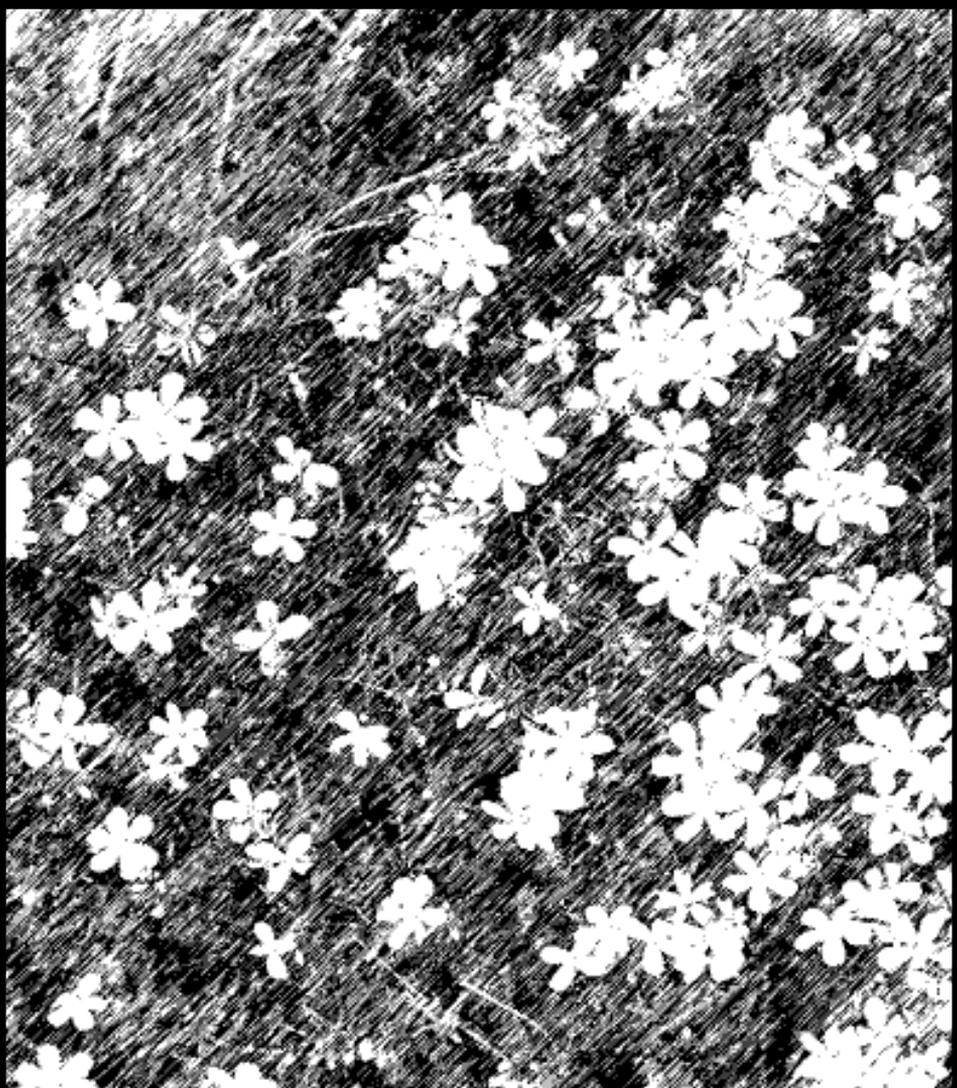


MIDDLEBURY FRIENDS MEETING



APRIL 2001

MINUTES, MEETING FOR BUSINESS

MARCH 18, 2001

Co-clerk: Jean Rosenberg

Recording Clerk: Laura Asermily

The meeting began at 11:30 AM with a moment of silence during which Co-Clerk Jean Rosenberg read a passage from Pendle Hill Pamphlet 217 titled “Practicing Compassion for the Stranger.” The passage invited us to make room for the stranger in our lives and to build communities that welcome and nurture the stranger. Ten people attended including Jean Rosenberg, Priscilla Baker, Olive and Ted Colwell, Faith Lowell, Ruth Barenbaum, John Vincent, Spence Putnam, Jerry McBride, and Laura Asermily.

1. Minutes: Approved the minutes of the February 18, 2001 Meeting For Business.
2. Ministry & Counsel: A report was given of the March 4, 2001 meeting. Enthur Ayush’s request for support was acknowledged. He was asked if he would like a Clearness Committee and he would. This will be brought to the next Ministry & Counsel meeting.
3. Treasurer’s Report: In February 2001 our contributions totaled \$816 and our expenses amounted to \$353.35. Included in expenses were payments for library materials, costs of printing the Newsletter, and \$200 given to AFSC for the Campaign of Conscience. In March so far we’ve received gifts of \$145 and had no expenses. We’ll have a bill for this month’s newsletter. On April 1 we will be disbursing \$1,050 for rent and our obligations to NEYM and NWQM. The present cash balance is \$2,341.69. During March, the balance in the Sas Carey Mongolian Fund of \$600 was fully disbursed. The meeting was forewarned that there is a proposal pending, which might allow a Middlebury city tax placed on property occupied by nonprofits. A contribution of \$492 could be requested (not required) of the Parent Child Center. The meeting will ask Fran Putnam if she would inquire on what the PCC would do if such a tax were levied.
4. Peace & Social Concerns Committee: The meeting received a letter back from Senator Leahy in response to our minute on the Campaign of Conscience for the Iraqi People. He thanked us and informed us that he felt the bombing was necessary, but agreed we needed to look at the sanctions. The committee is working to acquire a speaker on the topic and has contacted Middlebury College student organizations about it. Area ministers agreed to cover the event in their bulletins once it is scheduled. We agreed to cover the speaker’s travel expenses and to offer a small honorarium.
5. Ministering to Each Other Potluck: A far reaching discussion on what it means to minister to each other was conducted on March 11, 2001 at the home of Ruth

Barenbaum. A potluck followed. A list was generated in response to what paid ministers do and another list was generated in response to what it is that Middlebury Friends do to minister to each other. Queries were inspired from this which would be shared in the newsletter (see related story). It was agreed that we would ask “what keeps people coming to Meeting for Worship?” in an upcoming Meeting for Worship. Any new queries inspired from this could be added to those created at the potluck. Priscilla Baker will ask Mimi Love-Nicholson if she would be willing to create a poster of the queries, which could be posted in Meetings for Worship. Ministry & Counsel will follow up to see if there is anything else to do around ministering to each other. It was proposed that we might want to discuss eldering.

6. Midweek Meeting: The meeting agreed to continue these on alternate Tuesdays and Wednesdays at noon at Eleanor Gibson’s home. Seven people attended at the same times and location

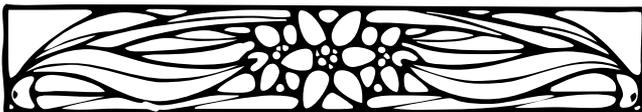
7. Preparations for Death & Dying Committee: Ministry & Counsel wishes to reactivate this committee to assist friends in completing and updating forms. Jann Grace Seale will convene this committee assisted by Priscilla Baker, Ruth Barenbaum, and Faith Lowell. The meeting thanks Sas Carey for archiving the forms, which are now with Jann Grace Seale.

8. Adult Discussion: The April adult discussion topic was changed to Global Warming. Laura Asermily agreed to facilitate.

9. Membership: The meeting joyfully approved the transferred membership of Rebecca Holmes to Middlebury Friends Meeting.

10. Yearly Meeting Traveling Ministries: Jean Rosenberg shared Yearly Meeting’s traveling ministry offer as a valuable resource for us to tap should we see fit. The list of speakers and topics, which are conveniently indexed, will be given to Ministry & Counsel.

11. Quarterly Meeting: Ruth Barenbaum, Cheryl Mitchell, and Jean Rosenbeg attended and reported that it was a good meeting. The meeting will follow up with Cheryl on the Fifth Force discussion, which she offered to host. A workshop titled “Are You Seeking Deeper Spiritual Experience?” is being planned for Yearly Meeting.



MINISTERING TO EACH OTHER IN MIDDLEBURY FRIENDS MEETING

Notes taken by Priscilla Baker

On March 11, 2001 about a dozen Friends gathered at the home of Ruth Barenbaum to discuss how we can better minister to one another. The discussion was far reaching and diverse, reflecting the vast range of ministering needs within any congregation of people as well as the many, many ways ministering can occur. Some of the topics discussed included:

- the importance of visiting one another and of gathering outside of Meeting for discussion, social communion and connection-building.
- the culture within MFM that guides us in how to minister to one another; how does the concept of shared responsibility for ministering get imbedded within the culture of a spiritual group?
- the Quaker practice of Clearness Committees as a way of giving and receiving support.
- the many different ways we can minister and reach out to one another, such as phone calls, cards, food, transportation, and visits.

We created two lists over the course of this discussion.

What Is Done By Ministers/Priests/Rabbis

(religious leaders who are empowered and hired as messengers of God)?

They

- visit the people in their congregations.
- are aware of who needs what.
- have their hands on the pulse of the congregation as a whole.
- know about passages in peoples' lives: births, deaths, sicknesses, retirements, marriages, divorces, graduations, etc.
- organize others to provide for needs within the community.
- prepare modes of communication, notably newsletters.
- shepherd their flocks.
- welcome newcomers, visit them and answer questions.
- provide a confidential ear; provide pastoral counseling when needed.
- organize and oversee religious education.
- run the business of the church or synagogue.
- act as spokespeople of their religion to the public.
- do outreach, on behalf of their group, within the larger community.
- embody the spiritual values of their religion and give voice to these values.

Furthermore, there is the expectation that these religious leaders are role models, possessing sometimes superhuman characteristics through exemplary behaviors. This sometimes allows or enables parishioners to be fallible.

What Can Friends In Mfm Do To Improve Ministering Among Ourselves?

We want to

- be more welcoming to newcomers; visit them and answer their questions
- seek out and connect with people we don't usually talk to.
- inform Friends about Clearness Committees and encourage people to use this vehicle of support and clarification.
- get to know each other outside of Meeting; play together; do (seemingly) trivial and unrelated-to-Meeting activities.
- keep active our after Meeting hospitality, regular potlucks, singing after Meeting, and books and flowers at Meetings.
- continue to minister to each other via food, visiting, cards, phone calls, transportation.
- continue our Healing Circle at the beginning of Meetings for Worship.
- continue to use our monthly newsletter as a vehicle of communication and sharing, especially news of Quakerly interest.
- continue to use our e-mail list and phone-tree as ways for informing everyone in Meeting about important news of each other.
- continue to improve the children's program which has become much better organized this year.
- continue the men's group and the women's annual gathering.
- support M & C in their charge to oversee the spiritual life of the Meeting.
- have periodic gatherings/potlucks (perhaps every 6 months-1 year) to welcome newcomers and help people understand Quakerism and Quaker practices

We ended with the suggestion that we create a set of queries to help Friends reflect on their own ways of ministering within the Meeting community. For example:

- Do I make time to connect and to minister to others within Meeting?
- Am I aware of and responsive to what others may need?
- How can I participate in ministering to others within Meeting?
- What are my special ways or gifts of ministering and helping to care for others in my spiritual community?

We agreed to invite Friends to share, during introductions at the end of Meeting for Worship,

“What has kept each of us in MFM over the years?”

GRACE MCGRATH: WHY DO I DO IT?

“How do you do it?” People sometimes ask me this when they find out the commitment of time and energy that it takes for an AVP prison workshop. I guess what they really mean is “why do you do it” knowing that I have an active family life and a demanding job.

There are times that I wonder about that myself. When I'm climbing out of my warm bed on a cold dark morning to face an hour's drive to the prison. When I'm staring at another barely edible styrofoam tray of prison dinner. When I'm frustrated by yet another bureaucratic mixup that interferes with the workshop. When I'm feeling tired and cranky and the role plays are flat, there are conflicts on the team, some participants are determined to convince me that non-violence is impractical and I'm muttering to myself “Trust the process, trust the process.”

Of course by the end of the workshop I remember exactly why (and how) I do it. I look around in the closing circle at the faces that three days ago were closed and wary and see, the intelligence, sense of hope, community feeling and inner spirit shining in those same faces. I see tears glistening in the eyes of “hardened criminals” and often feel them in my own eyes. While some workshops are glorious and some are just OK, they all have their luminous moments, many of which are etched in my mind.

At my first prison workshop, I watch men who were likely to have violated bodies of other people work together in a trust lift to rock a fellow prisoner in the gentlest possible manner to the sounds of soft music.

A man who plays the role of an off duty policeman in a role play sheepishly confesses that he never realized what a hard job police officers have, and he doesn't think he can look at them the same way again.

A participant at a community workshop who had struggled with some personal issues the night before rushes in on Sunday morning crying I understand! I understand! My mother is just trying to do her best!"

Two participants in a workshop acknowledge to the group that they were enemies before the workshop, but found out they, have much in common.

A young self-described “stick-up man” struggles to compose himself after playing the role of someone being robbed. “I never knew how scared those people were! Its awful!"

Over and over again hearing I only came here because I thought it would help me get paroled but this has been really important to me." Or I never thought I could have fun in prison". Or I can't believe it. This feels like family."

The times that a Light and Lively or even a Role Play takes such a comic turn that we all take many minutes to recover from our belly laughs.

Watching the English speakers wait patiently and respectfully for the concepts to get translated to a Spanish speaker, and then watching understanding dawn in that person's face.

Watching people use the safe atmosphere to show off their talents in singing, dancing, rapping, acting, drawing, perception or making people laugh.

Hearing desperately homesick men speak movingly of what matters to them in their lives: homes, parents, work, children, lovers, pets.

Watching the inside facilitators month after month grow in confidence and leadership skills as well as in a deeper understanding of what non-violence really means.

The other question people ask me is "But does it make a difference?" Of course I realize that for some participants the workshop is "only" a brief respite from the brutal monotony of prison life. Others may learn some skills which they will use on occasion, perhaps resulting in a few less violent incidents in their lives. Others may begin to re-evaluate some of their tightly held prejudices and be open to new possibilities. For some, however, I can see that the experience is the moisture that begins to soften the hard shell around the seed of their inner selves, and they gradually begin to blossom toward the light. When we are present to see this process in another human being, we are truly privileged.

Of course the real reason I do AVP workshops is for myself, but not only because I need to continually confront my own violence within. It is also because even a small dose of the nightly news begins to poison me with despair about the brutality and viciousness in our world. But each time I do a workshop I am reminded again of the innate worth of each person, and the possibility of transformation even in the belly of the beast. I can return to the rest of my life with faith and hope.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROGRAM IN NORTHWEST QUARTERLY MEETING

Consideration is being given to form a group that would create a nurturing spiritual community in which individuals would support each other in their spiritual journeys. Members would commit to a nine-month participation in the program, which would include retreats, individual spiritual discipline, regional monthly meetings for reflection on readings, and small groups for support and spiritual friendship. It is being organized for Friends who take God's call in their lives seriously.

A more detailed description of the program is available for those interested by contacting Ted Colwell (388-3632). Michael Hechmer of Burlington Meeting is heading up our Quarter's planning. He can be contacted at 878-3725 or mhechmer@worldnet.att.net.

SOME SPECIAL VISITORS TO MEETING!

During the last few weeks, the Unitarian/Universalist religious education program has had two meetings with Friends. Tara Nicholson and Mimi Love were invited to do an initial presentation of Quaker practices where they read the Queries, and the young people chose a particular one to discuss: Care of Children.

Then the group came to visit us, sat in Meeting for Worship, and afterwards engaged in a long discussion with Ruth Barenbaum about Quaker history and witness. They asked wonderful questions about the Inner Light, and how we discern what is a true Leading. They were particularly interested in our tradition of prison work and the Alternatives to Violence Project. There were many questions about how this program manifests Quaker principles.

One of our visitors said she became interested in Silence as an inner path by reading the book *The Blue Door*, in which a teen is punished by not being allowed to speak for two weeks, and discovers Silence as a deepening experience.

The group was led by a parent, Ann Marino, and included Holly Earle, Katia Sokoloff, Ann Nordmeyer and Steve Gullion. It was lovely to have these interesting young people with us.

-Ruth Barenbaum



The Senior Class of MUHS recently produced a play, "The Princess Bride" and in the cast was MICHAEL SMITH-STACKHOUSE as one of the Rodents of Unusual Size. Mike's comment in the cast listing was "Michael loves you." He has clearly learned some Quaker language from his father, Chris. A competing newsletter, "St. Stephen's Parishscope," reported that our RUTH BARENBAUM has donated one of her fine collages to that church, and it is hanging part way up the main staircase of the church. Ruth also has journeyed to Montreal recently and reports that their sidewalks were covered with nearly a foot of frozen snow - very hazardous. In addition, she has passed along word that ACCAG needs paired shoes for shipment to Africa or South America very shortly. Summer shoes without high heels are in most demand. Anyone with some extra footwear should contact ACCAG (388-3608) for more information. JERRY McBRIDE'S mother is seriously ill in California, and he will be departing this week to visit her. He has asked that we hold her in The Light. ANNA LEA is back safely from a month in Ghana with a Mt. Abe High School group, much more knowledgeable about

conditions in that country. Her mother, PATTY HEATHER-LEA is most relieved that she is back in the USA! One of our former attenders, GORDON BRETSCHEIDER, has moved from Grasonville, MD to Louisville, KY. He will be living with his son, David, there in Blue Grass Country. It only recently came to our attention that BILL SCHNEIDER was elected in March to the MUHS School Board, representing Bridport. He joins JEAN ROSENBERG in that important work. Bill has a great interest in education, and has been active, along with his wife, LAURA ASERMILY, in school matters in Bridport. It was nice to meet the brother and sister-in-law of BECKY HOLMES recently when they attended meeting. They live in Virginia outside the Nation's Capital. There was good news and bad news for OLIVE and TED COLWELL. The happy news is that Olive is recovering nicely from her twin problems of Sciatica and a broken wrist. The sad news was that Jasper, their large, white cat that participated yearly at the Christmas Worship Sharing and at Potlucks at the Colwells' home became critically ill and had to be put down. He had been a member of the family for nineteen years, three years with Win and then sixteen with Olive and Ted. He was a perfect Quaker/Buddha cat, never even chased a bird!

We have some address changes.

Ann Taylor
Awtaylor@sover.net

Martha & Chas Moseley
Memch@concentric.net
Crmos@concentric.net

- Ted Colwell

MIDDLEBURY FRIENDS MEETING

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Co-Clerks

Priscilla Baker (388-8024)
Jean Rosenberg (388-6453)

Ministry and Counsel Committee

Donna Belcher
Anne Corrigan
Marshall Hoagland
Jerry McBride
Grace McGrath
Jann Grace Seale

Newsletter Editor Winslow Colwell (388-1961, winslow@well.com)

Treasurer

Olive Colwell (388-3632)
1 Lower Plains Rd,
E. Middlebury, VT 05740

Recording Clerk

Laura Asermily

Newsletter Mailing

Ted Colwell
Olive Colwell
Ruth Barenbaum

MIDDLEBURY 
FRIENDS MEETING

278 Washington St.
Middlebury, VT 05753

Meeting for Worship
10:00 AM every First Day
Parent/Child Center, 11 Monroe Street, Middlebury
www.middlebury.edu/~jmcbride/mfm.htm