

Monday Afternoon

4.1 James Varner sang and prayed us into worship

He asked our Heavenly Father to open our minds and our hearts and exhorted us to practice our belief that there is that of God in everyone. He asked God to inspire us to show fire in our hearts, fire of love, and reminded us that it is “I and thee” who need to carry this love and do what God wants us to do as Quakers.

4.2 Epistle

We heard the Epistle of the 91st Assembly of the Yearly Meeting of Friends, “Quakers” in Cuba, excerpted here:

“The 91st assembly ... has for its theme: “A church that grows in love and seeks the Truth”; inspired by the text of Ephesians 4:15 ‘Rather, following the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.’ The church feels the joy of a generational renewal which is beginning to evaluate in a critical way how it carries out its mission, with initiatives that help to improve our work and with a greater commitment to accept the challenges of our context. ...

“We also feel joy at the presence of brothers and sisters from New England Yearly Meeting, with which we have built a “Bridge of Love” for the past twenty-six years, responding to the Voice of God. For us, this Bridge is a symbol of what humanity can do to build a world of peace, justice, unity, and love. ... This idea generated a minute which recognizes the value of the Bridge of Love between the yearly meetings of New England and Cuba, and opposes the measures taken by the government of the United States which limit the interchange between these two faith communities.

“May the Lord of Love and Truth inspire us to be living testimonies of this understanding which, like the wind and the sea that can reach everywhere, may extend to all the men and women of the world.”

4.3 Absent Friends

We called to our attention those friends whom we usually see among us but who are absent this year. As is our custom, postcards expressing our affection will be sent to those Friends.

4.4 Clerking Practices and Structures Report and Working Group

Last year the Yearly Meeting charged Permanent Board to look at clerking practices and structures. Nia Thomas (Northampton) & Martin Zwirner-Forsythe (Beacon Hill) , Ed Mair (Amesbury), and Fran Brokaw (Hanover) of the Clerking Practices and Structures working group have brought to us a preliminary report (see appended report) and will come back to us later asking for approval of specific recommendations.

We accepted the Working Group's report with gratitude.

4.5 Witness Session

Adam Kohrman (Wellesley) and Ben Guaraldi (Beacon Hill) , as two of the three members of the Disruptive Behavior Committee, led us in celebration of witness done by Friends among us. In between messages, they played riffs from "Sunshine of Your Love", "Stairway to Heaven", and "Smells Like Teen Spirit" on two electric guitars. When this was perceived by some Friends as disrespectful, they switched to leading us in a chorus of "Praise God!" and "Hallelujah!"

Charles Simpson (Burlington) talked to us about the Burlington Meeting deep time project. Burlington has built a relationship with the local Abenacki band. The fruits of this relationship include public art, most noticeably an art installation at the Burlington Airport giving voice to the Abenaki story and experience of history. Burlington Meeting has established a garden growing heritage strains of corn and vegetables; has participated in public forums and celebrations of the Abenaki in Northwestern Vermont.

Diane Dicranian (Midcoast) told us about the Maine Poor People's Campaign, a national call for moral revival. They have organized concerts, protests, and civil disobedience around the issues that cause poverty. Friends from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts who are active in the Poor People's Campaign stood and were recognized. NEYM is an endorsing partner of the Poor People's Campaign (Minute 2018-52).

Maggie Fogarty (Dover) told us about Dover Monthly Meeting reaching unity on becoming part of a sanctuary network. Their work included reaching out to other faith communities and providing training in how to deal with ICE. One day, a family with two young boys came to Dover MM seeking a "safe house" after agents of ICE had come to their home. It was with deep joy that the MM was able to say "You are welcome here. We have been waiting for you."

Skip Schiels (Fresh Pond) of the Israel/Palestine Working Group of NEYM told us about his decade long ministry using his photography to document the story of those Palestinians who have been internally exiled. The working group has been writing articles and hosting programs about Friends in New England who are carrying a concern for the people of Israel and Palestine.

Tim Wallis and Viki Elson (Northampton Meeting) told us of Tim's work with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and their collaborative work to help secure passage of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. They worked with their own monthly meeting to divest from companies producing materials for nuclear weapons and are now traveling to other meetings. They are also distributing a publication, Warheads to Windmills: How to Pay for a Green New Deal and A Quaker Guide to Nuclear Ban Treaty Alignment.

Judy Goldberger (Beacon Hill) told us of her work doing support & accompaniment of migrants and immigrants. Judy, an obstetric nurse, began by listening to the stories of Spanish speaking mothers of new infants, and then branched out to working with the wider immigrant community. She is now the Director of a pastoral visitation program in a house of corrections. Mary Hopkins (Fresh Pond) told us of marrying an immigrant and then learning that she would not be able to get him a green card. (He has since become a citizen.) She shared with us the joys and the pain of her work with the Boston Immigrant Justice Accompaniment Network.

4.6 Puente de Amigos

Em McManamy (Amesbury) and Maggie Fogarty reported to us on behalf of the Puente de Amigos committee. Their annual report may be found in the advance documents. They led us in singing a song celebrating the bridge of Love composed this year by Cuban Friend Jesus Leyva. This was recorded and will be sent back to our Cuban Friends. The refrain in Spanish means "Bridges, build more bridges," and the song conveys a sense of how important our connections with Cuban Friends are to each of us.

We also heard four brief reports from Friends who have traveled to Cuba this year.

Erica Brinton and Lisa Solbert Sheldon from Hanover Monthly Meeting traveled to Cuba in November. The group of five from Hanover Meeting spent a week with Hanover's sister meeting in Havana, and a week among Friends in eastern Cuba. They reported that their worship time in Cuba was full of heart and Spirit.

Macci Schmidt (Northampton) and Gina Nortonsmith went in January with two Amherst College Students to assess and inventory Quaker archives in Cuba and to advise on curation.

Jackie Stillwell & Noah Merrill traveled to Cuba in February for Cuba Yearly Meeting annual Sessions and travelled among meetings in Cuba. Jackie was serving as Noah's elder as he traveled there in the ministry.

Mary Beth Toomey (Wellesley) and Nora Spicer (Beacon Hill) joined with some Friends from Framingham to travel in April to assist in rebuilding the Wilmington School which is

being rehabilitated to become a community center. They renewed and strengthened long standing relationships with Cuban Friends.

Friends recognized the long service of the former clerks of the Puente de Amigos Committee, Len and Mary Anne Cadwallader (Hanover).