

ATLANTA FRIENDS MEETING NEWSLETTER

MAY 2020

FROM THE EDITOR

Out of an abundance of caution and a deep and prayerful concern for the health of our entire community, meeting for worship at the meetinghouse continues to be suspended and the meetinghouse closed. Meeting for worship and other meeting activities are continuing virtually, either via the internet or by calling in. See below for more details and for other resources, including ways to connect to the meeting if you need help or if you can help others. The newsletter and the announcement sheet will continue to be posted on the meeting's website. If you would like to be notified when the newsletter is posted online or to receive the announcement sheet via email, please see the final page of the newsletter for instructions. To join the meeting's Facebook page, search for Atlanta Friends Meeting and click the **+ Join Group** button.

The Office Coordinator is working from home and is checking email and voicemail regularly.



Atlanta Meeting of the Religious
Society of Friends (Quakers)

All are welcome

Virtual Meeting for Worship
Each First Day (Sunday)
10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

QUERY FOR MAY

Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

-- Advices and Queries of
Britain Yearly Meeting

CARING CONNECTIONS AT ATLANTA FRIENDS MEETING

If you need help during this time or if you can help, Care and Counsel Committee has set up an online way to connect people, using something Gordon Shippey set up earlier in the year to create a general list of those willing to deliver meals, drive people to appointments, run errands, or visit people at home or in hospital. In response to social distancing, we've also added an option to connect people via email or phone. To request help or to volunteer, go to:

<http://www.atlantaquakers.org/members.htm#CARINGCONNECT> (under Members and Attenders) or contact Karen Skellie at 404-680-4524 or kskellie@gmail.com or Nina Gooch at 404-377-2474 (leave a message) or atlantaquakers@gmail.com.

NEW DIRECTORY!

Our newest directory is finished and has been emailed to everyone for whom we have an email address. If you did not receive one, email the office or leave a message on the office phone with your phone number and email address and we can email your copy to you. If you don't have an email address, we can print you a copy and send it via US Mail.

Many, many thanks to Brent Wolff for collecting and verifying all the information and creating the directory for us.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS AND ADULT FIRST DAY SCHOOL

Each first Sunday of the month, in adult First Day School we listen to how a Friend in our meeting answers questions of God's leadings as well as questions about what brings them to this meeting, what led them to become a member or not, and what they believe now. We call these stories of spiritual journeys, stories where Friends describe their understanding of God and religion in their life. Each of the following Sundays in May, our meetings will focus on worship sharing with a query. We will meet via Zoom and close the class in time to be in meeting for worship in the separate zoom link. See below for Zoom details.

On Sunday May 3, Mike Aland will offer his spiritual journey. Mike Aland is a semi retired electrician who has been in attendance at AFM for 12 years. In 2009, he was married under the care of the meeting to Caroline Morris, a long time attender. He has been active with the teen first day class, the Administration committee as Employee Liaison, the Scholarship committee, and the Ferguson Cabin committee.

Here are some links to recordings of previous Spiritual Journeys:

Gordon Shippey, April 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/tsw2dca>

Althea Sumpter: <https://tinyurl.com/ybmh9ee4>

Elaine Meyer Lee, November 2018: <https://tinyurl.com/y8xsughu>

Bobby Meyer-Lee, December 2018: <https://tinyurl.com/y74hj783>

Mark Yates, February 2019: <https://tinyurl.com/yb4ah75b>

2019 STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT, Atlanta Friends Meeting, approved February 15, 2020

In a 1656 letter from prison, George Fox encouraged Friends "to be patterns, examples in all ...places, wherever you come." In these troubled and challenging times, we are a community seeking to be faithful and cheerful, a place of refuge as well as a place of inspiration and challenge.

We continue to explore how to be a more faithful community and how to live transformed lives. Each First Day, we gather in worship to listen expectantly. We close our Meeting for Worship inviting our community to hold in the Light concerns, challenges and joys. We seek to know each other more deeply. Once a month, a member of the community, surrounded by attentive listeners, is given an hour to share their spiritual journey. Friends participating find this a powerful opportunity for both speaker and all who witness. An adult religious education program meets each first day to deepen our spiritual lives and share new insights.

Our Meeting continues to grow and transition. We received nine new members by conviction and one by transfer. We celebrated the arrival of four babies born to Friends in Meeting. Three marriages were conducted under the care of the Meeting. Three memorial Meetings for Worship celebrated the lives of our beloved Friends Nan Pendergrast, Bill Jenkins and Carolyn Manley.

While there are many joys and opportunities with a large meeting, there are also challenges. We are investigating how we can better know the personal challenges of individual Friends. We want to note the absence of members and attenders and reach out with loving care. We are considering the responsibility of deeply caring for the marriages we take under our care especially of Friends who live at a distance from the Meeting, in other states or even other countries. Concerns about the security of the meetinghouse and the need to be mindful and prepared for life in a violent world is balanced by concerns for potential exclusion. An ad hoc committee has been formed to explore these concerns and we look forward to their prayerful deliberations.

Since a central component of our spirituality is listening to one another, Friends have raised the concern over being able to hear one another in the most literal sense. Some Friends are unable to hear the vocal ministry in Meeting for Worship and other community gatherings. We have attempted tweaks of the hearing assistance system, encouraging Friends to speak up or changing position in the room. We hear there are Friends who no longer attend meeting as they cannot hear. But the proposal of using a hand-held microphone also elicits strong feelings. We are exploring both technological and behavioral interventions to make this a place where all can hear and be heard.

Care and Counsel Committee is under the weight of a concern to create an inclusive, cared for, community. A newcomer's table provides a place and person to talk to most First Days. Friends with health issues and life transitions are supported with meals, rides and visits. The care quilts continue to be a tangible manifestation of being under the care of the Meeting. We continue to learn how to be more tender to the issues of gender identity and use of pronouns. Buttons are now available for members and attenders to inform others of the pronouns to use for them. Drawing on information from Friends General Conference, we are adding guidelines for greeting diverse newcomers to heighten the awareness of our front door greeters, who are often the first point of contact.

Nominating Committee actively works to involve more Friends in the organizational life of the Meeting with a goal of making each member feel welcome, included and valued. We continue to think of ways to make our processes and practices more transparent. While the short-hand terms and practices of a community are valued and familiar language to insiders, we recognize the need to find ways make these open and informing without losing our special identity and history. Decoding acronyms, explaining terms and describing processes in an accessible manner are challenges.

2019 was a year of transition for meeting staff. Our long-time Office Coordinator, Jonah McDonald, left his position and our Friend in Residence ended their term. Searches to fill these vacant positions as well as that of that the new Property Coordinator led to new Friends stepping forward to carry these responsibilities. We welcomed our new Friend in Residence, Anton Flores, whose gifts and experiences in community building alongside an emphasis on immigrant justice has already provided us many opportunities to learn and grow. Nina Gooch now serves as our Office Coordinator and Kevin Wong as our Property Manager

We have an energetic and active First Day Program for young Friends. This year thirteen adult Friends committed to serving as lead teachers. Our preschool and lower elementary classes are examining Quaker faith and practice, testimonies and queries. The Faith and Play approach uses the engagement of story to explore living our faith. The teen class has been expanded to include middle and high school participants and uses a format of queries to engage in discussion and reflection. On fifth Sunday, we do not hold first day classes and ask parents to worship with their family for the whole hour. We notice that attendance is less on those First days.

The Macon Worship Group continues under our care. The group increased their meetings from once a month to twice a month and meet in a downtown Unitarian Universalist Church. They publish a regular newsletter and hold a regular Meeting for Business. Members of Atlanta Meeting are encouraged and welcomed to attend. Those who have, find the experience enriching.

Through our Social Concerns Committee, we provide financial and practical support to a variety of community organizations and projects that our meeting members are involved with. This year we provided new support for asylum seekers via monthly workshops organized by Immigration Law Lab and sustained by volunteers of the Meeting. Support has also been extended to the DeKalb Remembrance Project (Lynching memorial and mitigation), Second Chance Georgia (Expungement) and Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda (Voting Rights). The committee continues to support leadings for peace and justice among members of the Atlanta Friends Meeting community.

We celebrated the important role Quaker women play in the ongoing struggle for women's rights. We celebrated the 99th anniversary of the 19th amendment and are reminded of the ongoing struggles to insure the realization of women's equality.

Friends with a concern for a livable planet have labored to be faithful to their leading. Green Friends meet monthly. The year began with a Friend sharing in business meeting a vision for a greener meetinghouse. Forums have been held during the year to explore the steps that might be taken to decrease our carbon dependence as a community such as installing solar panels. To educate our broader community, Green Friends produced poster maps illustrating the effects of climate change on Georgia and our neighboring states and shared these with hundreds of high school science classes across the region upon request.

Quakers for Racial Equality (QRE) and the Committee for Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting (CURAFM) continue to act on the testimony of equality and leading to undo racism in its many forms towards the vision of creating a spiritual home for all. Friends held meeting wide forums, hosted potlucks, a monthly listening ear for concerns about racism, literature table and bulletin board. Two interactive workshops on "Becoming a Welcoming Anti-Racist Meeting" were held. The committee provided support for Friends to attend educational events beyond the meeting, encouraging these Friends to bring these new insights back. Friends of Color met several times during the year. A monthly book discussion group is finding deep engagement. Beyond the meeting, QRE and Social Concerns join with community groups to transform the community.

The local Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) Advocacy Teams engaged Friends in developing respectful ongoing relationship with Georgia's federal elected senators and representatives and their staff. Team members meet regularly to prepare to speak our truth to our federal leaders in ways that speak to that of God in others, telling compelling personal stories connecting them to important legislative issues of war, peace and justice. Central to this team is faithfulness in ongoing service, working to build relationships.

Our faithfulness to the larger world continues with our ongoing relationship with Suchitoto, El Salvador and the connection that was forged between our two communities through the loving labor of Frank and Carol Cummings. We continue to carry their concerns after their deaths. The Suchitoto Fund Committee is pleased with the progress this year of the youth-led nonprofit "The Association of Current and Graduated Scholarship Students from Suchitoto" (ABESUCHI).

We are now in our 8th year as a host meeting for a Quaker Voluntary Service cohort. Our meeting has been enriched by the young adults who have come as QVS fellows. We are very fortunate some of these QVS fellows have served and stayed, becoming active members of our community. Members of our community serve as members of the local support committee and as spiritual nurturers and report on the powerful experience of accompanying those committed to a year of service and spiritual reflection. Ten years ago, Christina Repoley came to AFM with a concern and vision that led to the founding of QVS as an organization. In 2019, we celebrated Christina's prophetic service and her transition from being Executive Director. We treasure her continued involvement with our community.

Atlanta meeting continues to be a place of transformation, of nurture, of challenge, of deep listening and silence.

Approved, Atlanta Friends Meeting, February 15, 2020

MEETING VIRTUALLY THIS MONTH

See announcement sheet in your email inbox or on our website for more detailed instructions for connecting using the internet and for the most up to date information. To call in using your phone, dial 1-253-215-8782 or 1-301-715-8592 and enter the meeting ID when prompted. This may be a toll call from your landline. **If you have a mute button on your phone, mute it when you enter the meeting and unmute to speak.**



Sundays:

ADULT FIRST DAY SCHOOL will meet at 9:00-9:50 am
Meeting ID: 198773168.

Link: <https://zoom.us/j/198773168>

On the first Sunday of each month, we will listen to the Spiritual Journey of one of our members/attenders. (May 3 will be Mike Aland's.) Other Sundays will focus on worship sharing with a query. We will close the class each week in time to be in meeting for worship.

FIRST DAY MEETING FOR WORSHIP

will meet at 10 am

Meeting ID: 908-004-190 and Password: 842962.

Link: <https://zoom.us/j/908004190>

(closing by Ministry & Worship Committee and organized by Steve Collins)

The meeting link will remain open until about 11:45 for those who would like to stay and chat.

FIRST DAY SCHOOL for Families and Friends at 10:15 am with Laura MacNorlin.

Meeting ID: 727 996 1727.

Link: <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/7279961727>

Other days of the week:

WEDNESDAY MORNING MIDWEEK MEETING FOR WORSHIP 9:30 am on Wednesday mornings

Meeting ID: 920 3886 2952 and Password: 726229.

Link: <https://zoom.us/j/92038862952>

Contact Bert Skellie at 404-680-4799 for more info.

BOOKS BY AND ABOUT PEOPLE OF COLOR – May 7

The book group reading works by and about people of color continues to meet at 1:30 p.m. on the first Thursday of the month, but is currently meeting via Zoom. On May 7, the group will be discussing *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, by Ernest Gaines; and on June 4, *There There* by Tommy Orange. For questions and more details, contact Susan Cole (cole2544@bellsouth.net).

IS GOD ONLINE?

In a recent video from the weekly QuakerSpeak video series from *Friends Journal*, Emily Provance talks about her experiences traveling in the ministry full time and the way that work helps to connect Quaker meetings and about her experiences worshipping virtually. She also talks about how virtual meetings and social media can be a part of being more inclusive, a question particularly important when we live in an area where so many Quakers live far from a meeting or worship group.

“When we talk about worship in specific, there is a sort of inside feeling that I think all Friends would recognize. There is a sort of groundedness, a sort of deep listening, a sort of spaciousness that’s connected to the experience of expectant worship (that point in time when we are expecting to hear from God) and what is interesting to me is that even when we are sitting virtually, when we are very far away, we can still have that same internal feeling I know this because I have felt it.”

The link is www.quakerspeak.com/online. Scroll down for a transcript, which includes discussion questions. There are also links to other QuakerSpeak videos.

PRAYERS AND PROTESTS *by Mary Ann Downey*

Talking to God was an everyday affair when I was growing up. We said the blessing before meals, had Bible reading and prayer before bed at night and lived as though God was always on call. In our Southern Baptist tradition we believed, as many do, that we had direct access to God, a hot line, and that we should stay in touch, using our own words to ask for what we wanted and to express gratitude for what we had. Memorized, Church-approved prayer was a suspect ritual, even dishonest. I remember being disdainful as a nine year old when I had dinner with a friend and heard her father pray, “Lord, make us truly grateful for what we are about to receive.” He mumbled the words quickly, through clenched teeth and sounded anything but grateful, like he certainly wouldn’t be grateful unless God forced him to. I gave him a silent grade of F on his prayer.

At our meals, my sisters and I took turns saying the blessing and, only once, did I try to get out of this. We were having green beans and some other foods I didn’t like. When my mother called on me, I said, “I can’t say the blessing because if God knows everything, he already knows I don’t like green beans. I can’t lie and thank him for food I don’t want to eat.” Thinking I had a solid defense, I smiled smugly. But the silent stare from my mother that followed told me the argument was not good enough. She simply said, “Then you can thank God for the fact that you have food and are not starving.” I had sense enough to do as I was told and to eat what was set before me.

In 1963, my father died of a heart attack at the age of 47 after four years of struggling to recover from his first coronary. I was a senior in high school and had prayed constantly with my family and others in our church community for his recovery. I began to question prayer and to wonder if there was a God or any Supreme Being who cared or heard our prayers. For a while, prayers would bubble to the surface of my thoughts as they always had, but I refused to consciously pray. I adopted the college student’s disdain for such superstitious behavior, thinking even if there was a God, I wanted to make it clear that I was angry. Still, the prayers were always there, like little notes to God that I couldn’t send.

During my sophomore year in college, I heard Father Malcolm Boyd read prayers from a book he had written, *Are You Running With Me, Jesus?* Charlie Byrd, playing classical guitar music, accompanied his reading and the prayers were like many of my own most desperate petitions to God. It was a moving and memorable experience. Here was a priest who prayed like I did, not only

in his own words, but also often on the run and usually needing help. I now label these prayers my ‘foxhole pleas’ from the saying that there are no atheists in foxholes. Most of us, I’ve concluded, pray out of sheer desperation when we need a miracle, even if we generally claim God doesn’t exist. Is it possible that airports and traffic jams of all kinds prompt more people to pray than all the religions, and ministers ever did? Dietrich Bonhoffer uses the term “cheap grace” to describe this kind of desire we have for a quick fix by God as miracle worker. I gradually realized that I had counted on my prayers to bring the miracle that would save my father, and my faith had been shaken, but was not destroyed.

The image of God as a miracle worker is similar to another that prompted prayers in the past and still does. In this image God is a waiter and I am the favorite customer ordering from an unlimited menu. I order, sincerely believing that the order will be properly and promptly filled. When it’s not, I express outrage, like the angry customer saying, “Waiter, there’s a fly in my soup,” or “This is not what I ordered. Take it back.” Unfortunately, the answer back from God often seems to be what my father said about flies at picnics: “Think of the fly as extra protein.” The answer that is hardest to accept is “It may not be what you ordered, but I’ve decided it is what you need” (my mother’s usual answer to any menu objections). I learned early in life and keep relearning that with prayer there will be an answer, but to expect the unexpected. In her book, *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott describes a woman who begins her day with the one word prayer, “Whatever,” and in the evening says, “Oh well.”

When I was a social worker helping clients on welfare, I was given another lesson in prayer by a grandmother whose life read like the book of *Job* in the Bible. Disaster struck frequently and every kind of illness and tragedy had affected her life, yet her faith was strong. She radiated a joy that made me want to see her more for my own benefit than from any help I could give her. One day I asked her how she could be so strong and at peace. She said that her grandmother taught her to pray saying, “Now honey, when you pray don’t ask God to take away your troubles. Just ask him to make your shoulders strong enough to carry them.” I’m learning to pray as she did for strength and the faith to accept all that I can’t understand and don’t want to carry.

Gradually I’ve realized that my conversations with God come from a life-long recognition of a source of light and life that is both within me and beyond me, transcendent and omnipresent. Daily prayer has been and will continue to be a part of my life. In the movie *Shadowlands*, the words of C. S. Lewis express well what I’ve learned from all my protests and prayers. He says, “I pray because I’m helpless. The need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn’t change God. It changes me.”

HOLDING IN THE LIGHT:

Haesun Rhee, Mina's mother
Woody Woodall
Eric Glenn

Those wishing to have requests for holding in the light included in this monthly newsletter may give the names to a member of Care & Counsel.

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ATLANTA FRIENDS MEETING

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Are you a newcomer to the Atlanta Friends community and would like a nametag?

We would be happy to make you a permanent nametag. You can leave a request in one of the baskets on the front table. When Carol Gray has made one for you, it will be placed in the black file box on the greeting table.

Atlanta Friends Meeting has three email lists:

To receive the announcement sheets and other announcements relating directly to the life of the meeting, send a blank email to

afmannouncements-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

To receive announcements AND posts about a broader range of topics relating to being a Quaker, send a blank email to afmdiscussion-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

To receive the newsletter by email, send a blank email to afmnewsletter-subscribe@yahoo.groups.com. When asked to confirm, select the option to confirm by email.

Would you like to appear in future AFM Directories?

Send your name and contact information to Brent Wolff at afmdirectory@gmail.com.

What does investing in your spiritual community look like for you and your family?

Atlanta Friends Meeting accepts contributions of your time, resources, and money! You can place a financial contribution in the slot marked "Contributions" in the greeting area of the Meetinghouse or mail to the Treasurer at our mailing address.

To donate online with a credit card or paypal, visit atlantaquakers.org/contact.htm. Thank you!

Want to submit an announcement, letter, article, and anything else of interest to Friends for the newsletter?

Send items to atlquakerltr@gmail.com. Submissions may be edited for length and format. THE DEADLINE FOR NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS IS THE 20TH DAY OF EACH PRECEDING MONTH.

This newsletter is a publication of the Atlanta Friends Meeting. Views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily that of the Meeting.