

## MIDCOAST MONTHLY MEETING FOR BUSINESS

September 19, 2021

Clerk Diane Dicranian opened the zoom meeting with a period of silent worship.

Jim Matlack reported on two brief items for Ministry and Counsel. The effort to gather information on emergency contact persons for meeting members has fallen so short that the overall effort will be suspended. Jim has also found a suitable book to use as an effective introduction to Quakerism for seekers and new attenders. The co-authors of Quakerism--The Basics are Margery Post Abbott and Carl Abbott--Friends active in the Portland, Oregon Multinomah Meeting. It is an excellent guide to Quaker history, values, and practices. Jim will order several copies for the meeting library.

Suzy Hallett has a concern for the condition of the meeting house. She suggested that repair was needed on the ramp in front of the building. Polly Ulin currently leads a small committee focused upon how to achieve sufficient ventilation in the meeting room so that in-person meetings for worship can safely be held there. A report on this investigation will be forthcoming. Suzy also raised the issue whether the meeting should hire a property manager. No decision was taken.

Diane DiCranian reported on New England Yearly Meeting Sessions at which items of concern from Midcoast Friends were raised--especially the link between New England Yearly Meeting and Friends United Meeting--but in the end no action was taken. A new NEYM committee was created to consult further with the FUM Board but no change in the objectionable FUM hiring policies can be expected. Sharp differences among respondents at Sessions made clear that no agreement could be reached.

This disappointing report led to an extended discussion among Midcoast Friends that ran for an hour or more. No decisions were taken. The following text is a summary of the comments made by various participants.

Some Friends were ready to break with New England Yearly Meeting if that was the only way to clearly disassociate Midcoast from the objectionable FUM policies. Others saw steps to take short of leaving NEYM but with similar disapproval of FUM practices. Withholding regular meeting contributions to NEYM was considered with possible comparable donations to an "alternate fund" such as the Bayard Rustin Fund (set up by NEYM) or to overseas projects backed by FUM such as Ramallah Friends School.

So far Midcoast Meeting has not sent any funds to New England Yearly Meeting (or FUM) for at least a year. To those who urged continued dialogue with FUM representatives others spoke from experience that African Friends were adamant in their anti-gay doctrines and that FUM would not move to counter these positions or their own on LGBTQ+ issues despite all appeals to do so. Continued fitful dialogue with FUM thus seems destined to lead to extended delay rather than to any change or action.

A number of Friends said how precious they felt our connections to Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting were. They did not want to risk losing them. A few put a similar value on NEYM links and Friends. Others testified to the strength of their convictions that just treatment of LGBTQ+ persons must be upheld and relationship to any policies to the contrary be severed. This view was especially strong in cases where family members were gay.

While some mentioned cutting ties to New England Yearly Meeting others again lamented any such decision. It was suggested that pulling back from NEYM would not prevent Friends from attending Quarterly Meeting gatherings. Decisions as to meeting contributions and assessments were unresolved. How to sustain a loving, sharing community in the face of differing beliefs was held up as a goal and precious model.

It was evident that the issues under discussion were intensely felt and vigorously discussed without any evident agreement emerging. Further discernment will await the next Meeting for Business on October 17th.