

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

Asheville Friends Meeting

First Month 08, 2023

Present in the Meetinghouse: Pat Johnson, Clerk, Barbara Burke, Recording Clerk, Steve Livingston, Jim Barham, Rusty Maynard, Robin Wells, Zoe Wallace, Satchel Loftus, Jim Cavener, Katherine Kowal, Kim Wagner.

Present via Zoom: Rylin Hansen, Kitti Reynolds, Mike Eddy, Beth Eddy, Bob Lackey, Morgan Murry, Barbara Esther, Margaret Farmer, Ellie Cox

Meeting opened with Silent Worship.

The Clerk shared a reading out of silence. Excerpts from *Friends Journal*, October 1, 2018, pp.13-17

Money as a Mutual Blessing

By Lola Georg

“Imagine this scenario: It’s a typical Sunday afternoon, and the clerk reminds Friends that meeting for worship with attention to business is starting in five minutes...After a few minutes, the clerk welcomes everyone and reviews the agenda which is approved. The first item is next year’s budget. The treasurer reports that contributions from members continue to decline, and expenses continue to rise. The draft budget shows a deficit. The treasurer suggests that members could contribute more to cover the deficit; otherwise, the meeting will have to reduce its expenses. Tensions rise and the energy in the room shifts as people become visibly agitated.

One Friend notes that she can’t possibly contribute more, as she is on a fixed

income and has trouble paying her bills. A Friend suggests that the meeting should reduce the amount it gives to the school, as the meeting has few children and the school is doing just fine. A Friend vehemently objects to that idea, as the school is under the care of the meeting and Quaker schools are the best form of outreach we have. “What about the amount we pay to the yearly meeting? Certainly that could be reduced,” a Friend suggests. “Absolutely not!” is the view of someone else. “The yearly meeting needs our funds for children’s programs. If it weren’t for those programs, my children would have no Quaker friends!” “Well clearly,” another Friend notes, “we could just eliminate the money we spend on coffee and snacks and stop with the monthly food cupboard. We don’t have enough volunteers anyway. We could eliminate childcare during worship, and stop helping people attend conferences. The budget problem would be solved.”

Does that scenario sound familiar? Money and resources are topics today that create significant amounts of anxiety and animosity in many Friends meetings. As meetings lose members and resources shrink, tensions can run high, and difficult choices need to be made. This is true for monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings as well as Quaker schools and organizations. How can decisions and choices be made from a spiritual perspective instead of an anxious one?...

In the February 2009 issue of *Sojourners* magazine, Walter Brueggemann describes a spiritual shift around money and finances from one of anxiety and greed to one of milk and honey. In this shift, he identified three areas: from autonomy to covenantal existence, from anxiety to the abundance of God, and from greed to generosity.

Anxiety and Greed	→	Milk and Honey
Autonomy	→	covenantal existence
anxiety	→	abundance of God
greed	→	generosity

Hear the words of George Fox in a 1656 letter to Friends in the ministry written from Launceston jail.

And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God, be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you. Then to the Lord God you will be a sweet savour and a blessing. (The Journal of George Fox, edited by John L. Nickalls, 1985)

Fox is advocating using our lives as examples to engage with others, recognizing God in them, where we can be a blessing to them, and God, from within others, can bless us in return....Mutual blessing is a kind of relationship—a spiritual relationship—which by definition is reciprocal.

In my spiritual life, I have found God to live in relationship. I can sit alone at home in prayer and have a spiritual experience, but there is something different about meeting for worship with other people that enhances my personal experience. I believe that a mutually reciprocal relationship, which blesses each party in a relationship, is a spiritual practice based upon that of God in everyone.

What would the world be like if we used our financial relationships as opportunities for mutual, reciprocal blessings from God? How would our conversations around money shift, if we based them on this premise? How can anxiety and animosity be transformed to mutual blessing?...

As in Fox's letter, when we see that of God in others, there is an opportunity for mutual blessing in reciprocal relationships. It is this idea that can become the basis of our financial dealings in faith communities, shifting the focus of monetary issues from anxiety and greed to milk and honey, from fear and animosity in isolation to generosity and blessing in community. In this way, we can learn to develop a common spiritual language around money, and use it to cultivate mutual blessing in the world. Further, we can also be stewards of God's abundance and invest God's gifts as faithful servants, spreading mutual blessings in our financial dealings, as we walk cheerfully over the world answering that of God in everyone."

Approve Agenda

Minute #1: The agenda is approved.

12th Month Business Meeting Minutes

Minute #2: 12th Month Business Meeting Minutes were approved,

Announcements: Pat Johnson

1. We have reserved a table at the MLK Prayer Breakfast. The following people have requested a seat: Adrienne Weir, SaraWila Villatoro-Weir, Essence, Barbara Burke, Steve Livingston, Scotty Utz, Margaret Farmer, Jim Cavener, Sarah Jane Thomas, Zoe Wallace.

2. We received the following email regarding Quaker Weddings in NC:

Hi,

I'm a member of the Doylestown Friends Meeting in Pennsylvania. I recently became engaged, and we'd like to get married near Maggie Valley, North Carolina. I understand that North Carolina does not recognize self-uniting marriages, and I'm wondering if you have any insight into whether Quaker marriage ceremonies are legal in North Carolina. If so, if you have any information on what I'd need to do to ensure a legal ceremony, I'd be very appreciative.

Thank you so much for any guidance you may have.

All the best,

Abby

The clerk would like to hear from any members who could inform her about how Quaker marriages are conducted in N.C.

3. A party for the return of Sarawila Villatoro-Weir to be held January 22, 2023, was announced. This is sandwich Sunday, and a signup sheet is in the foyer for people to indicate what they are able to bring.

Committees:

Nominating: Kitti Reynolds

The nominating Committee recommended the Meeting's approval of Suzanne Junkin Friedrichs for membership on the Religious Education Committee. Suzanne has been helping with our children for some time now.

Minutes #3: The Meeting approved Suzanne as a member of the Religious Education Committee.

Kitti is updating the list of members on Committees and it will be posted in the Digest, and she would appreciate feedback if corrections are needed.

Our representative to SAYMA would appreciate members, especially young members, to put themselves forward for nomination to SAYMA committees.

House & Grounds: Jim Barham

We have one quote for removal of gutters from Heriberto Bautista, who painted the Meeting House. An attempt was made to Gutter Guard to give an amended quote for removal only (and not replacement), but they have not responded. Heriberto's quote includes removal and stacking the gutters, and the gutters can be donated to Beloved, or taken to a metal recycling yard. Jim asked for approval to spend \$1100 for Heriberto Bautista to remove the gutters. A Friend asked if Habitat would take the gutters and the answer was no. Another Friend asked if \$1100 is a good price for this work and several responded that it is a good price. A Friend said when Heriberto painted the Meeting House he did a great job. Another Friend asked if Heriberto will also give a quote on repair of the fascia, and Jim suggested he himself would pay for Heriberto to remove

one piece of fascia and see if there is rotting in the joists. Jim suggested this as he hadn't requested approval for an estimate on the fascia removal.

A Member suggests we approve having an estimate for fascia removal and replacement if needed, which is the next phase of the work.

A Friend feels that we are building a relationship with this contractor and by using him for our work we are indicating we have respect for him and his work. The Friend stated Heriberto gave us a great price on the house painting and is giving us a great price on gutter removal, and this is an opportunity to demonstrate our faith and trust in him and would like us to ask him to remove the gutters and inspect the fascia, and trust that he will give us a fair price.

Jim is asking permission to ask Heriberto to remove any rotted fascia and replace it but if additional damage underneath is found and additional work is needed, it would need to be brought to Meeting for approval. Jim indicates Heriberto is eager to do the work and Jim feels it will be done in a timely manner. The treasurer reported that there is \$3600 in the Meeting House Improvement Fund, and recommends that the money be drawn from there. If more money is needed, it will need to come from another fund. Jim feels that the money in the Meeting House Improvement Fund will cover the fascia removal and repair/replacement, but if additional damage is discovered, the cost may increase.

Another Friend feels uncomfortable approving having the fascia removed and replaced without an idea as to the cost involved.

A Friend spoke to places where he feels the gutters should not be removed and this includes over the front steps, the steps on the east side, and in the back, where there is gutter above where the awning is. He feels this should be discussed and decided upon in the House and Grounds Committee. He also suggested we also should save the gutters for a period of time to see if we may need to reattach them, and he would like us to keep the downspouts attached. Jim said these issues have been discussed in the

H&G committee and the decision has been made by H&G that we remove the gutters, and not reattach them, and a deflector will be attached over the steps so water does not fall on people. Jim thanked the Treasurer for his input on what funds we have available.

Minute #4: The Meeting approved the House and Grounds Committee request for \$1100 for gutter removal and additional funds as needed for removal of the rotted fascia to allow inspection of areas behind the fascia.

The steps on the front porch have some broken bricks and also need mortar repair. The cost of replacement of the steps is large, but repairs instead of replacement is possible. Two people have been out to look at the damage, and gave estimates for power washing, repair to the bricks, repointing and mortar repair. A stone mason's estimate was \$700 and the estimate from Saroy Palmer, who did some work on a step out back, is \$275. Mr Palmer has done good work here in the past, and his price is reasonable. The Meeting has committed to contract with people of color when possible, and Saroy is a person of color. Jim requests approval to have Mr. Palmer do the repair work.

Minute #5: The Meeting approved the request for \$275 for masonry repair.

Finance: Satchel Loftis

Satchel showed the 2022 final budget amounts and the proposed 2023 budgets on screen. The total 2022 contribution income was \$30,918, which differs significantly from the amount shown in the December MFB. The proposed 2023 contribution amount for gifts has been increased to \$30,000. The Library budget amount was decreased at the request of the Library committee. Our deficit for next year is projected to be \$635 if we have a target of \$30,000 in gifts next year. Satchel stated that we could reach a balanced budget by decreasing budget requests by \$635, or by increasing the budget expectations for gifts to cover that shortfall.

The H&G clerk stated that with a plumbing problem we had last month, a great deal of water was lost and we may have a large water bill come due. He believes the City of Asheville has a loss limit when a large amount of water is lost, and Treasurer Ellen Carr will call the city about what we owe. He proposed we may want to wait until we know what is owed before approving the 2023 budget. Satchel stated that the episode of the broken pipe is considered an extraordinary event and there is a separate meeting house emergency fund that has \$6000 in it that will be used to cover the plumbing and water expenses.

A member asked if there is a plan to replenish the Meeting House improvement fund. Satchel said in our annual budget there is a transfer of \$2400 to the Meeting House Improvement Fund.

A Friend asked if the newly acquired WiFi expense is included in the budget, and Satchel indicated that under total utilities the budget has been increased to cover the WiFi cost.

A Friend asked about actual end-of-year operating expenses. Satchel replied that it appears there is a surplus but this is because all outreach checks have not been disbursed yet, but we may end up with a surplus because we had additional contributions come in and a higher rental income than budgeted for. This possible surplus amount would go into the General Fund.

The Meeting thanked Ellen Carr, Treasurer and Satchel Loftis, Assistant Treasurer, for all their hard work on the budget.

Minute #6: The Meeting accepted the Finance Committee report and approved the 2023 budget, with the proposed increase in the unrestricted contribution amount.

The meeting closed with silent worship until the way opens for our next business in the Second Month of 2023.

ATTACHMENTS:

■ [AFM - Prelim budget 2023 \(Jan MFB\).pdf](#)

■ [AFM - Operating Budget - 2023 - APPROVED 2023-01-08u.pdf](#)