

Memorial Minute for
Christopher McCandless
(September 10, 1946 -- March 22, 2024)

We grieve the loss of our friend, Christopher McCandless, even while we celebrate his presence among us and the ministry he shared with us.

Christopher grew up in an active, devout Quaker family, educated in the practical and the mystical reality of Quaker thought and practice. He helped to build and tend the family homestead in the Eastern Pennsylvania woods, where his family intentionally lived below the poverty line as war tax resisters. Throughout his life, he lived into the importance of family, the importance of community, and the loving presence of the Divine in daily life.

Christopher's life of service began early. In 1965, at eighteen, he helped register voters in the South and supported the building of a community center in Canton, Mississippi, returning in 1967. Those experiences shaped him: he reflected on being schooled there in racial equality, humility, respect and the visceral impacts of white supremacy and its disruption until his final days. A conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, he counseled others about the draft in Chicago and in the Bay Area. He searched for and encountered "that of God" in everyone whose path he crossed. His theology embraced loving others; his vision was of joyful communion. He found a fierce, brilliant, and committed partner in building community in Jean Margaret (Watson) McCandless, his partner in activism, service and leadership for over 55 years. They imparted these values to their children, in turn.

Christopher had many talents. He used those gifts not to bring attention to himself but to bring together community and to celebrate the presence of Spirit in our midst. A pastor among unprogrammed Friends, he ministered to his community, nurturing curiosity, and insistent on the full participation and joy of children, young people and people with disabilities. A mentor to many, he consciously offered a model of gentle, engaged fatherhood. His strong singing voice, his memory and care for the details of our lives, his skills as a carpenter were all fodder for service. He approached clerking yearly meeting sessions or fixing a broken window in the meetinghouse with the same joyful zeal, drawing others into service with him.

Like his father before him, Christopher's witness was to "speak truth and do truth." He was stubborn in his own faith while embracing the differences of understating alive in the Religious Society of Friends. He believed that the Christ Spirit could manifest in anyone, in any place, of any faith tradition, and lived actively into that belief. He was a welcoming, loving presence—often the first person to greet a newcomer to meeting, always eager to enter in deep conversation. He held and freely shared the historic memory of our meeting and the wider world of Friends. His calm, competent manner, his centered presence underlined a love and respect for each of us and for our community.

Christopher asked that his memorial minute might simply read, "he was of some use." We would say more. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Matthew 25:21.

Approved by Burlington Monthly Meeting, 19 May 2024

Accepted by Northwest Quarterly Meeting, June 2, 2024