

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business
Asheville Friends Meeting
Twelfth Month 8, 2024

Present in the Meetinghouse: Robin Wells, Interim Clerk; Interim Recording Clerk: Elliott Jarrett, Margaret Normile, Katherine Kowal, Barbara Burke, Pat Johnson, Bob Lackey, Sarah Jane Thomas, Deana Hatch, Barbara Esther, Ellie Cox, Bobby Carter, Nick Mimkin, Rylín Hansen, Suzanne Fredicks, Tim Burgess, Rusty Maynard, Patty Burgess, Jim Cavener

Present via Zoom: Edith Patrick, Beth Eddy, Mike Eddy, Margaret Farmer, Satchel Loftis, Miles Loftis

The meeting opened with Silent Worship.

The following was read out of the silence:

Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict.

Saul Alinsky

The Clerk presented the agenda.

Minute #1: The Agenda was accepted.

Approval of the 11th month minutes.

Minute #2: The 11th month minutes were approved with no changes.

Announcements:

Meetinghouse water: Drinking water has been restored to Asheville and the water coming from the taps can be used for washing produce and dishes. We will continue to provide filtered water for drinking.

Christmas Play: The Christmas play will be held at rise of meeting on 12-15-24 and will be followed by light snacks and time to socialize.

Holiday Meal: Our shared holiday meal and carol sing will be held on 12-22-24. Friends are encouraged to bring a dish to share if they are able. There will be plenty of food, so don't stay away if you don't have time to fix something.

News of Miles and Satchel Loftis: Miles and Satchel have reached the 6-month mark since Miles had his kidney transplant. Both are doing well and have a healthy kidney. Miles will be graduating from UNC-G on December 13th. Congratulations to them both! See Robin if you would like to have Miles's address.

M&C Hurricane Helene Update: Pat Johnson

We began with an update sent to us from our neighbor meetings:

Celo -We, too, continue to receive donations, which we welcome. We created an ad hoc committee to identify those hard hit and allot them the money coming into the Helene Relief Fund, and we'll continue to do so into the foreseeable future. My heart goes out to Swannanoa Valley Friends, though, so if a Meeting or an individual wants to send a substantial amount for storm relief, please encourage them to donate there.

Thanks for checking in.

All the best,

Catherine

Black Mountain - I'm including the clerk of ministry and counsel, Mel Keiser, as he can speak to whether we have members that still need assistance financially. We have established our own relief fund, and have been receiving donations as well, so I think we have addressed the current requests but there may be others forthcoming.

In terms of the meeting house, it is hard to know exactly what our needs will be. We have applied for a FEMA/state program that would offer to purchase the meeting house at the value it had before the hurricane. We won't know about that until spring, and that will have a dramatic impact on our financial needs. So, I don't have a clear answer for you or the Asheville meeting. We are currently worshipping at the St. James Episcopal Church Sunday afternoons, and several members also attend by zoom.

Thank you for continuing to hold us in the light.

Chris

M&C is in the process of updating the Helene message on our website. It will include this information about Swannanoa and Celo, as well as information about recovery in the Asheville area.

Hurricane Helene donations continue to come in. We're so grateful for the generosity of Friends and others following Spirit's leading to help us recover from Helene's devastation. As you may recall we sent a total of \$5,600.00 last month to Celo, SVFM, RSAA, Equal Plates, BeLoved, Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church and Collaborative La Milpas (CLM). Each of these groups received \$500.00 each from AFM plus additional designated amounts to Celo for \$150.00 and SVFM for \$1,950.00. In addition, we assisted 9 individuals in our community for a total of \$3,113.22.

Since then, we have received \$285.00 from Maury River Friends in Lexington, VA, \$391.00 from Virginia Beach Friends, and \$1,000.00 from Medford NJ Friends for a total of \$1,923.50 all designated for Helene relief. Additional gifts via Just Giving include \$97.50 from Timothy Swast, NFM treasurer and \$150.00 from Charlotte Carey of Parksville, BC totaling \$247.50. We became aware that a local community member faced eviction, so we donated \$500.00 to help in that situation. Now we have a current balance of \$1,423.50 ($\$1923.50 - \$500.00 = \$1,423.50$) to disperse.

M&C discussed the balance of \$1,423.50 and what to do with it. We heard a report from Scotty Utz about the shortfall of Raw Tools due to event cancellations and other factors but with ongoing expenses. M&C strongly recommends supporting Raw Tools since Scotty's ministry is under the care of our Meeting. We also support reserving some amount for unknown requests here at home and note that we haven't yet sent any amount to Manna Foodbank.

We invite your discernment on how to disperse the current balance of \$1,423.50. Here's one idea: \$300 to Raw Tools, \$200 saved for needs within our meeting, \$300 to Manna Foodbank, and could we consider another \$600 to Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church for rental assistance to prevent eviction. A conversation with Libby Kyles at Grace Covenant let us know that they are receiving hundreds of requests and have already given out over a million dollars.

One friend had a concern that we might not be holding enough money back for the needs of our meeting. It was noted that other funds are available should a need arise.

Minute #3: The meeting approved the proposed use of the donation money. Which breaks down to :

In-Meeting-\$300 to Raw Tools, \$200 Saved for individual need

Outside Meeting- \$300 Manna Foodbank, \$600 Grace Covenant for Rental Assistance and Eviction Relief.

Letter from Chattanooga Friends Meeting–Barbara Esther

Last month we began considering a letter that was sent by Chattanooga Meeting to all of the monthly meetings in SAYMA. It became clear that we needed more time to discern all that was presented in the letter. We scheduled two opportunities to sit with the letter and share our thoughts. The responses were noted as closely as possible and are recorded below the Chattanooga letter.

Dear Friends,

We hold a vision of SAYMA as a stronger, more spiritual, diverse and actively anti-racist body, with children, teens and young adults flocking to our sessions. The need to overcome the culture of racial bias within the Society of Friends and SAYMA is indeed important. We see the YM taking steps toward becoming an anti-racist community and understand that the journey will take many years.

But we wonder: how long it will take for SAYMA to get to this vision—or will it implode from conflict and the withdrawal of monthly meetings and individual Friends?

Over the last few years, Chattanooga Friends have witnessed very unFriendly behavior at SAYMA sessions. We have seen shouting during business meetings, rants, name-calling, bullying, and other antagonistic conduct that went unchecked. Quakers tend to be conflict-averse in many situations, and this unFriendly conduct continued through several clerks without the YM establishing firm boundaries for acceptable behavior and tactics. This year, in response to a letter from Chattanooga Friends Meeting (CFM), SAYMA clerks implemented Guidelines for Participants in Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business with some success. However, Chattanooga Friends still observed toxic behavior and what felt like manipulation of the YM at large.

As a result of this ongoing turmoil, several of our long-time SAYMA participants have completely dropped their connection with the YM after being personally attacked, belittled and otherwise mistreated. The number of Chattanooga Friends attending YM has dwindled significantly, and only one person currently serves on a SAYMA committee. Thus, we find ourselves wrestling with what our relationship with SAYMA should be in the future, especially whether to continue our financial support in 2025.

CFM wonders if this turmoil is “normal” in the journey toward racial conflict transformation and becoming an anti-racist community or whether SAYMA’s tumult is the result of personalities that seek to manipulate our path through divisive power tactics instead of through spiritual leadership. We hear voices in the YM on both sides of this concern.

So we offer these questions for consideration by the clerks of SAYMA, YM committee clerks, and the other monthly meetings of SAYMA:

1. How would (or how does) SAYMA recognize and respond to someone whose behavior is out of step with Friends testimonies and practices?
2. How would SAYMA distinguish between someone following a Spirit-led leading or an ego-led leading?
3. Would SAYMA ever remove an attender from participation in and influence over YM matters? How would the YM determine it needed to initiate this process? What would this process look like in person and on Zoom?
4. How does SAYMA assess the value of Monthly Meeting engagement and membership versus maintaining the involvement of individuals whose behaviors sow division?

CFM cannot answer these questions for SAYMA, but we ask that the YM and its constituent meetings consider them soon. We welcome your direct feedback at ChattanoogaFriendsMeeting@gmail.com.

Yours in the Light,

Chattanooga Friends Meeting

Individual Responses to the Queries

1. How would (or how does) SAYMA recognize and respond to someone whose behavior is out of step with Friends testimonies and practices?

Discerning together and seeking the guidance of the Spirit Within is one way we operate as Quakers. The behaviors we are unhappy about may be unacceptable, but the person who behaved in a violent way is still a child of God.

Your vision of SAYMA as a “stronger, more spiritual, diverse and actively anti-racist body, with children, teens and young adults flocking to our sessions” matches our vision of SAYMA. It echoes one of the things our monthly meeting is trying to do. Would our understood values influence what we do? Yes, we believe so. We hang out in uncertainty, we are authentic, we stay engaged, we are okay sitting with discomfort. We practice how we want to be. We nurture a rich culture, meshing our anti-racist values with other Quaker values.

A friend said that behavior has consequences either good or bad. I have found in my experience that meetings that seem productive have guidelines and expectations including actions taken when the protocols are not followed.

Creating a safe space is very important. When the going gets rough, we may not be living in a safe space because it's messy and people get hurt. Honest assessment should say what the result of actions taken will be. Many steps toward change are necessary and can be very painful. Being in relationship carries with it both pain and openness to change. We can continue sitting with our raw nerves, but without revenge toward those who we think caused the hurt. (Being non-judgmental.) No one should be unsafe. We often overlook the causes of someone's pain because we are uncomfortable. A Friend said, “I am deeply hurt by our not dealing well with violence.” The level of hurt is often overlooked, the trauma suffered unknown. Some have decided to withdraw from the YM or MM because of the level of violence tolerated.

Our behaviors trigger others. We seek to consider the impact of our behavior, not the intention. No one should be unsafe in a Quaker meeting. Focus on one person's behavior is not the way to go. Making excuses for others' behavior doesn't mean violence is not occurring. As a child, one Friend shared that

there were opportunities at SAYMA to find like-minded people and to be challenged toward new insights. Knowing yourself, learning to take time for things to settle and not avoiding transformational opportunities is essential.

Respecting the process in our community entails having conversations and allowing silent waiting to develop a way forward. Relationships are foundational. We are seeking more knowledge. We have a history with one or two people, but need to acknowledge the need to do more. Someone's actions do color our opinion of a person, but anything that chills racial justice we cannot get behind. That would alter our credibility, showing a lack of integrity.

2. How would SAYMA distinguish between someone following a Spirit-led leading or an ego-led leading?

Someone who initiates an idea or action but is not interested in getting credit is acknowledged as Spirit led; someone who is eager to be recognized may be more ego-led. There is sacred power in listening in silence. No "us vs them" removes the ego from the process. Letting go of the ego is a learned discipline (Eckhardt Tolle). Messages that are spirit led the messenger lets it go. If it is from the ego the messenger tends to repeat it to win the argument or convince others. We seek equanimity without being swayed by anger and emotion. Sowing division: some people come into our community and feel othered instead of welcomed. The experiences of some people in the community at large make it hard to see a difference between one political party and another. Each of us is responsible to monitor and open our hearts to those who don't feel a part of monthly meeting or yearly meeting community. The source of a leading is telling, coming from a place of love means it comes from God.

3. Would SAYMA ever remove an attender from participation in and influence over YM matters? How would the YM determine it needed to initiate this process? What would this process look like in person and on Zoom?

Some Friends see Quakers as coming together for peaceful silent worship while others are interested in Qs as a social action group. Social action and following the leading of Spirit must walk hand-in-hand. Voluntary discovery is key to awareness. Labeling others drives some away. Processes to repair the community are needed in equal proportion to the harm. Bringing in an expert is not adequate to heal. Reading-out a person-or eldering negatively would

require a review and listening. Division within the community is very harmful. One friend said that they are intimidated by violence and anger. I feel other responses are an idealistic way of dealing with this kind of situation. How can this be handled? The violence that is experienced is tearing someone or something apart. By talking about an ideal meeting or what an ideal meeting could be we are not addressing the problem. We have observed one voice overriding the voices of others, yelling or throwing of objects, and shutting down all other voices in the room. Calling out the attempt to silence other people is necessary. One friend said that some people are disruptive and cannot change. People are wired differently and some people can change. I feel we are trying to sweep something under the rug again. Sometimes I feel that we have to ban somebody if they disrupt a silent meeting and make it not peaceful. That said, we want to labor with a Friend rather than removing them from a meeting.

4. How does SAYMA assess the value of Monthly Meeting engagement and membership versus maintaining the involvement of individuals whose behaviors sow division?

Is this normal? FGC's experience has been similar and many yearly meetings are trying to work toward racial justice. People of color serving on central committee, e.g., have resigned in anger. Perhaps white-American Culture as opposed to white Supremacy expresses better what we are looking at. When way opens, we have to respond. Using a clearness process helps to provide guidance to someone who feels called to some action. As a YM we have come a long way in confronting our own racism and how to deal with the harms people of color carry daily. S. Boland (Pendle Hill and Atlanta) has helped us work toward addressing conflict, along with a conflict transformation team. As Bill Kreidler's curriculum for non-violent classrooms was helpful in newly integrated schools, with continuing revelation we see that we can change as individuals and as meetings. This is spiritual work. We don't know exactly how to do it. Being in relationship, talking with each other and, most importantly, listening to each other is necessary. Regarding harm, we are all harmed when we are not in harmony, and we all benefit from working in harmony. Pulling back from activity in YM seems to us to be turning away from the larger family of Friends. However, many things were said and done in the various meetings that could not be tolerated. Some folks come to

Quakerism to find a peaceful spiritual home and others may be drawn to the social action in which Quakers have participated. Many of us want to take action in a whole panoply of areas, not focussing only on racial justice, but always seeking the will of the Divine.

Somehow a power structure has come to be influential in the YM. For example, arguments over the rules, lengthy processing over what is in the minutes have kept us looking at the letter, not the spirit of our proceedings. Using the minutes as weapons is not appropriate. The minutes remind us of where we were the last time we met, rather than becoming rules that have to be obeyed forever.

We need a spiritual family based on love. Respect and choosing to love will guide us. The rejection of a Friend as FWCC representative is an example of divisions and absence of love in our dealings. One Friend said there is no such thing as righteous anger. Acting-out in the world that way will not be fruitful. Two ways of taking action are: first, slowing down the discernment. We have mechanisms that help the process move along: worshipful sharing with time separation between them. Secondly, knowing when discernment on a topic is beginning to fail. Having observed that, the meeting needs to stop and go into silence. If we are not in unity we need to continue to discern, not rush along a path forward, being honest as to the capability of the community to find unity. Friends gave examples of ways to deal with frustration with the inability to find unity. "Anger is an energy, it can be used as a fuel, but you don't want to immerse yourself in it." "Everything looks like a nail if you pick up a hammer in anger." One Friend spoke of being part of a wounded meeting. While she was a member there, a family which felt accepted in the meeting, later could not agree with the things the meeting embraced. (That member transferred her membership and that monthly meeting is no longer worshipping together.)

Welcoming and healing are needed in every meeting. In our yearly meeting's Nominating Committee a representative from a MM is to adhere to discernment on any item of business, not to advocate for his/her individual positions. We recognize that in situations where representation of MMs or WGs is needed, mixing in the power of a single individual can lead to great distress. We see that with each position held, we should carefully explore and remember our roles when we are involved in YM.

One friend said let's be sure to thank them for prompting such a vibrant and necessary conversation.

Draft Cover Letter to Go With Our Responses to the Queries

Dear Chattanooga Monthly Meeting,

We want to thank you for sending these queries to our meeting and for all of the hard work you put into them. It grieves us to think of SAYMA without you. You are family to us and many of us have slept on the floor of your meetinghouse and spent time in your homes. We hope you will stay with us to work through repairing relationships and strengthening bonds.

We put a lot of time into considering the queries and decided to share with you what individuals said during our worship sharings around them. You will see that they represent a range of perspectives. When we first began discerning the queries, we found that we had work to do in our own meeting community and we spent quite a bit of time doing that. We shared tears, memories, and feelings. Our general response to the idea of reading someone out of meeting, is that each person should feel accepted, loved, and included as part of the community. We want to labor with a person, rather than remove them. But not every person in our meeting was in agreement about acceptance of unexpected behaviors.

Your presence, your voices, and your feelings matter to us. We want to keep you at the table as we commit to building bridges among Friends. Here in Asheville, we know how fragile and essential bridges can be. It takes many hands and goodwill to rebuild them.

Please know that we are holding you in the Light as you consider your way forward.

In peace and friendship,

One friend asked if this happened to our Meeting again how would we deal with it? The letter makes it sound as if we have solved a problem.

One thing that occurred to me as we prepared for today's meeting is that skillful clerking is very helpful. It may not solve every problem but it is very helpful. It does not come only from the clerks table but from everyone who is engaged.

But not every person in our meeting agrees that accepting unexpected or harmful behaviors is adequate.

Possible rewording:

But many people in our meeting agree that we should not accept disruptive or hurtful behaviors. Rather than remove them we prefer to labor with individuals. Unexpected behaviors can often be a source of enlightenment.

Meeting did not reach unity and we are sending the letter back to Ministry and Counsel for rewording. There was a concern that we need to let Chattanooga Meeting know that we are still working on our response.

Finance Committee–Satchel Loftis

Report on Spending

At the moment 69% of our gifts that we have budgeted to receive have come in. We are further behind this year than we were last year at this point in the year.

Our shortfall for income \$8,400.

Meeting house expense is a little over but is pretty clean.

We are spending \$3,200 less than our budget anticipated. It is a good idea for us to ponder if we are holding back in our committee work for fear of going over budget? Are those of us leading footing the bill?

We need \$5,800 in gifts to break even.

Indigenous peoples fund \$900 is in the budget but the check has not been sent.

Our insurance went up \$1000 and will maintain for 3 years.

Total house and grounds went up by a total of \$300 this was due to the addition of a HVAC maintenance contract and the rise in insurance cost.

Satchel presented the 2025 Budget. See attachment below for full report.

Statement of Accountability to Asheville's Black Community–Nick Mimken

Over a year ago this Meeting approved undergoing a truth and reconciliation process with Dr. Melchor Hall in which she guided us through learning about the history of the Black community in Asheville and the impact of white supremacy culture on their economic and personal wellbeing. Part of the process is to acknowledge our ongoing role in this and brainstorm what we might do to bring about change. This led us to write a statement of accountability to Asheville's Black Community, which includes action that we are committing to in 2025. We have just completed a first draft of this statement and would like to share it with you. We will share it with Melchor this Tuesday evening and we invite Friends to join us in the discussion that follows. Reach out to Steve Livingston if you would like to have a link to the Tuesday night Zoom meeting.

Dear Sisters and Brothers of Asheville's Black Community,

The Asheville Friends Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is a faith community made up mostly of white people who come from various religious backgrounds. What holds us together is our confidence in the presence and gifts of the Spirit of the Divine in everyone, the discernment of truth through Divine revelation, and our commitment to live our lives to the best of our ability in keeping with our testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship of the Earth. We embrace our relationship with the interweaving tapestry of all beings. In recent years we have felt led by the indwelling Spirit to delve deeply into understanding the white supremacy culture we live in, and that persists within us. Through that seeking we have come to acknowledge the value of cross-cultural relationships, the moral imperative of reparations, and our responsibility to take action.

As white people we are by default beneficiaries of white supremacy culture which has permeated our lives and our faith community. Over the last decade or so, we of Asheville Friends Meeting have begun to learn -- through book study, workshops, presentations, and weekly discussions -- the extent to which systemic racism and white supremacy culture have caused and continue to cause harm to you.

Through our participation in Building Bridges and Racial Equity Institute, and study of Dr. Dwight Mullen's State of Black Asheville Report and the Asheville-Buncombe Community Reparations Commission's report, we have begun to learn what you have known from your lived experience: the history of

Black Asheville from slavery through Jim Crow, the systematic destruction of Black neighborhoods and institutions, unequal health care treatment and unequal educational and employment opportunity. We are troubled by the Red-lining Urban Renewal, the decimation of thriving communities and businesses, the trauma of upheaval, and the undercutting of generational wealth. We grieve the criminalization of Blackness, manifested in unequal enforcement, denial of justice, the school to prison pipeline, and disparities in sentencing and parole. We are outraged by the senseless loss of Stephens Lee High School, the disappearance and destruction of symbols of achievement of Black youth, and the separation of the student body from the leadership and guidance of their outstanding Black educators.

Through study and discussion of books such as “White Fragility” and “My Grandmother’s Hands,” films like “13th” and “I Am Not Your Negro,” and podcasts like “Seeing White” and “Be Anti-Racist,” we have begun to learn what you have known from your lived experience about our white fragility, our white privilege, our racism denial, and how white supremacy culture permeates our perceptions, our language, and our practices. We have begun to learn what it takes to become a more anti-racist, multicultural faith community, and what it means to be anti-racist. We feel compelled by our sense of integrity to engage in a reparative process, to acknowledge these wrongs and to offer an apology to you from our community, and name our commitments toward stopping the harm and repairing the damage done.

These are the commitments that we feel able with our limited resources and personnel to undertake in the year 2025:

- Attend City and County government meetings and school board meetings when allies are summoned
- Work to disempower the white supremacy culture’s criminalization of Black youth
- Collaborate with Black leadership to improve the school experience for Black youth
- Offer experience and support when called upon by Black leaders to promote health care careers among Black youth
- Write letters and emails to advocate for Universal Health Care and a no-cost Insurance Healthcare Subsidy Fund

- Attend family-oriented multicultural events that welcome white participants, as well as events at communities such as Valley Street and Burton Street, focusing on spending money with vendors and organizations
- Join an already established network of faith communities working for racial justice
- Provide transportation when asked
- Support Black farmers and entrepreneurs actively and intentionally with sweat and dollars
- Listen to Black voices for guidance and feedback

In all of our reparations work we are determined to hear and follow the guidance of Black leadership. The actions we have listed are ones that we have heard the Black community wants us to do. We benefit when the Black community is healthy and strong. “Our liberation is inextricably tied to yours.”

A friend said that they were appreciative of the letter and all of the passion that went into writing it.

We are planning to have an honorarium to those that help us be accountable.

The Meeting closed with silent worship and will reconvene as way opens for our next Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business on the First Month 12th, 2025.

Attachment

[AFM-Operating Budget -2025-12-08-24](#)