

Worcester Friends Newsletter

January 2020



Calendar

Sunday Meeting for Worship: 11 A.M. **except February 2, 2020. See below**

Children's Program: 11 A.M. (childcare year-round, First Day School program during school year) **See below**

Potluck Lunch: After Worship every Sunday. Stay for fellowship.

Business Meeting: 2nd Sunday each month at 9 A.M.

The Meetinghouse is Handicapped

Stephen Aldrich Fund

The impact of contemporary economic change and the need of individuals and families is all around us. We sense the need, but often ask, "What can I do?"

Much as we ask this question today, Stephen Aldrich asked and responded in the 1800's by bequeathing a large portion of his estate to the [RI-Smithfield} Quarterly Meeting to provide emergency funding for Friends in need. This bequeath continues today as the Stephen Aldrich Fund and is available to all members of the Meeting community seeking one-time emergency financial assistance.

Individuals needing assistance or those who would like further information regarding the Fund should contact our Meeting's representative, **Paul Gallagher**. All contact is held strictly in confidence.

****Change of Time for Meeting for Worship on February 2, 2020****

Dear Friends,

Please set your alarms a little earlier on Sunday, 2/2/20 in order to attend Meeting for Worship. At January Business Meeting, Friends agreed to start Meeting for Worship at 9:30 am on the First Sunday in February. The change in time has been made so that members and attenders can prayerfully center themselves before Noah Baker-Merrill of NEYM presents information and leads a discussion on FUM to aid in discerning how New England Friends can come to clarity around the difficult issue of resolving support for both LGBTQ+ people and FUM.

Regular Meeting for Worship will begin at 9:30 a.m. on February 20. We will dispense with introductions at the end of worship and go directly into the discussion of NEYM/FUM relationship. We will have Pot Luck after the discussion.

A letter from NEYM Clerk Bruce Neumann is printed on the following pages. Please read his thoughts and the queries he includes in order to be prepared for the discussion.

January 6, 2020

From the NEYM Clerk: Update on our relationship with FUM

Dear Friends,

I am writing to share some updates and reflections about the relationship of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (NEYM) and Friends United Meeting (FUM), and to try to clarify how new ideas might come to Sessions 2020.

All of the monthly meetings which have withheld funds in the past have been contacted by someone from the Coordinating and Advisory Committee (C&A), which shepherds the work of the Yearly Meeting throughout the year, and which I clerk. A number of these meetings have scheduled listening and information sessions, in advance of threshing sessions on how to respond to the change in the Yearly Meeting's withholding mechanism. Several members of C&A have and will be attending some of these sessions. As presiding clerk when the request was made, Fritz Weiss sent a letter to the clerk of FUM's General Board clearly stating our view on the personnel policy and formally requesting that the Board consider changing it. We received an acknowledgement that the FUM Clerk had received the letter. We also received a letter from the general secretary of FUM, expressing his appreciation for "the ways NEYM is participating in the community and ministries of FUM. Given the cultural and theological diversities among us, I acknowledge this participation is not easy."

Our FUM Board members have begun to meet and consider how to approach the charge we laid on them, of working with other Board members to craft new language for the sexual ethics portion of the Personnel Policy that will be acceptable to all. As they engage in this process, they welcome input from all sources. Do you have thoughts about new language for the sexual ethics portion of FUM's personnel policy? ([Read the policy here.](#)) Thoughts about how the work should be approached? They welcome input from individuals, monthly meetings, or just groups that have gathered to chat and have ideas to share. Frederick Martin, fredrckm@gmail.com (Beacon Hill, MA, Friends Meeting), Kristina Keefe-Perry, stina.perry@gmail.com (Fresh Pond, MA, Friends Meeting), and Dawn Tripp, dcscout@hotmail.com (Allen's Neck, MA, Friends Meeting) are our representatives to the FUM Board.

One of the things that has come to me, as I ponder the situation, is that while this concern is outwardly about our membership with FUM, it is also about many other things, including "How Christian are we?" "What are the responsibilities of membership in an organization?" "Does money have a role in effecting change?" But underneath the outward concern, and the related questions, is a deeper challenge for us as Quakers—how do we live with each other, and with each of our neighbors—when we don't agree? Some Friends' theology would suggest that this is the real challenge put to us by God. Perhaps the work around this issue is just as significant as what resolution we finally come to.

At the same time that we continue to feel ourselves “painfully stretched between two apparently conflicting imperatives” (language from the 2009 minute)—honoring conscience and honoring relationship—let us remember to celebrate the unity that we do have. At a time when several other yearly meetings have been torn apart over the issue of being welcoming and affirming, our Yearly Meeting is clear in its sense that “We unite unequivocally in our love and care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Friends, and hold a particular concern for their lives and ministries” (language from the 2019 minute).

I’d like to expand on Sessions Minute 2019-58, which includes: *We hope that a properly seasoned proposal may rise through our established structures (e.g., a minute from a monthly meeting seasoned by the quarter) and be brought to Sessions 2020 before the withholding mechanism finally expires. What new opportunity, what new possibilities, are we now being called into?”*

I’d like to be clear there is no specific idea or plan we are looking for. We are hoping that Friends will engage again, certainly with our relationship with FUM, but also with considering our role in working for justice and peace for all LGBTQ+ people. Is there a different way of seeing and working with FUM? Might we be called to work for the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ Friends in the wider world?

From my perspective as your clerk, the ideal route for a minute or proposal to come to Annual Sessions is to be seasoned and approved at the monthly meeting, forwarded to the quarterly meeting, which considers it again and, if led, sends it to the Yearly Meeting presiding clerk, requesting that it be placed on the agenda at Sessions. The key part of “ideal” here, is that the minute or proposal has been seasoned and approved by two different discerning bodies.

Minutes or proposals on this matter could also potentially be suggested by a Yearly Meeting committee, or by an ad-hoc or informal group. In both of these cases it would be best if they were seasoned by another body—Permanent Board and Ministry and Counsel being two good examples. Both of those bodies have their last meeting in May, before Sessions in August, and it’s typical for the Yearly Meeting presiding clerk to be laying out a tentative agenda around that time. Which is to say, after May it can be challenging to get something on the agenda. Please keep me informed as ideas germinate and take shape or, indeed, if there is some not-quite-formed idea that you would like to share.

I should also make it clear that the presiding clerk is charged, in consultation with Coordinating and Advisory and with the clerk’s table, with discerning what business comes forward to Sessions. Such discernment revolves around how well-prepared and seasoned the business is, how it relates to ongoing concerns and, ultimately, our sense of whether the business holds some essence of the Divine.

As we continue to labor with the nature of our relationship with FUM, individually and as local meetings, I offer three queries:

If I have a strong conviction, do I hold that conviction with the tenderness that my Quaker faith and practice requires of me, acknowledging that in Meeting for Business or some other situation, a fuller vision of the Truth may emerge?

Am I willing to labor tenderly with those who have a different opinion, recognizing that they also hold the divine, recognizing that while there is only one Truth, we each have different understandings of it? Consider the old story of the blind men encountering an elephant, each having a different understanding based on which part they are touching. Are there aspects of a larger Truth I have not yet recognized?

Friends in New England are in unity in cherishing LGBTQ+ Friends. Is God calling us as a body to also work on behalf of LGBTQ+ Friends outside of New England? If so, how do we engage in that work?

Bruce Neumann

Presiding Clerk, New England Yearly Meeting

Request to members and attenders:

The Gifts and Leadings Committee is working on committee membership for 2020. See Jane Cutting, Daron Barnard or Mary Chenaille if you feel a leading to share your gifts on a particular committee.

Meeting is looking for someone to become our First Day School Co-ordinator. Until the position is filled, there is a sign-up sheet in the front hall where interested Friends can volunteer to lead individual Sunday sessions with Young Friends. If you have a book you love and would like to share, an art project, your own faith story, etc., our Young Friends would love to spend an hour with you.

There is also a sign-up sheet for First Day Greeters. Just come 15 minutes before M4W begins, put on your name tag and welcome newcomers to Worcester Friends Meeting. It makes a difference to first timers!

**The Worcester Friends Newsletter is available on our website:
www.WorcesterFriendsMeeting.org**

A calendar of events is also available there. Please check with Corresponding Clerk Mary Chenaille before reserving the Meetinghouse.

2019 Annual Business Meeting

Worcester Friends Meeting

January 12, 2020

Present: Daron Barnard, Katharine Barnard, Sheila Brenner, Tom Brenner, Clarence Burley, Mary Chenaille, Jane Cutting, Lucy Candib, Michelle Flint, David Legg, Ellen Perry, Jessica Seem, Richard Schmitt, Kevin Walsh

Clerking: Matthew Shorten

After opening the monthly business meeting, we moved into Annual Business.

Gifts and Leadings: Daron Barnard reported on behalf of the committee. While the committee has finalized the officer positions for the Meeting, which are unchanged from last year, more time is needed to finalize committee memberships. These rosters will be presented to a called meeting for business once they are available.

Practical Committee: Kevin Walsh reported on the completion of several projects this year, including the completion of window replacements which will help with energy efficiency of the building. Multiple other small projects were undertaken as well, including signage for gender-inclusive bathrooms, exterior sign and canopy repairs, and extensive eradication of poison ivy on the property. The main work of the committee has been deliberation about how to proceed with replacement siding and insulation, in which the committee is continuing to weigh pros and cons of different possibilities. Considerations include cost, maintenance, faithfulness to historical appearance, and energy efficiency. The committee hopes to finalize plans this quarter and welcomes input from others in the meeting. As plans unfold, the committee will bring recommendations to the business meeting.

Peace, Social Concerns and Outreach: The committee has focused on activities related to racism and racial awareness, and support of refugees and immigrants. Tom Brenner highlighted the committee's organization of a presentation by Debby Irving in March 2019, which was a meaningful talk on racial awareness as well as opportunity for outreach to the Worcester community. This talk was supported by a Legacy Grant from NEYM. It was shared with New England Quakers via a poster at NEYM Annual Sessions. The "Facing Race" reading group continued to meet through the year, providing opportunities for learning and discussion on issues of race. The committee supported various activities related to wellbeing of immigrants and refugees, and Native rights.

Spiritual Life Committee: The committee's focus has been in supporting Quaker worship practices, and carried out a successful workshop ("Quakerism 101, or, How to Have the Best Meeting Ever"). The committee wants to continue to provide opportunities for meeting members to share their spiritual journeys. The committee has worked to support First Day School during this era of low and variable attendance. The committee has welcomed new attenders and mourned the loss of others; Worcester Meeting participated in writing the memorial minute for long-time member Betty Poynton who passed away in 2018. The committee considered the question, "Are we an Affirming Congregation?" and to this end, invited Lisa Graustein (of Cambridge Meeting) to lead a workshop on gender identity.

An issue that arose in 2019 which bridges all committees was our choice to provide residence at the Meetinghouse for a community member in need. If we wish to continue offering residence to people in need, further discussion could be undertaken under the care of the Visioning Committee.

Treasurer's Report: We gratefully acknowledge both Mark Sullivan's many years of service as Treasurer, and Aaron Sakulich taking up the position and providing recommendations for streamlining the work.

Kevin Walsh reviewed 2019 finances. In the past year, income was approximately \$8000 higher than expected, due to increased donations, receipt of the Legacy Grant and small income from the Debby Irving presentation. Expenses were approximately \$4000 less than anticipated, which represents a combination of multiple small savings in areas such as childcare and elimination of mailing expenses for the newsletter. Ultimately we finished the year ahead of budget, which balances other years in which we have had greater expenses than income. The Assets and Liabilities statement was not available for review at this time but the Treasurer will be asked to present it when it is available.

The projected budget for 2020 reflects anticipated stable expenses and income from 2019. One unknown expense will be the house siding and insulation project, which is anticipated to cost \$20,000 - \$40,000; funding for that project would come from our savings account. Additionally, we anticipate further consideration of our financial contribution to NEYM. We will have upcoming discussion on our Meeting's response to NEYM's change in financial withholding from FUM, and that discussion could result in a change the amount of our contribution to NEYM.

After conclusion of annual business, the meeting turned to monthly business. Individual committees' annual reports are appended for detailed review.

In the Light,
Katharine Barnard

Monthly Meeting for Business

Worcester Friends Meeting

January 12, 2020

Present: Daron Barnard, Katharine Barnard, Sheila Brenner, Tom Brenner, Clarence Burley, Mary Chenaille, Jane Cutting, Lucy Candib, Michelle Flint, David Legg, Ellen Perry, Jessica Seem, Aaron Sakulich, Kevin Walsh
Clerking: Matthew Shorten

The meeting opened with silent worship and a reading from Howard Thurman about the "true work of Christmas" that continues after the holiday.

The monthly meeting was adjourned to attend to annual business, and reconvened after that business was completed. Annual business is reported in the above minutes of the Annual Business Meeting.

Business Items:

1. Matthew Shorten presents a proposal for a paid position of a "House Manager" who could help open and close the Meetinghouse on First Days, and be available at other times that contractors or groups need access to the building. Alternatively, these activities could be accomplished by volunteers, though it has been difficult in the past to have consistent commitment to and completion of these activities. One very helpful step, regardless of whether we hire a house manager, would be a written checklist for care and opening and closing of the building. Practical Committee is asked to write a checklist and to further consider options for getting the necessary tasks done.

Meeting for Business Continued

2. There is ongoing discussion of the timing of activities on First Days, including the possibility of moving the worship hour earlier. To this end, Aaron Sakulich has drafted an opinion-gathering survey that will soon be sent out to help “take the pulse” of worship attenders regarding timing. We recognize that holding worship at 9:30am on February 2nd (see below) will serve as a sort of pilot for a change in worship time.

Practical Committee: The committee met this month and reviewed 2019 activities and the 2019 and 2020 budgets. In other business, the committee considered a question of replacing the grass around the Meetinghouse with more environmentally-sustainable native vegetation. Mike Mallory and Diane Jones have interest and knowledge in this area and are asked to gather information. An anticipated project for 2020 is replacement of the signage in front of the building. This is not only a practical concern but also related to outreach. The committee requests the help of any Meeting members who have time and interest to contribute to these and other projects.

Peace, Social Concerns and Outreach: Tom Brenner reports that the committee continues supporting the LGBT Asylum Network and will again be serving dinner for the gathering tomorrow. The “Facing Race” reading group will meet this month to discuss a Native American-themed book, “Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Indians and the Birth of the FBI.”

Spiritual Life Committee: The committee has planned a visit from NEYM personnel on February 2, 2020, to discuss NEYM’s relationship to FUM, and help us discern our Meeting’s position related to financial contributions. Noah Baker-Merrill, who will be visiting on behalf of NEYM, has proposed that the discussion would best occur after worship so that the gathered group is more centered. Spiritual Life therefore requested the business meeting to consider holding worship earlier that day, with the discussion and then potluck to follow. Business meeting approved holding worship at 9:30am on February 2nd. This change will be announced broadly. It is noted that Spiritual Life and Practical Committees should choose a different meeting date/time if they wish to meet in February, as these plans will conflict with their usual meeting time.

As a preface to the discussion on our relationship with FUM, Matthew Shorten provided the Meeting with a January 6 letter and queries from Bruce Neumann (Presiding Clerk, NEYM). The letter will be posted on the bulletin board in the entryway and sent out in the newsletter and via email. It will be helpful for all to read this in preparation for our February 2nd discussion.

Treasurer’s Report: The Treasurer reported that the balance thus far is as anticipated for the year. He also reported on his ongoing work to streamline the Treasurer’s duties and improve accounting.

Announcements:

1. Mary Chenaille announced the **Annual MLK Jr Breakfast** which will be held next Monday, January 20, 2020. Mary will attend along with Jane Cutting, and the Meeting offers to sponsor others who wish to attend. Anyone interested in sponsorship should contact Matthew Shorten.
2. Matthew Shorten brought a letter from Christian leaders decrying violence against Jews. There is opportunity for others to add their signature if desired and Matt will provide the link to this.

The meeting concluded with a review of the minutes and a moment of silence.

In the Light,
Katharine Barnard

Practical Committee Annual Report 2019

Over the past year, the committee has overseen a variety of smaller projects, some of which are still ongoing, and initiated an ongoing discussion of longer-term plans for a larger project to repair or replace siding and insulation. The committee met in April, May, September, October, December, and most recently in January. The committee did not meet in March (due to threshing session), November (due to a discussion of spiritual journeys), or the summer months of June, July, and August (due to travel of some committee members).

Aaron Sakulich has largely taken on the duties of the treasurer. In consultation with the practical committee, he has initiated changes to stream line and consolidate the task of managing the finances of the meeting.

Spring Market Day was successful once again. Fall Market Day was successful as well, but closed slightly early due to sudden rain, resulting in somewhat lower earnings than is typical. Alongside the usual house maintenance, such as repairing loose boards on the accessibility ramp and installing gender-inclusive bathroom signs, there were a few notable projects. Extensive poison ivy removal work was undertaken behind the meeting house.

A damaged and worn canvas-on-frame canopy was removed from the side of the meeting house. The oft-repaired CNVS sign in the front of the house fell once again, and was replaced with a new sign that should last many years to come.

Peace and Social Concerns and Outreach Committee Annual Report 2019

The Peace and Social Concerns/Outreach Committee had an active and fulfilling year, engaging in a variety of activities to promote social justice, educate members about pervasive racism & racial issues in general, support immigrant individuals and families and support LGBTQ rights and asylum efforts. Here are the highlights of 2019 PASCO activities:

1. Organization and execution of a speaker's event featuring author and activist Debby Irving at the First Unitarian Church on March 31. Debby discussed her book, *Waking Up White*, chronicling her journey from innocent suburban child and adult to her realization of the existence and extent of racial injustice. She encourages us to look deep inside ourselves to confront our own unrealized prejudices and change the way that we interact with others. A Q&A session and reception was held afterwards. This well attended event provided an opportunity for both racial awareness and outreach to the Worcester community.
2. On July 8, the committee and others prepared, served and shared dinner at a community supper held monthly at the Hadwen Park Congregational Church for the LGBT Asylum Task Force. This was the second time that we have done this. The committee and other supporters will again serve dinner at the church on 1/13/20.
3. Committee members provided support in the form of transportation to immigration hearings, baby clothing and general care for Heidy Castillo. While she attained citizenship, the father of her child was eventually sent back to the Dominican Republic where she followed shortly after. She is now back in Providence, having returned after having established her citizenship in the DR. Their son, Eliam, now about one year old and has started to walk.
4. The meeting reserved a table for 8 at the annual gallant fundraiser for the LGBTQ Asylum Task Force, held at the DCU Center in October. Five Worcester Friends and 3 guests who have supported our efforts in serving community suppers at the Hadwen Park Church attended. It was a joyous, fun-filled and quite colorful event.
5. The committee and others continue with the Facing Race reading group, meeting roughly once a month to share dinner and discuss books of interest to educate ourselves about racism. Native American topics have been added to the readings about injustices to African Americans.
6. Information from an NEYM report on Quakers' relationships with Native Americans was presented. This opened discussion on educating ourselves further about the unsavory history of European occupation of lands from indigenous peoples in North America. There is an effort underway to engage Larry Spotted Crow to speak about the Nipmuc tribe's experiences in New England.
7. On September 29, Lisa Graustein visited the meeting to discuss ways in which the meeting can present itself as a place that is open and welcoming to all genders however they identify themselves.

Spiritual Life Committee Annual Report 2019

Over the past year our primary focus has been on supporting worship and Quaker process. We were all pleased to hold the discussion on Quaker Worship (AKA "How to Have the Best Meeting Ever") and felt it was well received. We would still like to find opportunities for individuals to share their spiritual journeys. We supported reinstating the role of Greeter, in particular to welcome visitors and to reduce interruptions as the Meeting centers. We considered the question, "are we an affirming congregation?" and felt we needed education; Lisa Graustein was invited and held a well-attended workshop on sexuality and gender. The committee continues to try to support First Day School through this time of low and variable attendance. We have continued in support of Meeting members and attenders, care of new members and loss of others; the committee participated in writing Betty Poynton's memorial minute.

LETTER FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS DECRYING VIOLENCE AGAINST JEWS (Please consider adding your signature through the link below) December 31, 2019

To our Jewish siblings and neighbors, and to our fellow Christians,

As Christian faith leaders, we reach out to share our sense of horror and disgust at the terrifying rise in violence against Jews and increasing public expressions of antisemitism. Our hearts, prayers, and tears join yours as we bear witness to tragic events in Monsey, New York, here in Massachusetts, and elsewhere. As Christians whose tradition has been and continues to be the source of so much antisemitic terror in history, we carry a particular responsibility to identify, condemn, and resist antisemitism in any and every form.

When we encounter it in our own sacred texts and liturgy, it's on us to call it out. When we teach Christian history, it's on us to name our forebears' complicity and to call them out. When we see it in the media or in everyday interactions with our peers, it's on us to speak up, push back, and demand awareness of the harm that even unintended or casual slights may cause. And when we see antisemitism borne out in acts of aggression on the streets or subways or in vicious and deadly violence in Jewish homes or synagogues, it's on us to go public, to cry out in the strongest possible terms that such actions are anathema to our most deeply held values of respect for human dignity and love for our neighbors... and that they are anathema to the God we worship.

To our neighbors who are Jewish, please know that we hold our relationships with you as sacred, that we stand in solidarity with you, that you are not alone and will not be asked to face these challenges alone. Indeed, antisemitism is not a Jewish problem! It is a Christian problem. And when it occurs in this nation, it is a national problem and a national disgrace! It is a shared problem which requires a massive shared response. Today, we recommit ourselves to doing our part to sustain our ancient ties and to show that we cherish our connections with you.

On August 17, 1790, President George Washington visited the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island. In response to his visit and reiterating words that were shared with him by Jewish leaders, he declared this defining commitment, that the government and people of this nation give "... to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance...."

Silence is both sanction and assistance. At a time of a resurgence of hatreds of all kinds, and meanness and violence visited upon persons of color, queer persons and immigrants, let us cry STOP.

Therefore, on the verge of a new year and a new decade may we each resolve to restore tolerance, decry hatred, celebrate diversity, 'give to bigotry no sanction and to persecution no assistance.'

In the coming days, please, everyone, reach out to Jewish neighbors, co-workers, friends, or acquaintances. Let them know they are not alone. Write them a caring text, email or letter. Share a note or sign of friendship and solidarity with a Jewish organization or synagogue. We need to lament these recent atrocities together, to share our heartache and to show our care, love and support in these tender, terrifying and fragile times.

For a list of religious leaders and others who have signed, visit: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1L14UJzMOhTIM9pI3P6D8I7B3kmfAhHgkvFEBnO2JSNs/edit?usp=sharing>

To add your name, please sign the letter here: <https://forms.gle/q7ivd3DUuoZdfXWs7>

Worcester Friends Meeting
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers)
901 Pleasant Street
Worcester, MA 01602



Scheduled Meetings

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business	-----	Second Sunday, 9 AM
Spiritual Life Committee, Daron Barnard & Mary Bennett	-----	First Sunday, 9:30 AM
Practical Committee, Kevin Walsh	-----	First Sunday, 9:30 AM
Peace/Social Concerns/Outreach, Tom Brenner	-----	Fourth Sunday, 9:30 AM
Clerk of Worcester Friends Meeting	-----	Matthew Shorten
Recording Clerk	-----	Katharine Barnard
Corresponding Clerk	-----	Mary Chenaille
First Day School	-----	Katharine Barnard, Sheila Brenner, Michelle
Flint, Matt Shorten		
Newsletter	-----	Sheila Brenner

Please send general correspondence to info@worcesterfriendsmeeting.org. Items of note for the next Newsletter may also be sent to brennerfamily@gmail.com or dropped off at MeetingHouse.