

The Provident FRIEND June 10, 2024

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

MEETING CALENDAR

Saturday, June 15, 10:00 AM to noon, Saylesville Book Swap (Saylesville Meetinghouse)

Sunday, June 16, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Weeden Lane, Jamestown), 9:30 AM (Indoors)

Sunday, June 16, 11:30 AM to 2:00 PM, Southeast Quarterly Meeting for Business (Providence Meetinghouse)

Sunday, June 23, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom, Hybrid); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Weeden Lane, Jamestown), 9:30 AM (Indoors)

Sunday, June 30, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Weeden Lane, Jamestown), 9:30 AM (Indoors)

Sunday, July 7, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Weeden Lane, Jamestown), 9:30 AM (Indoors)

Sunday, July 14, Meeting for Worship: at Providence, 10:00 AM (Indoors and Zoom); at Saylesville, 10:30 AM (Indoors); at Conanicut (Weeden Lane, Jamestown), 9:30 AM (Indoors)

Meeting for Worship will continue as above throughout the summer. The next Meeting for Business will be on September 8 and will be at the Saylesville meetinghouse.

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

**Providence Monthly Meeting for Worship
with a Concern for Business
9th of Sixth Month, 2024
Minutes**

Friends gathered at the Saylesville meetinghouse soon after noon with 15 present and 8 on Zoom.

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

“Self love is an act of holy disruption. To love yourself in a world that profits directly from your self-loathing is the ultimate subversion of all that seeks to keep you tame.” Jeanette LeBlanc

The following items of business were brought forward:

1. Peace and Social Action Committee’s *ad hoc* committee on our Cuban sister meeting relationship brought an update on our Meeting’s engagement with Floro Perez Meeting. Some Friends will be traveling to Cuba again this month and in the fall to conduct requested Alternatives to Violence trainings. They can bring financial contributions and letters of friendship in either Spanish or English. Friends interested in contributing to the sister relationship are invited to contact the committee.

2. Treasurer Peter Swaszek brought the year-end report for fiscal year 2023-2024. We ended with a deficit of over \$15,000. As always, some lines were over- and some under-budget. Notable overages were in Nursery & Child Care and in Saylesville Lawn Maintenance, which have led to alterations in the budget for the coming year. Contributions from members were about three-quarters of what had been budgeted and were about \$10,000 less than last year’s. The Clerk noted that the Meeting website should soon have a link to allow donations to be made via PayPal. The Treasurer reported that our investment income has essentially recovered from the withdrawals that financed alterations made to the Providence meetinghouse during recent years but that our budgeting process has not yet fully adjusted to some associated costs.

3. The Carla Dowben estate/yard sale held earlier this weekend was reported to have been a

success. The Clerk proposed that she be allowed to form an *ad hoc* committee to discern how to direct the funds in accordance with Carla's wishes. Friends approved.

4. Nursery and Child Care Committee reported on their activities. This was the Nursery's first year to be open since Covid and was a learning year. The committee has adopted a more realistic budget and scheduling improvements to coordinate the paid helpers. The availability of nursery care was noted as an important benefit to members and attenders with young families.

5. The same committee brought some ideas concerning children's involvement in Meeting for Worship. Friends referred these to Ministry and Counsel Committee for further discernment.

6. Ministry and Counsel Committee proposed Barabara Zimmer for membership. A former member of our Meeting, she had transferred her membership in 2016 to Plainfield Meeting in Vermont. She resigned from that Meeting when she moved later without intending thereby to leave the Society of Friends. Friends approved her return to membership in Providence Meeting and appointed Jules Burrowes, Ariana Steele, and Thia Lord to prepare an appropriate welcome.

7. Ministry and Counsel brought a draft memorial minute for our Friend Anne DiMase. Friends approved the minute with one slight alteration.

8. Ministry and Counsel brought a draft memorial Minute for our Friend Carla Dowben. Friends proposed certain additional information to be included and approved the resulting minute.

9. Ministry and Counsel brought a revised draft of the 2023 State of Society Report. Friends approved.

No further business appearing, we closed with a period of silent worship at 1:40 p.m., intending to meet next on the 8th of Ninth month at the Saylesville meetinghouse.

Respectfully submitted,

Respectfully submitted,
Ariana Steele, Clerk

Rebecca Smith, Recording Clerk

[The State of the Society Report is below. The memorial minutes for Anne DiMase and Carla Dowben will appear in the September Provident Friend.]

State of the Society Report for 2023

As we reflect on the year 2023, we are called to give thanks. This year has seen seeds bear fruit, as our community has grown in many ways. Of course, growth does not come without challenges, and our community continues to seek the leading of the Light in the face of continued change.

We are relieved that we have come out of the COVID era and can be together again without restrictions. Friends have continued, throughout the year, to gather at our three physical locations and on-line every First Day. We have been overjoyed with the growing community, including several new families with younger children. Our nursery and First Day School have been in full swing.

At the same time, new participants in the community have been eager to participate in Meeting activities, producing new energy in our meetinghouse. Aspects of this new energy have been distracting for some during our Meetings for Worship. For example, it is no longer our practice to restrict when people may enter the worship. For some, this has caused disruption in their spiritual practice, and they have raised good points on the topic of educating Friends about our traditions. At the same time, we are aware that we are a faith of ever-revealing Truth, and what was considered good practice by early Friends would not always match with our practice today. We are ever seeking and striving to find balance between creating the right conditions for listening to Spirit and allowing Spirit to push us in new directions.

Another area that has been a challenge for our community has been the inclusion of a hybrid gathering every other First Day in our Providence meetinghouse and on-line. In these Meetings for Worship, the on-line attenders can be heard but not seen, and are able to listen to and see those in the meetinghouse. This has required the addition of a microphone, speaker, and camera in our meeting space. For some, this intrusion into the gathering has been a

barrier to the Light and some have chosen to either skip worship or attend at Saylesville on those days. As a community we continue to seek how we can best be an inclusive community for all. We feel that this experiment is far from over and we will be trying some new approaches in 2024.

We have returned to in-person Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business, although we still allow on-line attendance. In these meetings we have included the ability to see, as well as hear, Friends on-line. Given the nature of these meetings, they seem more suitable for the hybrid experience. Many of our committees continue to meet on-line, as Friends find the flexibility, freedom from travel, and ability to be inclusive very appealing.

The greater world is always in our hearts, and our Peace & Social Action Committee has continued to call us to action on issues including poverty, diversity, transportation, indigenous peoples, and gun safety, among others. We have also continued our donations to Camp Street Community Ministries and our engagement with Floro Perez Friends Meeting in Cuba, with whom we have formalized a sister meeting relationship. Pastoral Care Committee organized writing letters of hope to women at the Adult Correctional Institution (ACI) for International Women's Day.

At the same time, some worldly events have called us into dialog with some Friends' testimonies, especially those that promote non-violence. Meeting has an active Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) Advocacy Team that meets weekly. Two of our members have provided Alternatives to Violence Program training in Cuba and at the ACI. We collectively ask the Light to grace us with understanding in the face of continued injustice locally and around the world.

We are aware that many Friends Meetings are currently experimenting with new patterns for leadership. We recognize that the events of the last few years have had significant ramifications for the world and for Friends. As discussed, Providence Friends Meeting is also experiencing change and we look forward to seeking in the Light with our fellow Friends. We are very thankful to be part of this continued journey, and we are very thankful for the thriving community around us.

We ended the year, as has become our custom, with a candlelight Christmas Eve service at our Saylesville meetinghouse and on-line. This returns us to the theme of being thankful. We

are still seeking and growing, but we are surrounded by Friends and welcome the Light into our lives.

Entering the Worship Room

from Ministry and Counsel Committee

Friends are again reminded that Meeting for Worship begins when the first worshipper sits down, which may occur before 10:00 AM, and we ask all to respect the silence from that point on. If you arrive after 10:00 but before 10:15, you have the option of entering the worship room quietly or waiting in the library until the children come out at 10:15.

That having been said, we urge Friends to arrive on time at Meeting for Worship whenever possible.

Southeast Quarterly Meeting June 16

The Southeast Quarter of NEYM will meet at 11:30 AM on Sunday June 16 at the Providence meetinghouse. We will host the meeting with visiting Friends from Smithfield RI Monthly Meeting, Westerly RI Monthly Meeting, Worcester MA Friends Meeting, and Conanicut RI Friends Meeting. The clerk of Southeast Quarter is Beth Hansen of Westerly Friends Meeting. Please join us to welcome our Friends for Meeting for Worship, bring along some “potluck lite” to share, and come to the Quarterly Meeting for Business. The full agenda will be posted.

Helping Detroit Friends Meeting

On Sunday May 19 we heard a presentation by Sharon Ottenbreit and Kevin Howley about their Detroit Friends Meeting’s struggles to survive after their meetinghouse was taken by eminent domain. It’s a small meeting, with only 24 members (of whom our own Helen Grundman is one) and around 15 active attenders. A little history:

Detroit Friends Meeting was first recognized as a monthly meeting in 1926. In the 1960’s

Detroit Quakers established one of the first integrated schools in the city. Initially without a permanent home, the meeting purchased and renovated a building in an industrial area in the 1980's. The State of Michigan took the building by eminent domain in 2017. After years of searching, members found a suitable building that they were able to purchase in April 2023, but extensive renovations were needed and are still in progress. Their plan calls for heat pumps, solar panels, low voltage power distribution, and permeable parking surfaces with rain gardens, all designed to allow maintenance within their \$20,000 annual budget. They're relying on local contractors and "sweat equity" by members and attenders.

They purchased the building for around \$227,000. They've raised around \$630,000 from member contributions, other monthly meetings, their quarter, and Lake Erie Yearly Meeting, but they need an additional \$220,000 to complete the needed renovations and create a welcoming space that will attract new members and attenders.

Their hope is to be a trusted member of the Detroit community, but they need the help of others who believe in their mission. Contributions can be sent to Detroit Friends Meeting, c/o Peter Dale (treasurer), 9812 Cranston Street, Livonia. Michigan 48150.

Art from Betsy Zimmerman

Betsy reports that these prints are monotype with transfer drawing, which is a form of printmaking created by drawing on a sheet of paper that's been laid on an inked, still wet plate (plastic, glass, wood, or board), so the transfer of the ink to the back of the drawing becomes the print. The image is the color of the ink and is the reverse of the image on the plate.



Clare's Poppies # 3



Daffodils # 2

Quaker Testimonies and Current Events

from Dan Lederer

The Quaker testimonies serve to guide us in our everyday lives. But can they do the same as we consider decisions related to local and national politics.

It's disheartening that approximately half the voters in our country seem inclined to accept a dictatorship as long as it addresses, to their liking, one or more of their concerns about immigration, abortion, gun rights, crime, or religion's role in government. What these folks advocate in regard to these issues may not be what we as Quakers would want, but they're entitled to their preferences. What's disturbing is that, to get there, they seem willing to sacrifice democracy.

How did we arrive at this juncture? One can point to various features of our culture as contributing, including a diverse population, marked income inequality, a consumption-based economy with the message that you can never have enough, the glorification of violence in our entertainment along with the increasing acceptance of violence as a way to settle disputes, and the enhanced means of spreading misinformation provided by social media. Add to that combination the willingness of some politicians to exploit our human susceptibilities to greed, fear, anger, and even hate, and you have a toxic political brew.

The United States' Constitution has been in effect for the last 235 years, but it's not indestructible. Can we reduce the current risk to our Constitution? While one could argue that all the Quaker testimonies have relevance in this situation, to me the one that stands out as most needed is a sense of community that extends to the entire nation.

When we sit in Meeting for Business, finding unity depends on having Friends set aside their personal preferences in favor of what's best for the group. Similarly, when deciding where to place our support on a national scale, what's needed is consideration of what's best for the country as a whole in place of our individual desires. I fear that somehow our educational system has failed to instill this idea in our citizenry, and I worry that we've forgotten the sacrifices that others have made to preserve our democracy.

Can we as Quakers help? I think so, but it's not enough just to espouse "community" or any of the other testimonies. Rather, we need to conduct our lives according to our testimonies, keeping alive the hope that, by so doing, we can beneficially influence the events of the day.

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 02

The Provident FRIEND
Newsletter of
Providence Monthly Meeting of
the Religious Society of Friends
99 Morris Avenue
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