.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Peter Swaszek presented a report on the meeting's finances for the first quarter of the fiscal year, ending August 31, 2022. Contributions from members and attenders have totaled almost \$10,000, significantly less than last year. However, this appears to be a timing issue, as an appeal went out in May 2021, causing members to accelerate their usual contributions. Rental income has been higher than budgeted. The expenses are typical for this period in the year, including transfers to designated funds. The decline in the stock market has affected the value of our invested funds, as it has for everyone else. A copy of the full report is attached to these minutes. We thank Peter for his work.

Peace and Social Action reports a need for more volunteers to assist Camp Street Ministries with packing and delivering food from its food pantry. This assists our neighbors and helps forge relationships with the Camp Street community. Details can be obtained from members of the committee (Steve Schwartz, Eugenia Marks or David

CALENDAR

Saturday, Sept 17, NEYM
Permanent Board Meeting (Indoors and Zoom)

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

Saturday, Sept 24, 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Great Road Day (Saylesville Meetinghouse)

Sunday, Sept 25, 10:00 AM,
Meeting for Worship (Indoors and Zoom)

Sunday, October 2, World Quaker Day

Sunday, Oct 2 10:00 AM, Meeting for Worship (Indoors and Zoom)

Sunday, Oct 9, 10:00 AM, Meeting for Worship (Indoors and Zoom)

Sunday, Oct 9, 12:15 PM. Meeting for Business (Zoom)

Bourns), or volunteers can ask Sherri Waldman (snaprov@gmail.com), volunteer manager, to add them to her email list for weekly notifications of what is needed.

Membership transfer: Ministry and Counsel recommends a membership transfer for Jill Frew, at her request, to Minneapolis Monthly Meeting, where she has recently relocated. Dan Lederer presented the proposed certificate of transfer, using the form recommended in Faith & Practice. We approve this transfer.

Covid-19 Relief Fund: Dan Lederer, for Ministry and Counsel, reminded us of the Covid-19 Relief Fund, which we established to assist members and attenders with financial needs arising from the pandemic and related unemployment. Since no needs have appeared for some time, the fund subcommittee and Ministry and Counsel recommend laying down the fund and dividing the \$850 remaining in the fund evenly between two local community charities. A question was raised whether this is consistent with the expectations of donors when the fund was established. We were reminded that in April 2020, when the meeting established the fund, we set up the possibility of the relevant subcommittee notifying the meeting that it is no longer needed for Covid needs and leaving it to the meeting to determine its use. An alternate suggestion is to expand the use of the fund for the needs of people within our meeting. After a discussion, we ask the subcommittee and Ministry and Counsel to reconsider this matter, taking into account the views expressed.

Covid-19 safety protocols: Nina Berry, Clerk of Providence Management Committee, brought a proposal from the committee to alter the current guidelines for in-person meeting for worship to make both masks and vaccinations strongly encouraged, but no longer required. The other protocols would remain in place, including open windows (weather permitting), the air purifiers, and social distancing, as well as recording attendance and contact information in case of a Covid exposure. The committee also asks for continued authority to add restrictions as needed if case numbers increase, to protect the community.

It is unclear whether loosening the requirements would make attending meeting feel too unsafe for some people who would otherwise attend meeting in person, or would make those who prefer not to mask feel more welcome to attend. It was clarified that vaccinated young children are welcome in the meeting room under our current regulations. We also need to be mindful of people who aren't eligible for masks and/or vaccination, and consider ways to include and welcome them into our community. We were reminded that vaccination is most important to protect the person being vaccinated, and does not have a significant impact on transmission or safety to others. Masks vary in how much they protect the person wearing them, and how much they only protect those around you. In addition, the definition of "fully vaccinated" has shifted as more boosters have been made available. Some Friends feel strongly that we should not be regulating who comes to meeting and who doesn't.

We have become accustomed in other settings to most people going without masks, and vaccination status unknown; while "everyone else is doing it" is not enough reason to change our practice, it is a factor in members' and attenders' comfort level. There is

still so much uncertainty and conflicting advice within the medical community about how to proceed, and what the future risks may be. We are all doing the best we can, in an inherently stressful and difficult situation.

We approve the committee's proposal to change the protocol for the present, recognizing that the committee is empowered to alter it if the situation warrants it. One Friend asked to stand aside from this decision.

Saylesville Medallion Content draft and plaque paragraph: We have considered revised texts for the Saylesville Slave Medallion Project website and the small plaque that would be mounted with the medallion. The negotiations with the project administrator have been lengthy and complex, and the Saylesville Management Committee has not yet had a good opportunity to consider this other than by email chains. We reaffirm our commitment to this important project, and ask the Saylesville Management Committee and the clerk to continue working with the Slave Medallion project to discern the best way forward on both the texts and the timeline for installing the medallion at the meetinghouse property.

We closed with silent worship at about 2:15 pm, intending to meet next, God willing, on the 9th of 10th month 2022.

Respectfully submitted,
Victoria Ekk, Clerk
Betsy Cazden, Acting Recording Clerk for the Day

First Day School

In person religious education classes began September 11 with an outdoor walking class. Our theme for the next few weeks will be based on the Old Testament story of Noah's Ark, its connections to similar religious tales, and how they influence our thinking and beliefs. Please contact Wendy Virgadamo (virgadamo.wendy@gmail.com) if you have questions or concerns.

NEYM Permanent Board Meeting September 17

Providence Friend Rebecca Leuchak, the Presiding Clerk for New England Yearly Meeting, will be hosting the first NEYM Permanent Board meeting in our meetinghouse on Saturday September 17. Providence Friends are

invited to attend and we need several volunteers to help with refreshments and childcare during the meeting. If you are interested in helping out, contact Vicky Ekk (clerk@providentfriends.org) as soon as possible so we can start planning!

Great Road Day/Bake Sale September 24

For the past several years, the Saylesville meetinghouse has been open, in conjunction with other historic buildings, for Lincoln's Great Road Day. We will be participating again this year and welcome visitors and volunteers. The event is planned for Saturday September 24, from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. For more information contact Rebecca Smith.

We will be holding a Quaker Baker Sale (not a typo) at the same time and place. It's an opportunity to reach out to a broader community as well as help those less fortunate by donating the proceeds of our bake sale to the RI Food Bank. We need people who will bake goodies at home and people who will help to staff the table at the meetinghouse. It will be a great opportunity for us to get together and create goodness in the community. Anyone who is interested please contact Zona Douthit (zona.c.douthit@gmail.com).

World Quaker Day October 2

World Quaker Day will take place on Sunday October 2 with the theme ***Becoming the Quakers the World Needs***. World Quaker Day is an annual event where we celebrate the diversity of Quakerism around the world and build connections to make our community stronger. This year, every Friends meeting is encouraged to send or receive visitors to or from another Quaker group, to bring greetings, build relationships, and share ideas.

Quakerism 101

Are you interested in learning more about Quakerism? The Adult Religious Education Committee is preparing a course that will provide rich and clear information on Quaker history, beliefs, and traditions. If you are interested, contact Ben Lamm (ben_lamm@hotmail.com).

Connecting with Cuban Friends
from Peace and Social Action Committee

Our yearly meeting has a special relationship with the Cuba Yearly Meeting. Since 1981, there have been visits back and forth, cards, letters and gifts, and many prayers. It is a work of love and justice to listen and respond to our Quaker Friends in Cuba. Some meetings have created a sister meeting connection, and now almost all the meetings in Cuba have such a connection.

A newer meeting there, Floro Perez, is waiting to see if they will find a sister meeting in New England. Our meeting is establishing an ad hoc exploratory committee to consider whether we feel called to be the sister meeting with Floro Perez. The committee will start to meet in September with a possible first meeting at 7:30 PM on Tuesday September 20. If you are interested in serving, please contact Vicky Ekk (clerk@providencefriends.org).

Camp Street Volunteers Needed
from Peace and Social Action Committee

Camp Street Community Ministries needs volunteers to help with the packing and delivery of food for those in need. A benefit of this work is that members of our Meeting community get to forge relationships with people in other local communities. This activity is generally weekly on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday and involves two separate activities; (1) packing food for delivery at the center on Camp Street, and (2) delivering it to those in need.

Sherri Waldman manages this through a weekly email to a volunteer list that we encourage all to join. Please contact Peace and Social Action for more information (Steve Schwartz, Eugenia Marks, or David Bourns), or send a request directly to Sherri (snaprov@gmail.com) to be put on the weekly notifications. The weekly notices from Sherri let volunteers know what is needed, which can change weekly.

Clerk's Corner: About Discerning Together

from Vicky Ekk

When September's Meeting for Worship for the purpose of business arrives we usually have a full agenda! Items tabled over the summer pile up as we begin the busier fall season. So this second First Day of September we have much to discern together!

The NEYM website has a section dedicated to helping Friends understand shared decision making. It begins with a quote from Patricia Loring, defining this process as: "...distinguishing God's work and guidance within the human heart..." (<https://neym.org/strengthen-your-local-meeting/make-shared-decisions>). The section goes on to note that we are "grounded in the faith that together we can perceive God's guidance for our communities. In this way, our corporate discernment is an extension of our worship."

I was reflecting on this passage and its call to learn to listen to each other deeply to reach a place "found through calm attention to the Light within... and trust in the Spirit's guidance..." to reach a "Sense of the Meeting." We are reminded to take time to engage in silent worship to seek what is best for the gathered body. The website goes on to tell us that the concept of "'Sense of the Meeting' is the understanding of where the gathered body is led and does not mean that every individual present is completely satisfied or in total agreement. The sense of the meeting emerges from the committed efforts of a loving community and strengthens its bonds.

As our life at home and at Meeting gets busier and there are more items to consider for our community, we know that some are fairly easily discerned together, where the sense of the Meeting is clear and fairly easy to reach. There are also more complex issues where many different perspectives call for a stronger seeking of that of God within to guide us to decisions that meet the needs of

the community in compliance with Quaker values. As a model, let's consider John Woolman, who gently persevered in calling attention to the wrongs of slavery until Friends were convinced to free their slaves. In his journal, John says:

... so far as our gracious Creator's love influences our minds, so far we become interested in his workmanship and feel a desire to take hold of every opportunity to lessen the distresses of the afflicted and increase the happiness of the creation. Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable—that to turn all the treasures we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives. John Woolman (date unknown)

So as we move into this busy decision-making season, let's hold our community in the Light and call upon that "mind influencing love" to help us discern what is best for our community, our homes and our nation. Happy September, everyone!

Presiding Clerk: **Vicky Ekk** clerk@providencesfriends.org

Newsletter: **Jen McFadden and Dan Lederer** providentfriend@providencesfriends.org

Website: **Sam Schifman** webclerk@providencesfriends.org

Questions and Information: **Steve Schwartz** info@providencesfriends.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
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