

MEETING CALENDAR

Saturday, Dec 16, 5:00 PM, Christmas Gathering and Potluck (Providence Meetinghouse)

Sunday, Dec 17, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Norman Bird Sanctuary), 10:30 AM (Indoors)

Sunday, Dec 24, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom, Hybrid*); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Norman Bird Sanctuary), 10:30 AM (Indoors)

Sunday, Dec 24, 4:30 PM, Christmas Eve Candlelight Service (Saylesville Meetinghouse, In-Person and possibly Zoom)

Sunday, Dec 31, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Norman Bird Sanctuary), 10:30 AM (Indoors)

Sunday, Jan 7, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom, Hybrid*); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Norman Bird Sanctuary), 10:30 AM (Indoors)

Sunday, Jan 14, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Norman Bird Sanctuary), 10:30 AM (Indoors)

Sunday, Jan 14, Meeting for Business at Providence, Noon (Indoors and Zoom, Hybrid*)

*Hybrid = the in-person and online meetings are combined.

Providence Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business 10th of Twelfth Month, 2023 Minutes

Friends gathered at the Providence meetinghouse at noon with 14 present and 5 on Zoom.

Presiding clerk Ariana Steele began the period of silent worship by reading the following queries

taken from quakercloud.org:

What are the tasks that seem important to your sense of who you are and who God is calling you to be?

Have you been embracing or avoiding them?

Which parts of your life is God's Truth seeking to illuminate?

The clerk read the following announcements:

- The Christmas gathering will be held on the 16th of this month, at 5:00 p.m. at the Providence meetinghouse. Performers should arrive about 4:00. The program will be followed by a pot-luck dinner.
- The Christmas Eve candlelight service will be held on the 24th of the month at 4:30 p.m. at the Saylesville meetinghouse and possibly on Zoom.
- A memorial service was held on the 18th of Eleventh month for our member Anne DiMase.
- A memorial gathering was held later the same day for Hannah Edgerly, daughter of our member Libby Edgerly.

The following items of business were brought forward:

Ministry and Counsel Committee reported that Laura Landon has requested membership in our Meeting, and that she has had a positive meeting with a clearness committee. Ministry & Counsel recommended that Laura be admitted to membership in our Meeting; Friends approved and appointed Paul Graseck, Martha Yager, and Elsie Morse as a committee to welcome her.

Ministry and Counsel Committee reported that the COVID-19 relief fund has a balance of \$850.00 and that no one has requested assistance from it during the past year. They requested permission to lay down this fund and to divide the remainder equally between the Rhode Island Community Food Bank and the Mount Hope Neighborhood Association. Friends approved.

Ministry and Counsel Committee requested approval to host a New England Yearly Meeting-sponsored in-person extended Meeting for Worship on Eleventh month 2, 2024 at the Providence meetinghouse. Friends approved.

Treasurer Peter Swaszek presented the second-quarter financial report. Contributions are somewhat behind last year's, but there is usually an increase around the end of Twelfth month. Expenses are

also under budget overall, although certain lines are likely to exceed the budgeted amounts. Friends received the report with thanks.

Finance Committee requested permission to overspend certain budget lines:

- Nursery & Childcare has spent 92% of its \$2,100 budget as a result of hiring more students to staff the nursery and First Day School. It was mentioned that First Day School has not needed a student recently, but that the Nursery benefits from two to three helpers. Finance Committee requests permission to spend up to a total of \$4,200.00 for this fiscal year. Friends approved.
- Insurance was budgeted at \$8,700, but the bill turned out to be \$9,806.00. Friends approved the additional expense.
- Saylesville Lawn Maintenance has a budget of \$2,000, possibly based on incomplete data from last year. Finance committee requests an increase to \$3,500.00 for this fiscal year. Friends approved.

Finance Committee proposed a change to the Meeting Handbook regarding the Treasurer's discretion in spending: the Treasurer will be authorized to spend up to 5% or \$250 (whichever is greater) in excess of the budgeted amount for a line item at the Treasurer's sole discretion, and up to 10% or \$500 (whichever is greater) at the combined discretion of the Treasurer and the clerk of Finance Committee, without needing to seek approval from Meeting for Business. Friends approved.

No further business appearing, we closed with a period of silent worship at 1:15 p.m., intending to meet next on the 14th of First month 2024.

Respectfully submitted: Ariana Steele, Presiding Clerk Rebecca Smith, Recording Clerk

Minute Calling for a Ceasefire in Israeli and Palestinian Territories

from Lancaster (PA) Monthly Meeting Newsletter, December 2023,

with permission of the editor, Jim Herr

As members of Lancaster Friends Meeting, we are in deep sympathy with the civilians in Palestine and Israel who are suffering ongoing assaults on their lives. As Friends we affirm that of God in everyone. We call on that inborn goodness among the parties brokering decisions to end the destruction and to advance a ceasefire. We enjoin them to remain at the negotiating table keeping

communication and dialog open and ongoing.

We seek and urge the creation of a world without war. Another cycle of violence will not solve the problems in the Middle East; violence begets more violence. We are dedicated to joining together with others to address the root causes of violence. To advance toward such a goal, willful destruction of life must cease.

Annual Christmas Gathering and Potluck December 16

The annual Christmas Gathering and Pot Luck will be held on Saturday, December 16, starting at 5:00 PM. If you would like to participate by offering a song, a poem, a recollection, or a reading, please let John Lord know at jonskydozer@msn.com. Also, anyone who would like to join the Sounds of Silence orchestra is invited to sit in with us that evening. Auditions are held during the actual performance and all we ask is for whatever instrument you play to be reasonably in tune. Mark your calendars: Christmas Gathering, Saturday, December 16, at 5:00 PM. All are welcome.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service December 24

The Saylesville Worship Group invites all to its annual Christmas Eve Candlelight Service starting at 4:30 PM on December 24 at the Saylesville meetinghouse, 374 Great Road, Lincoln, RI. Friends may attend in person or via Zoom (the link will be announced via our email list).

Saylesville Light Year Project

from Ann Durant

The Saylesville worship group is continuing its Light Year Project, inviting Friends to donate a light that honors a particular year in the Saylesville meetinghouse's existence. This is our fifth year of lighting up the 320 years of history and celebrating the light within us all.

If you'd like to donate to the display, the suggested amount is \$10.00. You can make out a check to Providence Friends Meeting with Light Year Display on the memo line and send it either to Light Year Display, c/o Denise Turco, 199 River Road, Lincoln, RI 02865, or directly to Meeting treasurer Peter Swaszek, P.O Box 1787, Kingston, RI 02881. Please attach a note indicating your name (or "Anonymous" if you would prefer that), which year you would like to commemorate, and contact information if you like.

New FCNL Policy on Abortion and Reproductive Health

from Betsy Cazden

Last year Providence Meeting, along with other Friends' meetings around the country, was asked to provide input to a discernment process on whether the Friends Committee on National Legislation, the Quaker lobby in Washington, should take a position on any abortion-related legislation that may come before Congress. Until now, FCNL's broad statement of legislative policy has long noted that "Members of the Society of Friends are not in unity on abortion issues. Therefore, FCNL takes no position and does not act either for or against abortion legislation." In the aftermath of the Supreme Court *Dobbs* decision, many Friends asked whether this statement was still accurate and appropriate.

FCNL received a robust response to its inquiry from across the country and across the Quaker spectrum. Those responses indicated that while Friends have differing perceptions of the morality of abortion in particular situations, they have considerable unity that those decisions belong to individuals and families, within their faith traditions, and that the role of government should be a very limited one, and should not threaten either women or medical providers with criminal penalties. At the November meeting of FCNL's General Committee, which I attended as one of New England Yearly Meeting's appointed representatives, the Policy Committee presented a draft minute. There was considerable discernment on the floor, and the draft was revised twice more during the weekend before it was finally approved.

The new language reads:

Reproductive health and abortion. Quakers recognize that human life is sacred, and that Spirit can guide us individually and collectively. Based on these beliefs, members of the Religious Society of Friends have come to different conclusions regarding abortion. FCNL supports individual discernment in a spirit of love and truth in making reproductive healthcare decisions, as we do in other areas of conscientious moral choice. Government must ensure that people have the legal right to make these decisions. We oppose the criminalization of people seeking, undergoing, or involved in abortion services. We support equitable access to abortion services. FCNL also supports policies that reduce unwanted pregnancies by ensuring equitable access to contraception, sex education, family planning, fertility and adoption services, and support for all who decide to have children.

A full summary of the meeting is available at <https://www.fcnl.org/events/annual-meeting-2023->

[justice-calls-us-love-unites-us](#). I'm happy to discuss it with anyone who has questions. Next year's meeting is scheduled for Nov. 13-17, 2024, and will be hybrid. The meetings are open to all Friends, although only General Committee members participate in the actual discernment and decisions. And this winter, our meeting along with others will have a chance to tell FCNL what we hope the specific legislative priorities will be for the next Congress. Stay tuned for that!

Friends and Democracy

from Dan Lederer

As Quakers, our manner of conducting business is an example of true democracy in action. Rather than elect officials who are empowered to make decisions for us, we invite all interested Friends to attend our Meeting for Business, and every voice is heard without any intermediary. And rather than voting whether to approve a decision, we seek unity, a somewhat subtle and at times elusive concept that reflects a shared understanding of what's best for our Meeting community.

Outside of Meeting, governance is different. In our country's constitutional republic, we elect representatives to make decisions for us at the local, state, and federal levels. We're free to contact these persons to communicate our opinion on any given issue, so in that sense our voices are heard, but special interests can have a disproportionate influence. In other words, the system can be corrupted. Its saving grace is that mechanisms exist to make corrections as needed.

An autocracy is different. A select few make all major decisions. There is no expression of differing opinions. Rather, dissent is suppressed, sometimes brutally. History tells us that autocracies tend not to end well, examples being regimes of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Pol Pot.

This contrast is relevant because today our form of government is at risk, and I'm trying to understand why so many fellow citizens seem willing to replace our representative democracy with an autocracy. Various explanations come to mind. Some folks are willing to accept an autocracy if it results in a favorite issue's desired outcome, such as a nationwide ban on abortion, a halt in immigration, unfettered gun ownership, fewer business regulations, or restoration of a system in which only Christian white men are in charge. And others may feel that we are threatened by other countries' ruthless autocrats, so that, given how cumbersome and slow-moving our form of government can be, we need our own homegrown autocrat to protect us and advance our national interest.

Admittedly American democracy is not perfect. For example, there are some religious groups that don't feel safe practicing their own manner of worship. There is wide gap of income inequality. And there are many other examples of shortcomings that need fixing. But good people are working on making the needed corrections, and, in contrast to autocracies, our system allows them to do so.

In our current political climate, preserving democracy has become an ongoing challenge. Given the high value we Quakers place on our democratic way of conducting business within our home meetings, I hope that each of us will try to find the strength and means to help preserve and perfect a democracy that benefits everyone.

‘Tis The Giving Season

This is a great time to make tax-deductible donations before the end of the calendar year. Meeting relies on donations, currently set at \$75,000 for this fiscal year (June 1, 2023, to May 31, 2024). Donations represent 64% of Meeting's total income.

We tend to receive donations from around 60 contributing units, defined as individuals or families who contribute. In order to reach our budgeted amount of \$75,000 this fiscal year, we would need each unit to contribute an average of \$1250. We understand that this would be a stretch for some, but also that there are folks at Meeting who could afford to give more than this.

Thus far this year Friends have contributed \$15,546. As of the same time last year, that is, the end of our second quarter, Friends had contributed \$26,041, so we're not doing as well this time around. We are currently running a deficit of \$4337.

Can you help? Donations can be sent to our treasurer as detailed below.

Address for Contributions:

**Providence Monthly Meeting
c/o Peter Swaszek
Box 1787
Kingston, RI 02881**

Presiding Clerk: **Ariana Steele** clerk@providencefriends.org
Newsletter: **Jen McFadden and Dan Lederer** providentfriend@providencefriends.org
Website: **Sam Schifman** webclerk@providencefriends.org
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>

**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

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