



FORT MYERS MONTHLY MEETING

Of the Religious Society of Friends

Meeting for Worship

Friends are meeting for hybrid worship every 1st day at 10:30 A.M. Friends may meet physically outdoors (weather permitting) under the roof of the chickee hut on the Orange River in Buckingham. (aka Peace Acres). Friends who prefer to meet via Zoom instead may do so. Each Friday an invitation to Zoom worship is sent to our entire e-mail list, identifying the hyperlink and meeting number. People may join early either physically or via Zoom at 10:00 a.m. for conversation and fellowship.

Midweek worship

Midweek worship, in person only, is held at the chickee on Peace Acres each Wednesday morning at 10:30 a.m. For directions to Peace Acres, call 239-313-6201 or email the e-mail address above for directions.

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SEYM Queries & Advices

First Section:

What is the state of our meetings for worship and business?

1st Month: Meeting for Worship

Queries:

- Are our meetings for worship held in expectant waiting for divine guidance, with a living silence in which we feel drawn together in the Light by the presence of God?
- Do we respond to the Spirit's prompting to minister, whether in silence, through the spoken word, or through action after the meeting for worship?
- Are we sensitive to one another's needs in meeting for worship?
- Are the spiritual gifts within the meeting fostered and encouraged?
- Are our meetings accessible and welcoming to everyone?

- Are our meetings a source of strength and guidance for daily living?
- Is the vocal ministry in our meetings exercised under the leading of the Spirit?

Advices:

- Be prompt and diligent in attendance at meetings.
- Come to meeting with expectant hearts and minds prepared for communion with God.
- Be faithful, be patient, and persevere in our service as messengers of truth.
- To everyone is given a share of the responsibility for the meeting for worship, whether through silence or through the spoken word.
- Quiet our hearts and minds for worship prior to entering the meeting room, so the whole group can be knit together in spiritual fellowship.
- Do not assume that vocal ministry is never to be our part.
- Be ready to speak under the leading of the Light. Learn to recognize when a message felt within is from God and if it is a message intended for the group to hear.
- Pray that our ministry may arise from deep experience of the Divine.
- Let our spoken ministry be audible and free from unnecessary words.
- Avoid speaking in a manner that brings a sense of discussion or debate.
- Allow for a period of silence after a message has been spoken, so the group can reflect on what has been said and continue to be grounded in silent worship. Overly long or too-frequent messages can hinder the worship of others present.
- Receive the ministry of others in a tender spirit.
- Treat every newcomer as one sent by God.

“The deeper our faith, the more doubt we must endure; the deeper our hope, the more prone we are to despair; the deeper our love, the more pain its loss will bring: these are a few of the paradoxes we must hold as human beings. If we refuse to hold them in the hopes of living without doubt, despair, and pain, we also find ourselves living without faith, hope, and love.

— Parker J. Palmer

Fort Myers Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends Minutes of 1st Month 08, 2023

The Fort Myers Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends met in hybrid format on the 1st month 8th day with 15 Friends present. The Meeting opened with a period of silent centering.

Clerk Richard Frechette read the following from SEYM Queries and Advices on Meetings for Worship:

- Do we respond to the Spirit's prompting to minister, whether in silence, through the spoken word, or through action after the meeting for worship?
- Is the vocal ministry in our meetings exercised under the leading of the Spirit?
- Are we sensitive to one another's needs in meeting for worship?

Friends shared:

- that our Meeting's use of afterthoughts enriches the depth of our worship and serves as an invitation to those who are more reticent;
- that while we are grateful for the words that people speak we should remember that Friends love the silence also;
- that Friends who come in-person need to be aware of the need to speak loud enough so those in the back can hear them.

Ministry & Counsel Committee

Clerk Nancy Murvine reported that Jeanette Botha left the Ministry and Council Committee at the end of 2022. She presented a draft minute of appreciation for Jeannette's service.

❖ *Minute 2023-MM-01:* Friends approve the following minute of appreciation:

Jeannette Botha has served for many years on Ministry and Counsel Committee. In that time, she has been a voice of compassion for members in need and a voice of wisdom for the spiritual health of our community. We thank her for the gifts she brought in service to the Fort Myers Monthly Meeting.

Clerk Nancy then read the latest draft of the **Spiritual State of the Meeting 2022**. Friends commented: "Well done." After one editorial change, the report was accepted as written.

❖ **Minute 2023-MM-02: The Spiritual State of the Meeting 2022**

We faced yet another year of challenges in our small Quaker community, most revolving around loss and displacement. Yet, with faith and the support of each other, we moved forward.

With the lengthening presence of Covid and its progression of variants, we continue to work toward a balance between our value of caring for vulnerable members and of remaining welcoming to all in our in-person worship settings. For social and community reasons, we hesitate to impose restrictions on members who have not chosen to or been able to be vaccinated or to require masks of everyone attending in person. Yet we do have at-risk members who may find it difficult to zoom in and who value the interpersonal contact of in-person worship. Discernment on this continues. We are pleased the number of those attending in-person is rising as restrictions are lifted and people feel more comfortable – thanks in part to the updates on the science offered by our own epidemiologist, Jim Koopman – as our northern Friends return and new snowbirds arrive, and as Friends reach out to offer ridesharing.

The innovation of a hybrid meeting with both physical presence and electronic connection presents its own balancing act with some new challenges. There is no denying the welcomed support Zoom has given to our vulnerable population to stay connected to Meeting for Worship and to committee work without exposure. This connection has also extended to our more distant attenders and members who would not be able to attend in person. However, some in our community have expressed sadness that we are not all physically together in one shared space. One member expressed it as an “alien sense of we/they” between those attending electronically and those attending physically. Our newest member resigned her membership because of a sense of missed connectedness. We also lost an attender Donna Anderton and a dear, longtime member Kathy Hale whose passings remind us of the fragility of our population and the deep need to nurture and care for each other. Also, the technical limitations and glitches can occasionally disrupt the quality of our spiritual time together for some. There are no simple solutions except to hope for change as the technology evolves and as our own comfort with it improves.

Despite these concerns, members repeatedly voice a love of the Meeting as a place where they find spiritual inspiration and support. Recently, there has been more variety of voices offering more diverse spoken ministry, a trend we hope will continue as it reflects a feeling that it is “safe to share” in a community that is “inclusive and supportive.”

We have also been without a true Meeting House for two years. The kindness and caring of Clerk Richard Frechette and his wife Friend Suzanne Frechette have been instrumental in allowing those who can worship in person to do so. They graciously offered the use of their large, outdoor chickee hut for Sunday and mid-

week worship, offered hospitality with set-up and refreshments, and welcomed the return of potlucks. Still, the desire to have a sacred space which we identify as our permanent home drew us to formalize a plan to build on property owned by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Fort Myers.

Although the process has been demanding, the tireless work, cooperation, and Quaker process of the Building Committee embodies the spirit of the Meeting. While the costs of completing this new home at times seems daunting, our small community made a priority to maintain our financial and time commitments to other organizations as part of our witness in the wider community. We increased our monetary contributions to the local food bank and Mission Peniel in Immokalee; continued our contributions to five national Quaker organizations; continued to support the Lee Interfaith For Empowerment (L.I.F.E.), a local social justice organization that finally won additional affordable housing support through the establishment of an Affordable Housing Trust Fund. Carolyn Stanley, the clerk of Peace and Social Concerns now sits on the board of L.I.F.E as well. Our concern for the people of Ukraine led to a one-time donation supporting the refugees and a discussion of the war in the light of our Quaker Peace Testimony. We again hosted a booth at the local Southwest Florida Peace Day at the end of September.

Like the pandemic, Hurricane Ian was an outside force that caused on-going grief through loss and displacement. Checking in on each other was an obvious first response to immediate physical needs, followed by maintaining a sense of spiritual normalcy with continuing hybrid Meetings for Worship and committee work. Within our Meeting we had members who could no longer live in their homes, some finding refuge with family or in housing nearby and, in one case, by moving out of the area to begin again. We are grateful for the kind donations from Clearwater and Ann Arbor Friends which allowed us to help not only those in our Meeting but also those in the neediest faith communities in our area. Once more, from darkness came Light, as the larger community of Quakers reminded us of the strong State of Spirit beyond our own small Meeting. This is the Spirit we hope to continue to carry forward next year.

Friend Nancy continued her report with a presentation of “Common Sense COVID Guidelines for Fort Myers Friends Meeting.” As she explained, the FtMMM had some difficulty with a family in the Meeting who felt excluded from some of our social gatherings since they didn’t feel comfortable being vaccinated and didn’t choose to be masked. This incident prompted Ministry and Counsel to begin talking about making sure everyone felt included while being cognizant of the vulnerable Friends in our Meeting. The committee reached out to Jim Koopman for guidance. Friends Jim Koopman and Helen Fox put together a list of common sense guidelines that would suggest expectations and general advice while avoiding complicated instructions or rules. Friend Nancy expressed that she was “deeply appreciative of Jim’s concern about creating guidelines that would not feel exclusionary to anyone.” The following text represents the guidelines after they had been edited by those present:

Common Sense Health Guidelines for Ft. Myers Friends Meeting

1. *If you feel sick, please stay home, rest, and attend Meeting over Zoom.*
2. *Wash your hands with warm water and soap before preparing or serving food for potluck.*
3. *If you are immune compromised or otherwise vulnerable, for your own protection, please wear a mask and keep up to date on your boosters.*
4. *Masks are always available at in-person worship. When and where CDC advises the public to wear them, please do so. An easy guide can be found here:*
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html?s_cid=11759:cdc%20covid%20guidelines:sem.ga:p:RG:GM:gen:PTN:FY22
5. *If you test positive for COVID within several days after attending in-person Meeting, please inform the Meeting Clerk. Friends may want to get tested if they interacted with you, and they may want to consult their physician about medicines which have been proven to reduce the risks of severe illness if taken early in infection.*

Friends responded:

- These guidelines avoid excluding anyone since they are focused on each person's individual health.
- The guidelines can be used to address any health issue where contagiousness is an issue.
- Perhaps we should add that the Meeting regrets that anyone has felt excluded on the basis of health concerns.
- The M&C Committee will talk to the family again, explaining that we have not set aside their concerns and that we have created these guidelines for everyone.

Friends agreed that the guidelines should be posted on our website, published in the Newsletter, and sent out once a month in the weekly invitation to worship.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Paul Davis reported that there were large donations to both the Meeting House Fund and the General Fund in December. The total amount in the Meeting House Fund is \$342,241 not counting an outstanding pledge of \$110,000 which we should receive early this year.

If we choose, we could eliminate the Meeting cell phone, even though the expense is only \$110 per year. Although the cell phone is almost never used it does provide some protection against crank calls.

We will be able to eliminate a \$115/month expense after the new Meetinghouse is built and we remove our possessions from storage.

FMMM Funds Report 12/31/2022

General Funds

Checking	13,674
Gen Fund Savings	40,436
Gen Fund Fr Fiduciary	27,777

Total General Fund 81,887

Meeting House Funds

Savings	329,316
MH Funds Fr Fiduciary	12,925

Total Meeting House Funds 342,241

FMMM Total Funds 424,128

Dec 2022 Income vs Expenses	
Dec Income	\$64,787
\$8,840 General Fund	
\$55,948 Meeting House	
Dec Expenses	\$ 6,164*
* Architect \$4,389	
* Ian Relief \$1,775	

Peace & Social Concerns Committee

Clerk Carolyn Stanley reported:

The Fort Myers P&SC Committee met in December to decide what to do with the contributions that have been sent to us from two other Quaker Monthly Meetings to help with the Hurricane Ian recovery. We recommended that the money be given to Friend Norma Lipsen who had significant damage to her home in Saint James City on Pine Island. She agreed to accept half of the money but wanted the other half to go to The Heights Foundation, our second choice. The Heights Foundation is helping those in the Harlem Heights community who lost both jobs and their homes. Many worked on the islands and need help with monthly bills and finding new jobs. Their website has a specific “donate to Ian recovery” page. You can read more about the Heights Foundation on line at: <https://heightsfoundation.org>

The other item on our agenda was to choose a clerk for 2023. I informed the committee that I needed to step down from the position. No one came forward to volunteer as clerk and after much discussion it was decided that we would all take a break and meet again in May to begin plans for a booth at the Peace Day event in September and to share thoughts about what’s next for the Peace and Social Concerns Committee. This break is needed in part due to our Monthly Meeting’s focus on the new building, members being involved in individual

peace and social justice issues, hurricane recovery and health issues. If there is anyone else who would step forward as Clerk, plz let the Meeting know.

Although I want to step down as clerk, I would like to continue as a member of the P&SC committee and if FMMM wants to continue as a member of the L.I.F.E. organization, I would like to continue as your representative to the board and participate in their justice work. The L.I.F.E. organization has had a difficult year. Our lead organizer has had major health issues and has had to take a sick leave and then return on a part time basis. The hurricane caused much damage to most of the congregations that are members of LIFE and extreme hardship to many members of the churches. Finally at the last board meeting, we learned that there has been embezzlement of funds from the organization for several years by the previous treasurer. The new treasurer, John, and Chelsea, our hired organizer, and the board acted quickly to cut this person off from handling any of the funds, report it to authorities, find a lawyer and put several safety measures in place so that this never happens again.

The L.I.F.E. organization has lots of rebuilding work to do. We will start with a "Love in Action" large gathering event on February 13 at 6:30 PM. The place is yet to be determined depending on which church has roof repairs completed and is ready for a large group. If the Ft.MMM Meeting wants to continue as a member of LIFE, I will keep you posted on this upcoming event and our continued work for justice in Lee County.

I will be glad to continue as your liaison and as a member of the board. Given this information, do we want to continue as a member of the L.I.F.E. organization?

Friends added these comments:

- It's sad that there was such a breach of trust within the L.I.F.E. organization, but it's important that the leadership remain intact. Friend Carolyn is very effective in that role.
- We should think not only about what we can contribute to L.I.F.E. but what the organization does for us. Our participation has been very strong despite our small numbers. This has been very positive for us.
- There is another kind of contribution that Quakers can make. This is a real life call for restorative justice that could be a role model for other, similar situations.
- Friend Carolyn has been impressed with the willingness of the L.I.F.E. organization to meet with the offender.

❖ *Minute 2023-MM-03: Fort Myers Monthly Meeting wishes to continue as a member of the L.I.F.E. organization. We gratefully accept Friend Carolyn Stanley's offer to continue as our representative to the board. We encourage other Friends to consider participating in LIFE's work.*

Meetinghouse Committee

Friend Helen Fox reported that not much has happened over the holidays. The engineers presented us with a bill based on a faulty count of the number of people our new structure will hold. We have asked that they revisit the number of additional parking spaces would be required by the County. The Meetinghouse Committee will meet with some members of the UU board January 13th to bring them up to date on our design, the progress with the engineers, and so on.

Announcement: The Rum Bucket restaurant next to the chickee hut has just opened. The hours of operation are daily from 11am to 9 pm. Yesterday, opening day, it was packed. But it appears that music won't begin until 2 pm. If they begin music early on Sunday we may want to consider starting a half hour earlier for worship. Friends Suzanne and Richard Frechette will be in touch with the new owners.

The meeting closed in silence.

Respectfully Submitted,
Helen Fox
Recording Clerk

Invitation to MLK March

Dear Friend, Pastor, and Community Leader:

I am writing today to ask you for your help in a very important and very enjoyable matter.

On Monday, January 16th, there will be a march through the streets of downtown Fort Myers to honor the life and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I am making this simple request: please march with us! And please invite and encourage all of the good people who attend your church to come and march with us as well!

We believe that the best way for us to celebrate the life and the work of Martin Luther King is for us to bring together as many people as possible: people of every race, and every color, and from every ethnic background, and from every religious affiliation, all marching together, united in our desire to remember this good man, and to uphold the great spiritual values that he lived for and that he gave his life for; values such as non-violence, and brotherly love, and building a more just society, and caring for the poor, and loving one's neighbor, and treating all people with respect (even when we do not agree with them!) These ideals are the bedrock values of our society, and we should never pass-up an opportunity to remember them and to re-affirm our commitment to upholding them.

Participating in this march will not only give us with a chance to meet our neighbors and to re-affirm our belief in these values, it will also provide us with a golden

opportunity to pass these values along to the next generation, which is one of our most sacred civic obligations.

The march itself is a very enjoyable experience: strolling through the streets of downtown Fort Myers on a sunny day, accompanied by the music of the Dunbar High School marching band, and ending up at a big party in Centennial Park, with plenty of music, dancing, food, and good fellowship for everyone.

The march begins at 10am, in front of the Jupiter-Hammon Public Library at 3095 Blount Street. If you have any questions or comments for us, or any ideas about how we can make this march even more meaningful, or more enjoyable, or more successful, please contact the Dunbar Festival Committee, who are the organizers of the event, or you can text me personally at: Chris Ruhnke, 239-895-8697.

We look forward to seeing you on the 16th! If you don't like to walk, don't let that stop you; just skip the march and come to the party! Let's not miss this opportunity to bring the people of Lee County together to build community, to celebrate Martin Luther King, and to remember the ideals that he loved so dearly and that he worked so hard to share with others.

PS: in order to get the most out of this day, I would like to recommend reading or re-reading Martin's brilliant essay, "A Letter from a Birmingham Jail". Reading this letter will remind you of who he was, and what he stood for, and why we should do everything in our power to keep our memory of him alive.

~submitted by Chris Ruhnke

The 53rd Annual Dwight & Ardis Michener

Michener Lecture & Seminars

Sunday, 15 First Month 2023

In person and via Zoom

Worship • 9:30 am

Luncheon • 11:30 am

Lecture & Seminar • 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Orlando Friends Meetinghouse • 316 E Marks Street, Orlando, Florida 32803

“Welcome As You Are: Seekers, Finders, Sharing the Journey”

presented by

Joel Cook



Whoever you are, however you are, you are invited to and welcomed at the Divine banquet table.

Joel will share experiences and stories from his own life, other Quakers, and the Bible – stories of seeking and finding: finding shadows, finding transformation, finding welcome. You will be invited to reflect on your own journey and the ways in which it echoes or differs.

Joel Cook was raised in a Christian Science home, where he learned an appreciation of the Bible and of

religious study. In July 1989 he attended Friend’s Meeting for Worship for the first time at Plainfield (NJ) Friends Meeting

Quaker Meeting immediately became his spiritual home. He was active in Monthly Meeting, Regional Meeting, and attended New York Yearly Meeting sessions until moving to Florida in 2003. Joel brought his love of the Bible and study of religion to Plainfield Meeting, offering weekly Bible Study for several years.

After moving to Florida, Joel attended the Treasure Coast Worship Group for several years before worshipping regularly at Palm Beach Meeting. There he facilitated the discussion before Meeting for Worship many times, often using the Bible as a starting point for

the topic. Several years ago, he helped to re-start the Treasure Coast Worship Group, where he now worships.

Joel has led Bible and other workshops at Southeastern Yearly Meeting sessions for several years and facilitated retreats at Friends Meetings in SEYM.

Joel led a five-day workshop, "Seeking St. Paul," at the 2011 Friends General Conference (FGC) Gathering and in 2014 he presented the daily Bible Half Hour using the gathering theme: "Let Love be the First Motion."

In March 2019 Joel brought the message to the Sunday plenary worship at the FWCC Section of the Americans meeting.

For the 2021 FGC Gathering Joel co-facilitated an on-line workshop "Discovering the Divine Flow in Our Lives," based on "Resistance and Obedience to God, Memoirs of David Ferris (1707–1779)"

Joel is currently facilitating an on-line study of the Sermon on the Mount using the book "Following the Call: Living the Sermon on the Mount Together."

Joel is a member of Palm Beach Friends Meeting (Lake Worth Beach, FL), and worships with the Treasure Coast Worship Group. He served as Southeastern Yearly Meeting Assistant Clerk and is now serving as the Yearly Meeting Treasurer.

[Register here](#)

Contributions to the Meeting can be made payable to Fort Myers Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, and can be sent to:

Samuel De Oliveira, Assistant Treasurer
FtMMM

A Guide To Listening And Speaking In Our Quaker Meeting For Worship



Fort Myers Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Everyone is welcome to our Meeting for Worship. Each one who enters the Meeting room, either in person or virtually, contributes to the spiritual seeking, which is the purpose of our waiting silence. We seek inner quiet in which the Spirit may be felt. While we Quakers have no creed, we believe that a divine center exists in every person and that each of us can sense the Inner Light directly.

One can expect silence to prevail during most of the Meeting. However, one or more persons may feel moved by the Spirit to offer vocal ministry. Usually, these messages are spiritual in nature and are not preplanned. It is helpful to speak clearly so that everyone may hear and move to the microphone when available.

It is well to remember that spoken messages should not outrun the spiritual guide which moved them. Simple, direct, and brief messages are valued. It is customary to speak no more than once during a Meeting.

Allowing a period of silence after each message gives time to reflect on the previous message and the opportunity for further messages to emerge. Because the focus is on the Spirit that inspires vocal ministry, messages should prompt reflection and inner dialogue rather than conversation or argument between Friends.

As a listener, one is invited to hold on to that which is meaningful and let the rest go. Try to listen to the place from where the words come, rather than be put off by a speaker's words, theology, or manner. A message may speak to some but not to others.

A meeting may be completely silent. The truly "gathered meeting," with deep silence in which messages reflect for many the deeply felt presence of the Spirit, is particularly treasured.

More about our Meeting for Worship

Meeting for worship lasts about one hour, starting at 10:30 a.m. on First Day mornings. Traditionally, some Quakers call the days of the week by number, so that Sunday is First Day, Monday is Second Day, etc.

Near 11:30 a.m. the designated person, usually a member of the Ministry and Counsel Committee, signals the end of Meeting for Worship with a brief acknowledgment that Meeting has ended. That person then calls for any afterthoughts, invites visitors to introduce themselves to the Meeting, and asks for any announcements from those present. Simple refreshments are then served, and fellowship is shared among the worshipers.



Reader’s/Writer’s Corner

Most of us are avid readers, and some of us are writers, as well. Submit any essays, poetry or book reviews (400 words or less—about one newsletter page) that witness to the testimonies of Quaker life. Please email: debwhitenfl@gmail.com

Winter



The trees have no way to hide their nakedness.
They stand shivering in the wind.
The last leaf has fallen.
Snow will bury it.
Snow palls.
Silently.

© Theron White January 9, 2023

USEFUL WEBSITES FOR FRIENDS

- <https://pendlehill.org>Pendle Hill, Quaker Retreat and Resource Center
- <http://seymquakers.org>Southeastern Yearly Meeting
- www.fcni.orgFriends Committee for National Legislation
- www.fgcquaker.orgFriends General Conference
- www.afsc.orgAmerican Friends Service Committee
- <http://fwcc.world>Friends World Committee on Consultation
- www.quakerspeak.comQuakerSpeak: A Quaker YouTube Channel
- www.quakerhouse.orgQuaker House, Fayetteville
- www.quakervoluntaryservice.orgQuaker Voluntary Service
- www.quno.orgQuaker United Nations

MEETING CALENDAR		
Each First Day	Meeting for Worship in a hybrid format: in person at Peace Acres or via Zoom An informal conversation time begins at 10:00 am	10:30 a.m.
Each Wednesday	Meeting for Worship at Peace Acres. This is in person only.	10:30 a.m.
1/14/23	SEYM Winter Interim Business Meeting begins	8:30 a.m.
1/15/23	SEYM Michener Lecture: Joel Cook	1:00 p.m. in-person and on-line
1/22/23	Zoom Discussion facilitated by Susan Oehl Topic: Fear	upon rise of worship

Friends Meeting of Fort Myers
Religious Society of Friends
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 Address Correction Requested