

MIDCOAST MONTHLY MEETING FOR BUSINESS
OCTOBER 17, 2021

The zoom meeting opened with a period of silent worship.

Clerk Diane DiCranian explained that New England Yearly Meeting deleted its Ministry and Counsel Committee a few years ago in order to hold occasional "Gatherings" of interested Friends for worship/sharing together. Another such Gathering focused on ministry and spiritual life will be held on November 13th. Midcoast Friends are welcome to take part in this session.

The small committee working on preparing adequate ventilation in the meeting room to enable in-person worship has no report yet due to the absence of suitable bids.

Suzy Hallett raised again the question whether the meeting should hire a Property Manager to have oversight of all necessary maintenance and repairs in the meeting house. Discussion as to possible candidates, assignments, and rate of pay was inconclusive.

The meeting currently hires persons to clean, to mow, and to plow snow. A large construction project is pending in the repair of the ramp leading up to the front porch. An early estimate for this job was \$4,000+. The idea of a Work Day drew support from a number of volunteers. The work would include preparing windows for winter, moving outdoor furniture, setting marker on the edges of the parking lot for snow plowing, and other tasks. A Work Day date will be announced.

Most of the meeting was devoted to further discussion of the controversy arising from Friends United Meeting hiring policies as well as Midcoast Meeting's relationships with FUM and NEYM. Although intense and deeply felt views were shared, no specific decision regarding FUM was reached.

A small group has been deliberating over the meeting's response to the overall FUM set of issues. Earlier they had considered seeking to bring NEYM representatives to the FUM Board to Midcoast for shared discussions. Two of the three current NEYM representatives have resigned, however, and the third has said that no change in FUM policy can be expected. Nor could unity be found at NEYM Summer Sessions.

As a result the small group brought a more introspective proposal for a series of three worship/sharing sessions among Midcoast Friends for a deeper examination of all aspects of homophobia including our own experiences and outlook. The first session would be to share our respective views and attitudes in a candid and caring exchange. The second episode would be devoted to education as to current developments and sufferings in affected communities as well as our responses. The third session would be to hear from monthly and quarterly meetings that have separated from FUM. How did they take such a stand and what were the consequences? The following discussion was shaped by the proposed worship/sharing model but roamed widely.

It was noted that Bruce Neumann--Presiding Clerk of NEYM--has offered to visit Midcoast for a sharing session focused on the FUM controversy. Several Friends said that they sensed general agreement among meeting members that prejudicial policies against GLBTQ persons were wrong.

Some here have struggled and advocated for years on these concerns. The heart of the problem lay in discerning what relationships Midcoast should have with FUM and NEYM.

Several Friends said how much they valued the links and personal connections in NEYM and especially in Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting. Another expressed the concern that further communication be attempted to FUM Friends. In response those with experience in such endeavors said that no such direct overture, however friendly, would reach much less persuade the decision-makers on the FUM Board. The experience of a family member working on an FUM project in Rwanda who was instantly fired and ousted from her house when the local pastor learned that she was a lesbian was offered as an exemplary demonstration of the adamant anti-gay stance of African Friends linked to FUM.

The Clerk reminded everyone that no decisions on policy or relationships to FUM and NEYM were to be made in this business session. There is no unity and no effort should be made to find one. Instead we can plan for the first proposed worship/sharing episode. Out of tender listening and deep sharing a way forward may be discerned. There was anxiety about possible splits and breakaways in the sad tradition of past Quaker separations. Equally strong was the sense of weariness in dealing with these issues over many years, especially in the face of the obdurate stance of FUM Friends.

Clerk Diane DiCranian noted the need for renewed sign-ups for meeting committees. Additional members and participants would be welcome on most committees. There is also a need for someone with appropriate skills to manage the meeting web-site.