

# ATLANTA FRIENDS MEETING NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2025



Current and back issues of the newsletter are available at <https://atlantaquakers.org/newsletter/>

<https://atlantaquakers.org/announcement-sheet/> will always have the most recent announcement sheet

Meeting for Worship each First Day (Sunday) in Person & via Zoom, 10:00 am  
(For those who prefer a more intimate worship experience, we have resumed small meetings for worship in the library at 10 am.)

Details for Sunday worship and for our Wednesday small meetings for worship as well as worship opportunities with the Macon Worship Group, in person and via zoom, are in the announcement sheet (link just above).

## QUERY FOR FEBRUARY

How do I maintain simplicity, moderation, and honesty in my speech, my manner of living, and my daily work?

Do I recognize when I have enough?

Do I live simply, and promote the right sharing of the world's bounty?

## POEMS

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*by patricia turner*

--Hope is a Choice--

We have no country  
like the son of man  
we have no place to  
lay our head.  
God is our country  
God is our homeland  
We are sojourners  
strangers in a temporal  
world chained to time  
the divine one  
is our freedom  
past all pain  
and remembering.

--Home of the Free and the Brave--

On the way to becoming  
a police state  
you punish dissent  
bury their  
voices  
in an open grave  
with plenty  
of room left  
until  
the voices  
fall silent  
and  
cop cities  
cover the land  
of the  
once  
free  
but now afraid.

"The Divine One  
has not given  
us  
the spirit of fear  
but  
of  
power, love and a sound mind."

**PLEASE HOLD  
IN THE LIGHT:**

Jennifer Crumpley  
Julia Ewen  
Carolyn VanArsdale's  
mother  
Harriet Unfug's family

*If you wish to have  
requests for holding in  
the light included in  
this monthly  
newsletter and in the  
announcement sheet,  
please give the names  
to a member of Care  
& Counsel.*

**Atlanta Friends Committees and Other Contacts**

Clerk of the Meeting: David Small, afmclerk1@gmail.com  
Office Coordinator: Nina Gooch, atlantaquakers@gmail.com  
Treasurer: Stacey Sharer, afmtreasurer1@gmail.com  
Ministry & Worship: Clive Gordon, 404-534-1091  
Finance: Paul Mangelsdorf, 770-677-4280  
Administration: Jack Honderd, jkhonderd@gmail.com  
Social Concerns: Karen Morris, karenh.1415@gmail.com  
Care & Counsel: Jennifer Crumpley, afm.care.counsel@gmail.com  
Quakers for Racial Equality: Susan Firestone, susanfires@gmail.com  
Committee on Undoing Racism in AFM: Lissa Place, lissaplace@yahoo.com  
Religious Education: Amanda Gendreau, AmandaGendreau5@gmail.com  
Young Friends Program Coordinator, Asa Kramer-Dickie, afm.young.friends@gmail.com  
Library: Derek Harootune Otis, dharootuneotis@gmail.com  
Nominating: Ellen McQueen (missliveoak@aol.com) and  
Elizabeth Lamb (gelds@comcast.net)  
Newsletter Editor: Nina Gooch, atlquakerltr@gmail.com  
Webmaster: Emma Bingham, afm.web.wizard@gmail.com  
Bookkeeper: Jonah McDonald, afmbookkeeper1@gmail.com

**For info about these and other committees, visit or download the AFM Handbook from <https://atlantaquakers.org/handbook/> OR contact the Clerk of the committee you're interested in.**

## MIRRORING AND MAGNIFYING THE LIGHT

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The longer I live, the more deeply I learn that love – whether we call it friendship or family or romance – is the work of mirroring and magnifying each other's light. Gentle work. Steadfast work. Life-saving work in those moments when life and shame and sorrow occlude our own light from our view, but there is still a clear-eyed loving person to beam it back. In our best moments, we are that person for another.

*James Baldwin*

## 1921 TULSA RACE MASSACRE: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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*shared by Herb Edwards of the the Reparations, Reparative Justice & Right Relations Committee*

The Justice Department recently released a report confirming the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre was a coordinated, military-style attack, not mere mob violence. While it acknowledges the atrocities and systemic racism involved, no legal action can be taken due to the statute of limitations and the death of perpetrators. Survivors' lawsuits seeking reparations were dismissed by the Oklahoma Supreme Court in 2024, citing public nuisance laws as insufficient grounds. Despite frustration, descendants hope the DOJ's findings will support future efforts for justice and reparations.

The Justice Department's report on the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, released on January 10, 2025, provides a comprehensive review. The main findings of the report include:

### **Nature of the Attack**

The massacre was not merely mob violence, but a "coordinated, military-style attack" on the Black community of Greenwood.

The report describes the event as systematic and organized, transcending typical mob violence.

### **Scale and Impact**

- As many as 300 people were killed, with hundreds more injured.
- The attack resulted in the destruction of 35 city blocks, including homes, businesses, schools, and churches.
- Thousands of Black residents were left homeless.
- The estimated damage in 1921 dollars was \$1.8 million, equivalent to about \$32.2 million today.

### **Law Enforcement Involvement**

- The Tulsa Police Department "deputized hundreds of white residents," many of whom had been agitating for violence.
- There are credible reports that some law enforcement officers participated in murders, arson, and looting.
- The Oklahoma National Guard also played a role in the chaos and destruction.

### **Aftermath and Obstruction**

- Survivors were detained in makeshift camps under armed guard.
- The city government put up obstacles to reconstruction, imposing harsh new fire codes to prevent rebuilding in the area.
- Victims were never compensated for their losses.

## Legal Implications

The report concludes that while federal prosecution might have been possible a century ago, there is no longer any venue for criminal charges due to the statute of limitations and the fact that all perpetrators are deceased.

## Historical Significance

This report marks the first thorough federal government reckoning with the massacre, officially acknowledging, and preserving the historical record of these events. While the report provides a detailed account of the atrocities committed, it also highlights the lack of accountability at the time and the ongoing struggle for justice and reparations for the descendants of the victims.

After the Oklahoma Supreme Court's dismissal of their lawsuit, the survivors of the Tulsa Race Massacre are pursuing two courses of action:

**Federal Investigation:** They requested President Biden and the Department of Justice to open an investigation under the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Act, which allows the reopening of racially motivated cold cases before 1970. Meetings with the Department of Justice have been held, but no decision has been announced.

**Community Advocacy:** Their legal team continues to advocate for justice and reparations, emphasizing the ongoing harm caused by the massacre and seeking alternative remedies through public and governmental support.

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## QUIET MOMENTS: BOOK OF POETRY FROM AFM MEMBER

Sharon McDonnell writes: "My son, Morgan McDonnell, a member of AFM now living in Santa Clarita, California has published a book of poems. It is called *Quiet Moments* and those that know him – as a wee sprite in Meeting or as a student at Atlanta Friends School – might enjoy looking at it." It is available at <https://morgandell.gumroad.com//QuietMomentsBook> or via Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/Quiet-Moments-Morgan-McDonnell-ebook/dp/B0DJX4JDTC> .

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## SEEKING BOARD MEMBERS FOR ORGANIZATION SUPPORTING FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE

Uplifting People is an Atlanta-based organization that provides support to those who have recently been released from incarceration. This helps reduce the chance of them returning to prison. Long-time Atlanta Meeting member, Free Polazzo, helped found the organization, and our Social Concerns Committee has been supporting it for many years. Ponchellis Jackson, director of Uplifting People, has invited one or more Meeting attenders to be on Uplifting People's board. Legal experience helpful, but not required. To apply or to ask questions, contact Ponchellis at [PJackson@upliftingpeople.org](mailto:PJackson@upliftingpeople.org) or 404-536-3343. Here are more details of their mission: <https://upliftingpeople.org>."

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## CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH WITH LISTENING 4 JUSTICE -- starting Feb 1 & Feb 4

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Listening 4 Justice (a leading of long-time AFM member Dr. Folami Prescott-Adams) is offering two learning experiences this February.

Black History Through Our Music, meeting Saturdays, starting February 1, from 12-1:30pm ET, features Folami and Professor/Musician Mausiki Scales exploring Black history and musical heritage through weekly themes of Black Music History, Black Music as Resistance, The Messages in the Music, and the Future of Black Music. More details and registration at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/black-history-through-our-music-an-l4j-experience-tickets-1064010727729>.

The original Listening 4 Justice Series (being offered for the fifth year in a row) will be meeting Tuesdays and Thursdays, starting February 4, from 1-2pm ET, creating a supportive, multicultural, and multigenerational space to examine racism's historical roots while working toward meaningful action. More details and registration at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/listening-4-justice-series-tickets-1064012964419>.

Both series are \$95 each, with scholarships available (contact [amara@htcatalysts.net](mailto:amara@htcatalysts.net)). These Black-led programs welcome all participants who bring respect and humility to the learning journey.

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## TWO BENEFIT CONCERTS AT MEETINGHOUSE -- Saturday, February 1 & Sunday, February 2

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February 1 at 7 pm and February 2 after potluck (1 pm), you can enjoy two concerts of Satire and Social Commentary with award winning folk singers **Tom Neilson** and **Lynn Waldron**! Each performance will feature different sets of songs, so attending both is twice the fun! Proceeds will benefit Casa Alterna & SAYMA's Racial Conflict Transformation Program. Please see the Promotional Posters with times, details and the advance tickets link at <https://atlantaquakers.org/special-events>. Everyone is welcome, so please freely share the webpage link and posters with your friends, family and communities! For questions, or to VOLUNTEER TO HELP WITH SETUP AND CLEANUP, email Aaron Ruscetta at [arxaaron@gmail.com](mailto:arxaaron@gmail.com).

About Casa Alterna from their website <https://casaalterna.org>: "At Casa Alterna, we embody radical hospitality by offering short- and long-term housing to asylum-seeking families, building a supportive community as they journey toward healing and new beginnings. Our mission is to provide a space where those fleeing violence find safety, support, and the resources to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope. Building on years of immigrant solidarity, since 2020, we've welcomed hundreds of asylum seekers from over 50 countries into our spaces of care and renewal."

The SAYMA (Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association) Racial Conflict Transformation program is a unique opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions and transformative experiences aimed at addressing racial conflict, and expanding our institutional capacity to hold space for uncomfortable conversations about race and racism in Quakerism, moving SAYMA and its members toward understanding and dismantling systemic racism. The program includes Quaker social theory and anti-racist praxis. There are small monthly affinity groups for White identifying participants and separate group(s) for Friends of Color. Its goals include building deep connections with Friends engaged in anti-racist work and exploring ideas, sharing perspectives, and supporting each other.

## SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS & QUAKERISM 101 & ADULT FIRST DAY SCHOOL – Sundays

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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 Spiritual Journeys, stories where Friends describe their understanding of God and religion in their lives. On February 2, Mark Taylor will share his Spiritual Journey. (To listen to Cheryl Cowherd's Spiritual Journey shared November 3, visit <https://tinyurl.com/br8n9nr7>; for Connor McMahon's on December 1, visit <https://tinyurl.com/yrxtnf63>; for Tom Denham's shared January 5, visit <https://tinyurl.com/3d9a464x>. For other past Spiritual Journeys, see previous newsletters or contact Mary Ann Downey at [madowney@mindspring.com](mailto:madowney@mindspring.com).)

We offer a standing invitation to all attenders and members (those new to meeting, transfers from other meetings, or longtime Atlanta members and attenders) to share your answers to these questions. Some Friends find it helpful to do this as an interview. For more information and to schedule a time to tell your story, contact Mary Ann Downey at [madowney@mindspring.com](mailto:madowney@mindspring.com).

Continuing in February, on the second, third and fourth Sundays Adult First Day School will offer its annual Quakerism 101, for those who are new to the meeting as well as those who would like a refresher. For February, the book is *Four Doors to Meeting for Worship* by William Taber (Pendle Hill Pamphlet #306). Taber provides a useful way of thinking about the process of preparing for meeting for worship, settling into meeting, deepening our experience and moving out in the world maintaining this spirit. We have some copies at the meeting house, and it is available from Pendle Hill at <https://tinyurl.com/56n5kv99>.

Adult First Day School meets in person at the meetinghouse, and people can also join via Zoom. (Zoom details in the announcement sheet; see link at top of page 1.) For more details or questions, please contact Elizabeth Lamb.

## FIRST SUNDAY POTLUCK -- Sunday, February 2

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Please join us for a potluck lunch following the rise of Meeting. Weather permitting, there are several outdoor tables for those who prefer to eat outside. Green Friends and FLGBTQC (Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns) will meet during potluck this Sunday. (See details in announcement sheet.)

*If you can, please bring not only enough food for your family, but also extra for newcomers and guests.*

## THE EXPONENTIAL IMPACT OF HISTORICAL AND ONGOING INJUSTICE: A CALL TO ACTION Monday February 3

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Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge and Dr. Harold D. Weaver, Jr., of the Black Quaker Project (<https://www.theblackquakerproject.org/>), will deliver Pendle Hill's First Monday Lecture in celebration of Black History Month. The two Quaker scholar-activists will examine major historical injustices committed by the Western world, the complicity of the Religious Society of Friends in these crimes, and modes of analysis and solutions put forth by modern Quakers of color and other Quakers for atonement. Monday, 3 February 2025, 7:30pm-9:00pm Eastern Time. Hybrid Lecture-Presentation (Pendle Hill Campus and via Zoom). To attend, please register at <https://tinyurl.com/ynht5uyd>. Info about Pendle Hill (a Quaker study, retreat, and conference center) at [pendlehill.org](http://pendlehill.org).

## FLGBTQC GAMES NIGHT – Tuesday, February 4

Atlanta's local FLGBTQC (Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender – and genderqueer, nonbinary and genderfluid – Concerns) group will be holding their monthly game night on Tuesday, February 4 at 6:30 pm at the meetinghouse. We will be meeting in the library this month. You (and all your friends) are invited for conversation, games and potluck-style food. Allies welcome! We encourage you to bring any board game or other tabletop game you'd like to share with the group. Just be willing to explain the game to new players, or (if it's your first time playing it) be willing to learn it along with the rest of us. We will also eat together at potluck on Sunday, February 2. For more information, contact Nina Gooch or Derek Harootune Otis. To join the group email list and receive updates, contact Nina in the office. (Beginning in March, Games Night will be on the first Saturday of every month.)

## COMMITTEE ON UNDOING RACISM IN AFM -- Tuesday, February 4

The Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting (CURAFM) will have their regular first Tuesday Zoom meeting on Tuesday, February 4, at 7:30 pm ET. Everyone is welcome! Tentative agenda topics include planning for the March 29, 2025 in-person Restorative Circle Learning Experience with S. Bowland, use of budget for 2025, nominations for the Standing Response Group, and CURAFM coordination with other committees for a trip to the Legacy museum or other interactive projects. For more info, or if you have a question or comment between meetings, please contact Lissa Place (lissaplace@yahoo.com or 678-793-9260) or Susan Firestone (susanfires@gmail.com or 404-268-6480).

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86834391717?pwd=sPP4oYvOxqelEnebuTjnnryBgrKI6E.1>

Meeting ID: 868 3439 1717

Passcode: 611281

## BOOKS BY AND ABOUT PEOPLE OF COLOR -- Thursday, February 6

The book group reading works by and about people of color meets at 1:30 p.m. on the first Thursday of the month in person in combination with Zoom. The book for February 6 is *Erasure* by Percival Everett. Upcoming books include:

March 6: *American Marriage* by Tayari Jones

April 3: *James* by Percival Everett

May 1: *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez

June 5: *Wandering Stars* by Tommy Orange

For questions or the Zoom link, contact Susan Cole (cole2544@bellsouth.net).

## REPARATIONS, REPARATIVE JUSTICE AND RIGHT RELATIONS COMMITTEE -- Thurs, Feb 13

You are invited to attend the open meetings of the Reparations, Reparative Justice and Right Relations committee. RRJRR for short. We will meet on Thursday, February 13 at 2 pm on Zoom (new day of the week). Our committee invites interested individuals and also individuals who represent a Meeting group or committee to join us.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/5171998073?pwd=b1IYUHVPczRVM0s5VmVoMmhwekE1dz09&omn=84326887254>

Meeting ID: 517 199 8073

Passcode: CronesMeet



## MEETING FOR WORSHIP WITH ATTENTION TO BUSINESS – Sunday, February 16

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Stay after meeting for worship, whether in person or via Zoom. Meeting for Business will be held in a combined format about 11:45, using the Zoom coordinates for Meeting for Worship.

The minutes for last month's meeting are below.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89686276751?pwd=M29EYlIFWEhSQUtZRVVPalFFYmVDQT09>

Meeting ID: 896 8627 6751

Passcode: 789456

## ABOUT MEETING FOR WORSHIP WITH ATTENTION TO BUSINESS

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*"Friends' decision-making is rooted in the spiritual oneness of a religious community. We reject majority rule for the higher goal of reaching decisions in unity, through distinctive attitudes developed by Friends over the centuries. Our process is democratic in the sense that everyone is encouraged to participate. However, it also goes beyond democracy in that it does not rely solely on human will or ability. Participants are expected to put aside personal desires and allow themselves to be led by a Guide beyond the self."* (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice 1998)

*"Whenever we remember that we are in the presence of God, transformation is possible. Every task, no matter how mundane, becomes an act of worship, a word of praise offered to God. This is the basis for Quaker business practice. We call it 'meeting for worship with attention to business' because it is grounded in an awareness of God's presence!"* (Friends General Conference)

Atlanta Friends Meeting guidelines for meeting for Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business are at [https://atlantaquakers.org/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines\\_for\\_Meeting\\_for\\_Business.pdf](https://atlantaquakers.org/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines_for_Meeting_for_Business.pdf). In addition, <https://www.friendsjournal.org/meeting-for-business-as-spiritual-rehearsal> talks more about the spiritual side of Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business as well as the ways the Quaker decision-making process differs from consensus. Another resource is Pendle Hill Pamphlet #307, *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting*. The AFM library has two copies, and there's a description of it at <https://pendlehill.org/product/beyond-consensus-salvaging-sense-meeting/>.

## NEWCOMER WELCOME DINNER -- Tuesday, February 18

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On the 18<sup>th</sup> of each month, newcomers to Atlanta Friends Meeting are invited to dinner at the home of a member or long-time attender. You'll have a chance to get to know other new attenders as well as long-time Quakers in a casual setting. See announcement sheet for more details.

(If you are interested in hosting a winter or spring Welcome Dinner, held on the 18th of each month, please contact Jim Tolmach at 404-294-5194 or [jimtolmach@icloud.com](mailto:jimtolmach@icloud.com).)

## QUAKERS FOR PEACE IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL -- Thursday, February 20

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On February 20 at 7:30 pm (EST/NYC), Quakers for Peace in Palestine & Israel is hosting a panel discussion on Paths to Liberation in Palestine & Lessons from South Africa. To join this Zoom event, register at [https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/1w13J78EQMC\\_jfz9z6-CGQ](https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/1w13J78EQMC_jfz9z6-CGQ).

For more information on the panelists and to share info about this event, see this flyer:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1R2guw4uvKZzZtf2qBrUWyPVsi36sH5GN/view?usp=sharing>



## DINNER WITH GUESTS FROM THE COLLEGE OF THE MUSCOGEE NATION – Thurs, Feb 20

Atlanta Friends Meeting is located in the homelands of the Muscogee Nation, and as part of working toward restoring right relations, we seek to build relationships of respect with Muscogee Creek people. AFM will host a “getting to know you” dinner on Thursday, Feb. 20 with 10 guests from the College of the Muscogee Nation during their “return to the homelands” trip. The College of the Muscogee Nation (CMN) in Okmulgee, Oklahoma is the institution of higher education for the Muscogee Creek Nation emphasizing native culture, values, language and self-determination. The homelands return trip helps students connect more to their history and culture from the Southeast. The Feb. 20 dinner at AFM is a first meeting with limited space for Friends, and we hope to offer future opportunities for Friends to meet College of Muscogee Nation students and teachers. The AFM Reparations, Reparative Justice, and Right Relations (RRJRR) committee is the lead sponsor organizing the event. If you have questions or would like to help, contact RRJRR committee member Waman French at [waman.french@friendsschoolatlanta.org](mailto:waman.french@friendsschoolatlanta.org). See announcements closer to the date for more details.

## FGC: QUAKER TOOLS FOR THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY – Mondays, February 24 thru May 19

Friends use many different tools to live with integrity, make thoughtful decisions, and stay grounded amidst the hubbub of life. Starting on February 24 (*note change in date*), the Spiritual Deepening program of Friends General Conference (FGC) is offering an eRetreat called "Quaker Tools for the Spiritual Journey." It includes time to listen and learn together in community. Get details and register now at <https://www.fgcquaker.org/event/quaker-tools-for-the-spiritual-journey-eretreat/>.

## FCNL SPRING LOBBY WEEKEND – March 22 to 25; register for in person lobbying by Mon, Mar 3

Spring Lobby Weekend is Friends Committee for National Legislation's (FCNL's) young adult conference that brings hundreds of people to DC every year to lobby Congress for important policy change. Focus during Spring Lobby Weekend 2025: to prevent millions of people from losing healthcare and food assistance. The deadline to register for in-person lobbying is March 3, 2025. For more information and to register, visit: <https://web.cvent.com/event/a2527e6f-a65c-4e8e-9d24-19b4deaf7b00/summary>. Full scholarships available thru AFM. Contact Clive Gordon of Ministry & Worship before registering. General information about FCNL is at [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org).

## WHITE PRIVILEGE CONFERENCE – March 26 to 29; pre-registration open now

Pre-register now with Friends General Conference (FGC) for a discount code to the 2025 White Privilege Conference in Hartford, CT from March 26-29! FGC says: Our time together will be a vital opportunity to deepen our antiracism work, build collective power, and strengthen community as we navigate our everchanging political landscape. You may complete the pre-registration form with FGC (<https://fgc.tfaforms.net/5109910>) to get \$100/person off the conference registration fee. This also ensures you will be connected to the Quaker community present at the conference this coming year. (We expect to have a dedicated Quaker worship + reflection space.) Once you have pre-registered with FGC, you must register with the White Privilege Conference at <https://tinyurl.com/mwvs4wkm>.

RESTORATIVE CIRCLE LEARNING EXPERIENCE – Saturday, March 29

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On March 29, 2025 from 1:30 to 4:30 pm in the AFM meeting room, the Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting (CURAFM) invites you to participate in a Restorative Circle Learning Experience with S.Y. Bowland. She is skilled in conflict resolution and restorative practices. S. Y. Bowland is a co-editor of *Beyond Equity and Inclusion: Recentring the profession* and of *RE-CENTERING Culture and Knowledge in Conflict Resolution Practice*. She attends AFM worship and committees virtually and is active in SAYMA.

One of the purposes of this Restorative Circle Learning Experience is to help create a community of Friends that is open to exploring difficult situations that involve race matters in a sacred, brave space. There will be an opportunity for building community and interactive sharing of stories with listening and support. This Restorative Circle Learning Experience is open to both people who are new to restorative circles and those who have had experience with restorative practices through AFM or elsewhere. People who have had some previous training will have the chance to do hands-on practice in a circle, followed by the whole group coming back together.

This event is free for all Atlanta Friends Meeting members and attenders. CURAFM encourages everyone to participate as AFM builds a spiritual community that embraces inclusion, equity, and anti-racism. Registration is necessary for planning purposes. Please contact Karen Morris at [karenth.1415@gmail.com](mailto:karenth.1415@gmail.com) by March 23, 2025 to register for the March 29, 2025 event. For more information, contact Susan Firestone at [susanfires@gmail.com](mailto:susanfires@gmail.com)

SAVE THE DATE: GATHERED MEETING RETREAT – September 5 to 7

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Facilitators: Christina Repoley and Folami Adams. At Calvin Center.  
Mark your calendar now and plan to gather the weekend of September 5-7 with Friends to explore individual and group discernment.



MINUTES FOR FIRST MONTH MEETING FOR WORSHIP WITH ATTENTION TO BUSINESS  
January 19, 2025, held in person and via Zoom in a blended meeting  
Minutes Recorded Pending Approval

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**Attendance:** Mike Aland, Richard Allen, Cathy Amanti, Chiron, Cheryl Cowherd, Jennifer Crumpley, Jennifer Dickie, Mary Ann Downey, Julia Ewen, Susan Firestone, Julie Foster, Larry Foster, Waman French, Eric Glenn, Nina Gooch, Charles Hicks, Bill Holland, Jack Honderd, Elizabeth Lamb, Georgia Lord, Judy Lumb, Paul Mangelsdorf, Susan May, Caroline Morris, Karen terHorst Morris, Derek H. Otis, Lissa Place, Christina Repoley, Arianna Rodriguez, Stacey Sharer, Bert Skellie, Karen Skellie, Elizabeth Valera, Brent Wolff, David Small (Clerk), Emma Bingham (Recording Clerk)

**Worship**

**Query for the First Month:**

Every stage of our lives offers fresh opportunities. Responding to divine guidance, try to discern the right time to undertake or relinquish responsibilities without undue pride or guilt. Attend to what love requires of you, which may not be great busyness. Do I center my life in an awareness of God’s presence so that all things take their rightful place?

## ***Discernment***

**Minute-01-19-25:01:** The Atlanta Friends Meeting appreciates the service of Friend Emma Bingham and recognizes that her two years of service as Recording Clerk have led to clarity in heart in our written word.

- **Ministry and Worship** — Bill Holland reported for Ministry and Worship Committee.
- Supporting the Continuing Ministry of Mary Ann Downey

The Atlanta Friends Meeting has a process for formally recognizing Friends who are led into a ministry. We currently hold four recognized ministries: Mary Ann Downey, Anton Flores-Maisonet, Richard Allen, and Jennifer Dickie. We hold those ministries under our care. In turn, they are accountable to the meeting, supported by an anchoring committee appointed by meeting, and they annually report to the community.

We have received the annual report of the ministry of Mary Ann Downey. We will share it with you now.

Mary Ann read her report.

*December days invite reflection. I'm looking back and looking ahead for the ministry that I carry under the care of the meeting. When I consider what I've given this year, I'm reminded that "it is in giving that we receive". And I am grateful for the gifts I've been given in service to the Atlanta Meeting and to Friends outside the meeting. I am grateful that I'm able to continue this work in partnership with Bill Holland, and with the support of my anchoring committee Nan O'Connor, Dave Thurman and Lewis Fuller.*

*I was asked to lead a retreat in the spring of 2024 for Birmingham Friends meeting on the role of clerk. Because the pandemic led to an influx of new attenders, mostly young adults, Friends were eager to help them learn more about the process of meeting for worship with attention to business. The retreat we led combined instruction on Friends spirit led decisions and the clearness committee process: the gifts of individual discernment and group discernment. This service helped me see the need in meetings for both levels of discernment, and I was inspired by the commitment of Friends of all ages.*

*I was surprised by a request in April from the High Museum to be interviewed for the Seeing with Spirit speaker series. The program features a public conversation between a representative of a contemplative/faith-based practice and a museum facilitator around a selected artwork. I was asked to speak about my spiritual practice, the relation between art and my spiritual practice, why I chose a particular artwork and what I take away. The interview was followed by a conversation with the audience and recorded. The gift of speaking about my choice of an amazing piece of pottery made by an enslaved potter, David Drake, self-taught to read and write, led me to explore my faith and how I share it in new ways.*

*Working with Friends to plan our September Gathered Meeting Retreat with the leadership of Christina Repoley on "The Story of Me, The Story of Us, The Story of Now" was a special joy. Fifty-four Friends gathered for the weekend and enjoyed getting to know each other, learning our meeting history and the challenges for our community now. Telling our stories, individually and collectively for meeting has been a way our meeting has grown since the first gatherings of Friends in the 1940s.*

*In 2007, realizing that elderly Friends were passing, and we were losing their stories, I began inviting them to offer the stories of their spiritual journey on the first Sunday of each month.*

*I continue to do this, recording those willing, old and young, and now plan to make our collection of stories available and accessible in our meeting library. Everyone who speaks, tells me that it helps them reflect on the path that led them to our meeting, and when we gather to listen, it is a way we build a closer community. Some Friends find it helps them decide to request membership.*

*It is a gift to serve on clearness committees for membership, and marriage, as well as with conflicts among Friends inside and outside our meeting. The challenge is to help each other find what spirit leads us to do and discern how to practice our faith in service. Working with families to plan and conduct memorial services I always learn more about the person, who they were as a parent, spouse, sibling or friend. This year, I shared a recording of Paul Baker and Margie Reece's spiritual journey given at meeting with their family. Margie's children said they had not heard her speak more than a few words for the last eight years because of her Alzheimer's decline.*

*Accompanying Friends in hospice at the end of life led me to write an article, "Loving and Letting Go" that was published in the December issue of Friends Journal. The theme of the issue was "Spiritual Optimism vs Spiritual Pessimism". I realized that supporting Friends on this journey expresses our spiritual optimism and the words attributed to Teilhard de Chardin that we are not just human beings having a human experience, but spiritual beings having a human experience. Death, in our faith, is a step on the journey, a continuation of our spiritual journey.*

*In 2022, we began using microphones in meeting for worship with attention to business and in memorial meetings to help those attending on zoom hear all who speak but have resisted concerns expressed about the inability to hear messages in meeting for worship. I'm one of many older Friends with a hearing loss and even with hearing aids am often unable to hear messages shared in meeting for worship, or our concerns and joys, introduction of new attenders, and announcements. Yet I resisted suggestions that we use mics in meeting for worship, feeling that it would keep us from a deep and gathered worship. After our Gathered Meeting Retreat, however, I felt a strong and persistent leading out of my need and a concern for accessibility and inclusivity to propose that Ministry and Worship begin using microphones in meeting for worship. After deliberation in M&W and meeting for worship with attention to business, we agreed to begin introducing the use of microphones in November and December by the Friend closing meeting and use of a mic minister to carry a mic to others wishing to speak. On January 5, 2025, we will begin using microphones in meeting for worship.*

*A query from Britain Yearly Meeting: "Are you open to new light from whatever source it may come?" As I begin the new year, I hope to be open to new light and to question my resistance to new ideas.*

The old question about ministry is 'does it have life in it?' Mary Ann's anchoring committee and Ministry and Worship are in unity that Mary Ann's ministry is alive and growing. We recommend the meeting continue her ministry under our care.

**Minute-01-19-25:02:** We have received the annual report of Mary Ann Downey's Ministry under the Care of Atlanta Friends Meeting with thanks and gratitude for her faithfulness. We thank Mary Ann for the many gifts she shares with our meeting. We acknowledge and support the continued life of her ministry.

- Kevin Moran's request to lay down his membership in Atlanta Meeting.

We reported two months ago the meeting had received an email request in early November from Kevin Moran requesting that his membership in Atlanta Friends Meeting and the Religious Society of Friends be laid down. Several of us have attempted to contact Kevin by phone and email to understand his decision and express our care and support for him. Through email he has briefly and succinctly stated he is clear that he no longer wishes to be a Quaker and does not desire additional discussion. We reluctantly accept his decision.

**Minute-01-19-25:03:** Kevin Moran became a member of the Atlanta Friends Meeting by application in March of 2022. During his time with us he regularly attended meeting for worship. He was an active member of the Social Concerns Committee and served as its clerk. He served briefly as our meeting's representative to SAYMA Ministry and Nurture Committee. On the recommendation of the Ministry and Worship Committee and at the request of Kevin Moran, we lay down his membership in the Atlanta Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. We offer our tender and loving regard to Kevin and remain open to any further conversation. We will miss his participation, commitment and insights.

- **FCNL** — Sue May reported on behalf of Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Sue read the following report from the FCNL Atlanta Advocacy Team.

As a meeting we have felt a particular concern for the Middle East and the search for a lasting peace. Many of our members have connections and concerns with the Middle East.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation has asked advocacy teams around the country to work with our Congress and President to restore funding for the primary UN agency serving Palestinian refugees, UNRWA — the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.

The United States has provided funds to UNRWA for over six decades, but Congress and the President suspended our contributions, as did other contributing states, after Israel claimed that 12 UNRWA agency staff had been involved in the carrying out the attacks of October 7, 2023. All 15 countries, except the United States, have now resumed funding. UNRWA was established in 1949 to address the needs of refugees displaced by the creation of the state of Israel. The agency now has 30,000 employees serving refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and East Jerusalem and Gaza. The agency provides food, clean water, healthcare, shelter, education and employment services, in addition to emergency relief. The suspension of funding threatens the lives and futures of Palestinians across the Near East.

The Atlanta Advocacy Team is working with our members of congress of pass legislation to restore funding to UNRWA. It was introduced in the last congress and will be reintroduced in this session. The meeting can be a vital part of our work in Georgia to build support for the resumption of this aid. We ask the meeting to support the work of UNRWA, to support the efforts to restore funding by our government and to make a financial contribution to UNRWA-USA, the US based nonprofit that can send contributions to the agency.

**Minute-01-19-25:04:** Atlanta Friends Meeting celebrates the Israel-Hamas ceasefire. Atlanta Meeting continues to support a just and lasting peace between the people of Israel and the Palestinian People. The Atlanta Friends Meeting supports the work of the International Community through UNRWA and other agencies to provide support and assistance to Palestinians. We support the continuation of emergency relief to sustain life and rebuild homes in Gaza.

**Minute-01-19-25:05:** The Atlanta Friends Meeting supports enacting legislation to resume funding of UNRWA. We encourage our members to contact FCNL and learn how they may be involved. While our nation has not yet resumed funding, we must do what we can.

**Minute-01-19-25:06:** Atlanta Meeting approves donating \$1000 to the UNRWA-USA to support the agency during this time of emergency need.

A Friend asked where in the budget that donation will come from, and Paul Mangelsdorf (clerk of Finance) said it is not budgeted anywhere, but we'll find a place for it.

A Friend asked if we have clarity on what the money will be used for by UNRWA. Sue said she doesn't know exactly what it will be, such as humanitarian aid in the form of food, medicine, etc., but it will go where the need is greatest. The Friend asked for further clarification about whether it was for political purposes such as the creation of the Palestinian state, or for humanitarian aid. Sue clarified that this money is for humanitarian aid designed to support Palestinian refugees.

➤ **Nominating** — Alison Mawle reported for Nominating Committee.

All terms start this month, January, 2025, and run for the number of years listed.

**Minute-01-19-25:07:** On the recommendation of Nominating Committee, Atlanta Friends Meeting approves Charles Hicks to serve as Recording Clerk for a term of 2 years.

**Minute-01-19-25:08:** On the recommendation of Nominating Committee, Atlanta Friends Meeting approves Lissa Place to serve as clerk of the Committee on Undoing Racism in AFM (CURAFM) for a term of 3 years.

**Minute-01-19-25:09:** On the recommendation of Nominating Committee, Atlanta Friends Meeting approves Paul Mangelsdorf to serve as clerk of Finance Committee for a term of 1 year.

**Minute-01-19-25:10:** On the recommendation of Nominating Committee, Atlanta Friends Meeting approves Alison Mawle to serve as clerk of Hospitality Committee for a term of 3 years.

**Minute-01-19-25:11:** On the recommendation of Nominating Committee, Atlanta Friends Meeting approves Myrna Trapp to serve as clerk of Landscape Committee for a term of 3 years.

**Minute-01-19-25:12:** On the recommendation of Nominating Committee, Atlanta Friends Meeting approves Alison Mawle to serve as Facebook Moderator for a term of 2 years.

➤ **Naming** — Charles Hicks reported for Naming Committee.

Last month, the Naming Committee brought forward attender Max Saltman to serve on the Nominating Committee. The Naming Committee brings back Max Saltman's nomination for the Nominating Committee.

**Minute-01-19-25:13:** On the recommendation of Naming Committee, Atlanta Friends Meeting approves Max Saltman to serve on Nominating Committee for a term of 3 years.

Last business meeting, the business meeting requested the Naming Committee to bring forward clerks for the Nominating Committee for the upcoming year. Ellen McQueen and Elizabeth Lamb have agreed to serve as co-clerks of the Nominating Committee, and we bring their names forward for nomination.

**Minute-01-19-25:14:** On the recommendation of Naming Committee, Atlanta Friends Meeting approves Ellen McQueen and Elizabeth Lamb to serve as co-clerks of Nominating Committee for a term of 3 years.

**SAYF** — Jennifer Dickie reported for Southern Appalachian Young Friends.

Background: SAYMA has a program called Southern Appalachian Young Friends (SAYF), and they can only run with adult volunteer support. The SAYF steering committee has developed more and more robust checks for adults regarding adults volunteering to work with children. One of the things they asked for is minutes of support from each meeting. The following is a letter from the SAYF program coordinator making this request.

*Dear Friend(s),*

*I am writing on behalf of Southern Appalachian Young Friends (SAYF), to request a minute of approval from your monthly meeting, for the following individuals to serve as Friendly Adult Nurturers (FANs) with SAYF program:*

<i>Maia Hallward</i>	<i>Devin Lenz</i>
<i>Asa Kramer-Dickie</i>	<i>Patrick O'Neil</i>
<i>Jennifer Dickie</i>	<i>Brent Wolff</i>
<i>Michael Kramer</i>	<i>Mike Aland</i>
<i>Jane Lay</i>	

*Some of these Friends may have been serving with SAYF for some time, and some may be new. We are in the process of updating minutes of approval for SAYF volunteers.*

*Friends have a long history of minuting the service, leadings and ministries of members and attenders. A minute of approval to work as an adult volunteer with the Southern Appalachian Young Friends program (SAYF) is a recognition by a volunteer's monthly meeting that the volunteer has clarity to work as a Friendly Adult Nurturer (FAN) and has the support of their Monthly Meeting to serve in this capacity.*

*We recognize that every meeting is slightly different. To seek a minute of approval, it may need to be requested from the ministry and worship committee of the volunteer's meeting, or it may be requested from the clerk directly. A minute is approved by the whole meeting through the monthly meeting for business. I ask for your support to direct this request to the proper person or persons.*

*Below is an example of a minute of approval:*

*The Atlanta Friends Meeting supports and approves Maia Hallward, Asa Kramer-Dickie, Jennifer Dickie, Michael Kramer, Jane Lay, Devin Lenz, Patrick O'Neil, Brent Wolff, and Mike Aland to serve as Friendly Adult Nurturers for the Southern Appalachian Young Friends (SAYF) program of Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association (SAYMA).*

*Thank you for your time and attention,*

*Autumn Woodward  
Program Coordinator  
she/her  
Southern Appalachian Young Friends (SAYF)*

**Minute-01-19-25:15:** The Atlanta Friends Meeting supports and approves Maia Hallward, Asa Kramer-Dickie, Jennifer Dickie, Michael Kramer, Jane Lay, Devin Lenz, Patrick O'Neil, Brent Wolff, and Mike Aland to serve as Friendly Adult Nurturers for the Southern Appalachian Young Friends (SAYF) program of Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association (SAYMA).



## **Reports**

### ➤ **Admin — Jack Honderd reported for Admin Committee.**

Jack asked for us to acknowledge the work of Aaron Ruscetta, Emma Bingham, Jennifer Dickie, and others who helped with the website and other tech needs. He also said that a tech committee is being created and a description for it is being worked on.

A Friend asked who is in charge of writing the description of the tech committee. Jack said the Admin Committee will draft it and said to let them know if anyone has input.

The sprinkler system is being worked on. There was some work done and there is also several thousand dollars more of recommended work. There is a lot of permitting and regulation involved with the Decatur Fire Marshall.

The water fountain has been fixed and is working again for the first time since the pandemic.

The spots in the ceiling are being worked on. There will be a stain sealer put on this week to make sure there are no more leaks, then it will be repaired more permanently.

### ➤ **Social Concerns Committee — Karen Morris reported for Social Concerns Committee.**

SCC approved this minute in December and they want to bring it to the meeting to ask for approval in February.

### **Minute from the Social Concerns Committee of Atlanta Friends Meeting**

Atlanta Friends Meeting reaffirms its commitment to being a sanctuary for immigrants. As people of faith who respect the inherent dignity and humanity of people whose immigration status is irregular, we recognize sanctuary as both a spiritual practice and a moral imperative. This commitment calls us to act with courage and compassion, responding to the needs of people seeking refuge while opposing policies and practices rooted in oppression, exclusion, and harm toward all people.

Sanctuary extends beyond physical shelter; it is a collective practice of living into our

testimonies of peace, equality, and community. To this end, we call on the entire Meeting to join in the work of creating a just and welcoming alternative to systems of harm. This work may include:

- Providing care, protection, and solidarity to immigrants seeking safety and stability;
- Interrupting systems of deportation and detention through advocacy, accompaniment, and, when led by the Spirit, acts of non-violent civil disobedience;
- Defending democratic structures that protect the rights of all people;
- Expanding our understanding of sanctuary through education, dialogue, and faithful discernment; Supporting organizations that embody these commitments and provide transformative sanctuary models.

We affirm our unwavering support for Casa Alterna as one expression of sanctuary. Under the care of the Meeting, Casa Alterna challenges us to embody its name — a loving “alternative”— as we respond to the realities of injustice with collective care and solidarity.

This call to sanctuary belongs to the Meeting as a whole. We are invited to discern how the Spirit leads us to act through direct participation, advocacy, education, or prayerful accompaniment. Together, we commit to practicing love and justice in a world marked by dehumanization and division.

May we move forward in faith, trusting the Spirit to guide and sustain us in this sacred work.

Karen said she would like to thank Anton for helping draft much of the language of the minute.

A Friend said they appreciate we are being called to consider our commitment to sanctuary. There was leaked news this past week that as soon as tomorrow, the Trump administration plans to expand deportations. The Friend asked if there are any initiatives that are already coming down the pipeline from SCC. Karen said this question came up in SCC's meeting as well. At the moment, there are no direct action plans, but they welcome anyone's thoughts on that. A related question is who you should get in touch with. Because of the existence of Casa Alterna, Anton would be the first person to be contacted should we become aware of a need.

Karen said there is also a larger question of how we can be involved as a meeting. Although she wasn't specifically involved in 1985 for sanctuary for people coming from Central America (it was illegal to help them at the time), there was a group that was organizing this. Karen remembers being in the meeting when the decision was made to bring a public minute of our concern and hopes and expectations, and other churches were also involved at the time.

A Friend said he was 3 years old in 1985 and is 42 now. He asked if we can approve the minute now instead of waiting for next month.

A Friend said she was sorry that Don Bender was not there. He and others were involved in sanctuary in the 1980s. There were several steps they took at that time, including bringing people to Quaker House. At the time, there was a covered meeting saying, yes, we want sanctuary. In the 80s, it was a different situation, there were people who would be put in jail for helping refugees. Then there was a transition, there were several churches that also declared their support publicly. When the question of sanctuary came up now, the situation is different now, the way we talk about political statuses, and immigration, is different now, so they decided they needed a bigger minute than the 1985 minute or the minute supporting Casa Alterna.

A Friend recommended keeping with the process of bringing the minute back next month so that Don Bender and other relevant Friends who were not present could look at it and be involved. In the meantime, it was felt that even without an approved minute, the meeting could still take actions around sanctuary.

➤ **Young Adult Friends** — Emma Bingham reported for Young Adult Friends.

On Dec. 19, 2024, Young Adult Friends held a hybrid meeting for visioning for 2025. Nine Friends attended in person and on Zoom. We talked about our feelings, concerns, and hopes for the meeting and YAFs in particular, and shared what kind of projects/concerns we're each holding individually.

It was clear to us that there were many different interests present among the group there, and interest in a few different kinds of events, including skill sharing, group volunteering, and socializing.

We decided that a rotating event schedule would be the best way to navigate that variety of interests and help us build better understanding/consciousness of ourselves as a group. One YAF will volunteer each month to run that month's event, which they will organize according to their interest, whether it's, for example, hiking together, volunteering at a warming shelter, etc. We have created a [volunteer sign-up spreadsheet](#) for people to sign up to organize events. Anyone with questions or interest in joining our chat group can contact Emma.

Our first event was Saturday, Jan. 18, a hike at Sweetwater Creek State Park. Around six YAFs were there, along with some of Adam's friends. We hope to continue this momentum in February.

A Friend said he wanted to acknowledge that it's wonderful that this group is meeting and gives him a lot of joy and confidence in the future of the meeting.

- **Finance** — Paul Mangelsdorf reported for Finance Committee.

Paul reported on the 2024 end of year financial statements.

In December as we were approving the budget, Paul had reported we had the best November in contributions, and now we've had the best December as well. Last year was the single best year we've had in terms of contributions. We have \$7,000 in excess of what we budgeted for 2025, which makes us not as worried anymore about the increase in budget.

Looking over the financial statements: We received some endowment income. We also had some unrealized gains on the other investments. Rental income was flat – even though we lost some long term renters, we got some short term renters. Expenses were also higher than budgeted. We spent some money on a private investigator looking for devices in the meeting. Utilities were also higher because we don't have a fixed rate. We also had some little maintenance items that did NOT come out of the permanent improvement fund. We've budgeted more for that this year. We also spent on the Gathered Meeting Retreat (which we hadn't had the previous couple of years). Looking at our balance sheet, it's up by almost a third, and a large part of that is the endowment, and the second part of that is the surplus we ran last year, and the third part is the Beloved Community Scholarship fund, which is not our funds but we act as fiscal agents for them.

- **Ministry and Worship** — Bill Holland reported for Ministry and Worship Committee.

### **Microphone in Meeting for Worship**

In 10<sup>th</sup> month Ministry and Worship Committee brought to Meeting for Business our leading to phase in the use of a microphone for spoken ministry during Meeting for Worship. At that time, we pointed out that we were already using microphones during Meeting for Worship at Memorial Services, Weddings and Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. Our understanding is that vocal ministry is meant for the inspiration and instruction of the whole gathered body.

Since 1990 we have tried a variety of remedies to improve the sound quality in our meeting room. We have consulted acoustic engineers, we installed sound baffles in the ceiling, we introduced the drop microphones with listening sets, and we provided instruction on speaking with greater projection.

During our time on Zoom, all of us used our computer's microphones and vocal ministry could be heard by all who participated. When we returned to the meetinghouse, we realized our meeting community had expanded and was more inclusive by adopting the hybrid format. We now understand that those who join us virtually are excluded from the ministry shared in the room as they cannot hear what is shared. We are also aware that those who speak softly or from across the room are not heard by many of us. Those with hearing challenges also are being excluded by our format.

During November and December, we phased in the use of the microphone during the closing of meeting. We announced we would be moving toward the use of microphones in worship beginning in January.

Since we started using microphones three weeks ago, we heard from several Friends who strongly oppose the use of microphones. We also heard from Friends in the room and on zoom who are deeply grateful for being fully included in our period of worship.

Our plan now is to continue the use of the microphone for spoken ministry during the 10:00 am meeting for worship in the large meeting room. We invite all comments and suggestions.

We realize there are Friends who find they worship better without technology. We have designated the library meeting as a space free from technology during 10:00 worship.

We also encourage Friends to attend other opportunities for technology free worship. The Wednesday night meeting for worship is one such space.

Our goal with the microphone is to include everyone in the ministry of giving and receiving. If vocal ministry comes from a divine source and is meant to be shared with the community, the community needs to be able to receive the message.

It was clarified that a six-month trial, which was one of the ideas floated, was not something that Ministry & Worship was in unity on. Their question was, 'What would cause us to change? If we believe ministry is meant for the entire body, what would cause us to change?' This is a strong leading for M&W Committee.

A Friend asked about jurisdiction and technology. He wonders long term about where we're at with virtual space vs physically having to be in Atlanta. He says it is something to think about with regard to using Zoom.

A Friend said she strongly supports the use of microphones. She also wanted to share one concern that resonated with her, that microphones can turn people into performers, and change their amount of speech and tone of speech. Our form of worship can be vulnerable to people who crave an audience, and she wants to ask M&W to be aware and mindful of that.

A Friend said that with regard to the six month trial, we should remember that our meeting is flexible and if we find something overwhelmingly negative with this change, we should remain open to changing again.

M&W's goal is to make everyone heard. The meeting is coming to this after many years of trying other solutions. They welcome any comments or suggestions for improvement.

➤ **SAYMA** — Alison Mawle and Jennifer Dickie reported on behalf of SAYMA.

Atlanta Friends Meeting has received two letters for consideration regarding SAYMA, one from Chattanooga Friends Meeting (CFM) and one from the Racial Conflict Transformation Team of SAYMA written in response to the CFM letter.

A Friend said the letters were fairly lengthy and it might be a better use of the meeting's time to come back next month once Friends have had more time to read them. Another Friend said she appreciated the suggestion, and asked that the letters be put in the minutes.

*[letter from Chattanooga Friends Meeting]*

Dear Friends,

Quakers value seeking decision-making on a spiritual path and resolve to find harmony even amidst division. After years of watching the Yearly Meeting devolve into dissonance and strife and our Monthly Meeting's subsequent distress at the turmoil, we have come to some clarity and are resolved to follow as the Spirit leads. Even so, this decision is a compromise and is not meant to close any doors permanently. This letter is to inform SAYMA of our decision.

To start, our current sense of our Meeting is:

- We will withhold our annual giving to SAYMA for the calendar year 2025 AND
- We will reevaluate this decision and our status within SAYMA at the end of the calendar year 2025.

SAYMA is aware that we have been considering our relationship with it for some time. To leave would be difficult and, for some—heartbreaking. CFM has had a long history with SAYMA. Some of

us have watched our children grow to adulthood participating in SAYF and seen how valuable that was. Many of us have found spiritual nurture through attendance at Gatherings and working on YM committees. Yet SAYMA has become less nurturing and more painful over the past five or more years. Chattanooga Friends has mostly withdrawn from SAYMA de facto because few found any personal benefit in attendance. Worse, several formerly active SAYMA members now refuse to have any connection with SAYMA due to their anger/ sadness/ distress at how things have been conducted.

We believe that SAYMA is veering farther away from following Quaker principles and practices.

We have seen shouting during business meetings, rants, name-calling, bullying, and other antagonistic conduct that went unchecked. This unfriendly behavior continued through several clerks without the YM establishing firm boundaries for meeting etiquette. Keynote speakers were interrupted and verbally attacked. For many business meetings, no business could be conducted, because one person and her concerns were allowed to dominate at the expense of other agenda items. This year, partly in response to a letter from CFM, SAYMA clerks implemented Guidelines for Participants in Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. This did succeed in making meetings more orderly, but did not stop Star Smith's ability to control the agenda. Our concern is not mainly the behavior of one or a few people, it is that the leadership of SAYMA has allowed this to go on for so long. Hateful speech has been not only tolerated but, at times, celebrated as confronting racism. When Swannanoa Meeting sent a letter expressing their pain at feeling that they had to leave SAYMA, a public comment was made that literally said, "Goodbye and good riddance!" No one felt the need to suggest that this is unkind and destructive to unity.

We believe tolerating all this violates our testimonies of peace, integrity, and equality. CFM is also concerned that far from containing Star Smith, she has been allowed more support and power in SAYMA. It did not seem appropriate to us to send someone to Friends World Committee on Consultation who has little regard for Quaker principles, practices, and testimonies. Likewise, it seems self-defeating to appoint someone to the Faith and Practice revision committee who has made public statements to the effect that Quakers' testimonies and customs are mere tools of oppression.

Given these observations and experiences, we find it troublesome to continue financially supporting an organization that seems to no longer hold Quaker practices and testimonies in regard. We do not wish to choose between our membership in SAYMA or our devotion to Quaker faith & practice, but if we must, the latter has our fidelity.

We recognize that the response to our letter by SAYMA-URJ will be an accusation of racism and white supremacy. This is certainly not our intent and our commitment to racial justice remains steadfast. SAYMA URJ was created to help the YM move towards anti-racism and racial justice, creating an inclusive space where everyone could feel they belong. Yet, in the years since, no progress has been made, and SAYMA has become a space where no one feels comfortable. We believe that without a change, an openness to listen, the freedom to ask questions, a return to civility in the pursuit of unity, working towards decisions through Spirit led guidance—a return to Quakerliness—the durability of SAYMA is in jeopardy.

We love SAYMA, the monthly meetings in its affiliation, and its people. Our hope is that we can galvanize one another and move toward restoration. We wait for the Spirit's guidance and the peaceful resolution of these concerns. We will continue to care about SAYMA and to hold it in the Light and watch where it goes next. In a year we will revisit all this and review the action we have taken now.

In the Light  
Chuck Jones, kate anthony, Matthew Ludwikowski  
For Chattanooga Friends Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends  
December 2024

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*[letter from SAYMA]*

January 2025

Dear Friends,

We are sharing this response as the Racial Conflict Transformation [RCT] Team of SAYMA. We have received your letters and held them in our hearts reflecting on your words and Spirit.

We find ourselves in agreement in some places and in disagreement in others which feels uncomfortable. One thing we know well is that grappling with discomfort is the work of the RCT Team and Quakers generally. Monthly and Yearly Meetings across the world are struggling with new understandings of previously accepted norms and practices. How could we not, as people of continuous revelation? SAYMA as an organization continues to be deeply committed to Quaker testimonies and practices even as we remain open to the possibility that they may look different through the process of spiritual transformation and revelation.\*

*We hold a vision of SAYMA as a stronger, more spiritual, diverse and actively anti-racist body, with children, teens and young adults flocking to our sessions. The need to overcome the culture of racial bias within the Society of Friends and SAYMA is indeed important. We see the YM taking steps toward becoming an anti-racist community and understand that the journey will take many years. [CFM Letter 10/2024]*

In this we agree. We are not where we want to be AND we are not where we were. We are a community in transition. We value the spiritual growth implicit in learning how to be in community with those who are different from ourselves. Monthly meetings and individual Friends are in different places on this journey. It is not comfortable nor easy. As your letters reflect, in years past we have experienced business meetings that were uncomfortable, and to some, untenable. We have to varying degrees felt challenged by differences in the ways Friends respond to injustice. However, we recognize that these experiences are not universal, and we disagree with CFM's assertion that ". . . no progress has been made, and SAYMA has become a space where no one feels comfortable." [CFM Letter 12/2024] As we continue to allow Spirit's movement, individuals and communities have responded as led. SAYMA, as a coalition of monthly meetings, and SAYMA Uplifting Racial Justice [URJ] have taken steps to bridge some of the differences among us including an effort to build a common language around anti-racism. We offer this list of some of the work that has been done and is ongoing and faithfully acknowledge that Star Smith has been instrumental in initiating and contributing to much of it.

- SAYMA URJ maintains a list of anti-racism resources on SAYMA.org that Friends are encouraged to explore individually and as monthly meetings;
- We established and are in the 3rd year of a Racial Conflict Transformation Program helping Friends to deal with their discomfort and the paradoxes in racial justice work. All Friends are invited to participate in the program of year-long affinity groups and 3-teaching modules;
- We invited Friend Angela Hopkins, from the Friends center for Racial Justice, to work with us to focus on Quaker process and our struggle with racial justice issues (YM 2022);

- We held threshing sessions and conversations with professional facilitators, SY Bowland and Ukumbwa Sauti, that helped us to address some conflicts between individuals and understand better some of the history of various concerns (YM 2024);
- We established guidelines for meetings for worship with attention to business (YM 2024);
- We established the Racial Conflict Transformation Team\*\* to help us move forward in less harmful ways (RM 153).

The Racial Conflict Transformation Team is tasked to develop processes that can effectively address racial conflict in the yearly meeting, identify Quaker resources available to aid us in this work, and to implement the process as needed to address racial conflict. While we are new at this, we have identified some guidelines we find helpful and we invite you to use them to support us all in this conflict.

- ★ We will look for and affirm that of God in ourselves and others. (YM 2024)
- ★ We will listen in a spirit of continuing revelation. (YM 2024)
- ★ We will listen for truth and refrain from put-downs of ourselves or others.(YM 2024)
- ★ We can disagree, recognizing that of God in one another. (YM 2024)
  - ★ We will experience and examine our discomfort recognizing that it is part of the work of becoming an antiracist community. (Singleton, G., 2006)
  - ★ We will refrain from centering our anger, hurt, or frustration on one Meeting, group, or individual recognizing that we are all deeply involved in the conflict and must work together to transform ourselves, our monthly meetings, and SAYMA and avoid factionalization. (RCT Team 2025)
  - ★ We will stay engaged and take care of ourselves. If we need to take a break or ask for help, we will so that we can stay engaged for the long term. (Singleton, G., 2006)

As the RCT Team continues to identify systems and procedures for addressing conflicts we invite Friends to stay engaged as much as they are able. We too hold this truth, *“We love SAYMA, the monthly meetings in its affiliation, and its people. Our hope is that we can galvanize one another and move toward restoration.”* [CFM Letter 12/2024] We recognize as we move forward into unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable territory of reconciliation and transformation, we may lose some Friends and we may gain new ones. We cannot force Friends to stay, nor to leave.\* This is a process for each to discern for themselves as we move forward.

Below are queries we invite Friends to consider as we move forward with racial conflict transformation.

- How do we reconcile historic Quaker practices that feel freeing to some while feeling oppressive to others?
- How do we both expand our community and care uniquely for each member? How do I answer that of God in you, even if it looks different from that of God within me? [modified from Lauren Brownlee, Quaker Speak. 10/26/2023]
- Are we ready to let go of a need to justify and defend ourselves in order to acknowledge the painful experiences of Friends of Color? [FGC, *Living the Truth of our Testimony of Equality*]

In a Spirit of conciliation,

### **Members of the Racial Conflict Transformation Team**

Daryl Bergquist, Treasurer (Birmingham FM)

Jennifer Dickie, SAYMA Presiding Clerk (Atlanta FM)



Margaret Farmer, SAYMA Asst. Clerk (Asheville FM)  
Patricia Gailey, Racial Justice Working Group (Berea FM)  
Angela Hopkins (Friends Center for Racial Justice)  
Kendall Ivie, Asst. Treasurer (West Knoxville FM)  
Karen Morris, Finance (Atlanta FM)  
Lissa Place, Ministry and Nurture (Atlanta FM)  
Melissa Preast, Yearly Meeting Planning Committee (West Knoxville FM)  
Tribal Raine, Uplifting Racial Justice (Paul Cuffee Worship Group)

*\* FGC, **Becoming an anti-racist Quaker Meeting: Don't be surprised if there is shame and bullying of one another (though it's important to interrupt these behaviors, and encourage everyone to use "I statements" when sharing their thoughts and feelings). Don't be surprised that Friends step away from Meeting, both Friends of Color and white Friends. Don't be surprised that Friends' understanding of Quaker testimonies are individual and conflicting. Don't be surprised when discernment seeps into social media (a place better built for education, not for the process of decision-making). Don't be surprised that in times of struggle it is surprisingly easy to spread rumors ("this Friend told me..."). Don't be surprised when leaders are attacked. Don't be surprised when white fragility stops progress. None of these are fatal, and we owe it to our loved ones who are hurt most by racism to work through them.***

#### **\*\* Ad-hoc Racial Conflict Transformation Team**

**Charge:** (i) To develop processes that can effectively address the racial conflict in the yearly meeting. (ii) To identify Quaker resources available to aid us in this work. (iii) To implement the process as needed to address racial conflict.

**Members:** (i) Interested SAYMA Friends of Color. (ii) SAYMA Presiding clerk(s) (iii) Clerks or representatives from M&N Committee, Yearly Meeting Planning Committee, the Racial Justice Working Group, and Finance Committee and/or SAYMA Treasurer (iv) Additional members may be added as needed for the work.

➤ **Nominating** — Alison Mawle reported for Nominating Committee.

We would like to bring Shannon McNeal forward for consideration as an Administration member at large, for a term of 3 years. We will bring her name back next month for approval.

#### **Clerk's Items**

- Call for State of the Committee Reports. If anyone has not submitted their report, the clerk asked for them to submit them.
- Friends School MLK Day event January 17th. A number of Friends showed up to package care kits for the homeless community. The clerk expressed hope that the meeting could be more involved.
  - A Friend whose kids attend the Friends School said that kids at Friends School enjoyed seeing people from meeting as well.
  - A Friend said that Friends in First Day School today also reported that they enjoyed the volunteer event.

#### **Approval of Minutes from 12th month 2024**

[https://atlantaquakers.org/wp-content/uploads/AFM\\_Newsletter\\_2024-12.pdf](https://atlantaquakers.org/wp-content/uploads/AFM_Newsletter_2024-12.pdf)

**Minute-01-19-25:16:** The Atlanta Friends Meeting approves the 12th month 2024 minutes.

#### **Closing Worship**

by Derek Harootune Otis

### **Sketches from Behind Prison Walls**



Illustrated by Rein Kolts

Introduction and Commentary by Devon M. Kurtz

book is in the AFM Library in the General Collection  
Call Number: 365 Kol

Friends have a long history of prison visitation, going back to our early days of persecution, and flowering now as an enduring and general concern for the humane treatment of all prisoners. This book – a collaboration by two Quakers, one free and one imprisoned – is a call to approach that concern through the lives of individual inmates. Their lives are presented to the reader through sketched portraits, their own writing, and commentary by Devon Kurtz, who studies criminology at Cambridge. Though I consider myself a supporter of prison reform, some of the crimes these inmates were convicted of deadened my empathy, and I found myself reading their words several times over to move past their pasts and in to their present

struggles. In the end, I crossed that gap, and found a greater empathy than what I had before. Prison, in my mind, should be a tool of last resort, a place that helps a broken person become whole again and right their wrongs. Instead, this book paints a picture of prison as a senseless place, one where inmates are stripped of nearly everything – even their crimes – to be made equal and arbitrary victims of state power.

~\*

#### **ATLANTA FRIENDS MEETING**

Regular Office Hours: Monday thru Thursday, 10 am to 1 pm and Friday, by appointment

web and email: [atlantaquakers.org](http://atlantaquakers.org), [atlantaquakers@gmail.com](mailto:atlantaquakers@gmail.com)

voicemail/phone: 404-377-2474

Clerk: David Small, [afmclerk1@gmail.com](mailto:afmclerk1@gmail.com)

Treasurer: Stacey Sharer, [afmtreasurer1@gmail.com](mailto:afmtreasurer1@gmail.com)

#### **Ways to communicate and receive information:**

- You can receive the announcement sheets and other announcements relating directly to the life of the meeting. This is the announcement email list. (The announcement sheet is also posted online.)
- You can receive announcements AND posts about a broader range of topics relating to being a Quaker via email. This is the discussion email list.
- You can receive notification that the newsletter is online. This is the newsletter email list.

To join any of these email lists above, please email the office at [atlantaquakers@gmail.com](mailto:atlantaquakers@gmail.com).

To join the meeting's Facebook group, search for Atlanta Friends Meeting & click the + **Join Group** button.

#### **Do we have your (correct) contact information so we can reach you?**

Please send your name and (updated) contact information to Brent Wolff at [afmdirectory@gmail.com](mailto:afmdirectory@gmail.com) and to the office at [atlantaquakers@gmail.com](mailto:atlantaquakers@gmail.com).

#### **Do you need a directory, printed or electronic?**

Email [atlantaquakers@gmail.com](mailto:atlantaquakers@gmail.com) or call 404-377-2474

#### **What does supporting your spiritual community look like for you and your family?**

Atlanta Friends Meeting accepts contributions of your time, resources, talents, and money! Place a financial contribution in the slot marked "Contributions" in the greeting area of the Meetinghouse or mail to our mailing address. Or donate online at [atlantaquakers.org/contact-donate/](http://atlantaquakers.org/contact-donate/) with a credit card or paypal. Sign up to volunteer on Sunday morning at <http://tinyurl.com/afmvolunteers>. Contact the Nominating Committee to serve on a committee. *Thanks!*

#### **Want to submit an announcement, letter, article, etc to the newsletter?**

Email [atlquakerltr@gmail.com](mailto: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*