

# Des Moines Valley Friends Meeting

## FRIENDLY LINE

### January 2024



### A Quaker Minute

**10 Spiritual resolutions** suggested by Reno Friends Meeting, Reno, Nevada.

1. I will take advantage of the Silence to reconsider my choices around work and commitments.
2. I will take advantage of the Silence to reassess my energy and my gifts.
3. I will spend time with people who lift me up. I will intentionally seek them out and connect with them.
4. If a new commitment arises, I will give myself permission to sit with it and ask for spiritual guidance before jumping in.
5. I will give myself time for activities that make me happy and relaxed.
6. I will take time to sit in silence and listen to Spirit, especially when things turn difficult.
7. I will make things simpler. When given a choice, I'll try the doable way and learn to accept help gracefully.
8. I will take an occasional retreat day: a day off without deadlines or engagements, to read, relax and do easy chores.
9. I will take time to consider my faith journey and deepen my connection with Spirit.
10. I will take advantage of the Silence to ask myself: what would I do if I were not afraid?

*One in a series on Quaker history and practice, contributed by Pam Blackburn*

### My Journey to Friends by Linaja Mikalonis

*Thank you to Linaja for sharing this poem and these thoughtful reflections, during a second hour in October 2023.*

#### The Voice of God (found in *A Poem for Every Feeling*)

Ninety percent of what's wrong with you could be cured with a hot bath, says God through the manhole covers, but we want magic, to win the lottery we never bought a ticket for.

*(Tenderly, the monks chant, embrace the suffering.)*

The voice never panders, offers no five-year plan, no long-term solution, no edicts from a cloudy white beard hooked over ears. It is small and fond and local. Don't look for your initials in the geese honking overhead or to see through the glass even darkly. It says the most obvious shit, i.e. Put down that gun, you need a sandwich.

-- by Mary Karr

My journey to Friends began with the question "Do you think you're part of the problem?" My immediate (rather indignant) response was "no, I'm not part of the problem. I'm part of the solution. I'm sometimes the only person at the church pushing my pastor to consider the civil rights of the gay and lesbian members in our community." But the longer I sat with the question in the fall of 2022, the more I began to realize that my attendance, service, and donations to the evangelical church that I loved so much, even when I disagreed so sharply with some of its messages, *might* mean I was part of the problem.

This question, asked lovingly  
*(continued on page 8)*

## **DMVF Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, Dec. 10, 2023**

**Present:** Carol Spaulding-Kruse, Claire Cumbie-Drake, Andrea Holveck, Jack Holveck, Billie Wade, Peter Clay, Bob Henderson, Dorothy Lifka, Dick Douglass, Ann Robinson, Katie Jacoby, Deb Fisch, Catherine Dietz-Kilen, Jim Dietz-Kilen

The Meeting began with a welcome from the Clerk, followed by a moment of silence.

### **Approval of Minutes**

**Minute:** Friends approved the minutes of the Nov. 11, 2023, Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.

### **Announcements**

1. Thank you to Logan Jimenez for organizing the Silent Vigil on Dec. 15, 2023, for peace in the Middle East and call for a ceasefire, held at the Federal Building.
2. Holiday program of singing and music will be on Dec. 17. Friends are invited to bring finger foods and snacks.
3. Thank you to Jon Krieg for sending AFSC information about the call for a cease fire in the Middle East (a link to the information was provided in the *Clerk's Notes*.)
4. Ann Robinson has suggested a Christmas Eve Meeting for Worship and is willing to host.
5. Day of Remembrance is scheduled for Jan. 21, 2024.
6. Sacred Dance Group sent a thank you letter to Friends, which Dorothy read to the Meeting.

## **Finance Committee & Budget Report (Catherine Dietz-Kilen) Minutes of November 28, 2023 meeting:**

**Attendees:** Catherine Dietz-Kilen, Katie Jacoby, Dorothy Lifka and Dick Douglass

1. Financial Statements for July, August, September & October 2023. The Finance Committee reviewed the monthly financial statements for the months of July through October 2023 with attention to the changes that were made in the format of the reports as a result of switching to cash accounting. The reports were approved and will be provided to the clerk for upcoming Business meeting.
2. Liability Insurance. Katie Jacoby reported that we have liability insurance in place covering the Des Moines Valley Friends Meeting, which has been paid in full for the year. Payment was made from the designated fund of the Finance Committee for transition, and therefore not included in the budget for this year. The budget for the next fiscal year will include an amount for liability insurance for the Meeting.  
Discussion was held on our responsibility for paying a share of the insurance purchased by Friends House. Our lease requires that we pay one-third of the Friends House insurance premium. Because the Friends House insurance policy covers the structure of our Meeting House against damage, the Finance Committee

determined that it was appropriate for the Meeting to continue to pay one-third of the Friends House insurance premium as budgeted and required by our lease. This matter will be researched and discussed further when the budgeting process for the next fiscal year takes place.

3. Finance Committee Meeting Time. The Finance Committee decided to change the meeting time to meet during the day rather than the evening. Our next scheduled meeting will be December 13, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom, and thereafter, we will meet on the third Wednesday of each month at 9:00 a.m.

The Treasurer reviewed the financial reports for July, August, September, and October, 2023, which are now prepared on a cash basis accounting. One correction was noted. In the July and August report, the Internet expense shows under Friends House and should go under Outreach. This has been corrected on the reports going forward.

**Minute:** Friends expressed their thanks to the Treasurer and members of the Finance Committee for their hard work on behalf of the Meeting.

## **Ministry & Council Committee Report (Jim Dietz-Kilen)**

### **Dec. 3, 2023 Meeting Report**

Attending: Gordon Bivens, Peter Clay, Jim Dietz-Kilen, Deborah Fisch, Andrea Holveck, Dorothy Lifka and Billie Wade.

We gathered in silence at 8:30 am. We first exchanged information about known member & attender concerns/needs for ministry.

We next considered a request from Peter Clay for \$400 from the Education & Enrichment Fund in support of his upcoming sojourn to Rwanda to learn about and support the work of Friends Peace Teams in the African Great Lakes Region. This work will be followed by three weeks participating in the 18<sup>th</sup> International Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) training. We approved the requested \$400 allotment from the Education & Enrichment Fund and, after hearing of the other expenses he will incur, approved another \$200 from the Sharing Fund. We also plan to draft a minute for travel in ministry to accompany Peter on his journey. We hope there will be opportunities for him to share his experiences with folks from our meeting, upon his return.

We discussed the joyful reunion the Ramazani family is enjoying in Ottawa. Now that they are in Ottawa, there will likely be some changes in the schedule for zoom meetings and some of the needs may change. The \$500 from our Sharing Fund that was approved last month has been sent c/o Penn Valley Meeting.

Unfortunately, COVID prevented Billie from her planned attendance at the FGC Friends of Color conference at Pendle Hill. She is returning the \$310 that was allocated from the Education & Enrichment Fund to help cover

those expenses. We hope that a similar opportunity will come along in the future and encourage Billie to apply again.

We returned to earlier discussion of the idea of planning a group book discussion of How the Word Is Passed, now that discussion of the Outreach Committee's first offering has concluded. Dorothy and Billie volunteered to coordinate/facilitate this effort.

Deborah passed along a message that Katie encountered on our website. It was from a person who self-identified as a member of Ohio Yearly Meeting. The message suggested that we should have more "Orthodox Christian" language on our website and in our Advices & Queries (which are actually composed by IYMC). Deb offered to draft a response for M&C members to review.

We ended with silence.

**Minute:** Friends received the report and expressed their thank you to the committee for their work.

### **Building & Grounds**

**Committee** (Dick Douglass) Building and Grounds team cleaned the gutters over the portico, blew leaves off the walkway, and arranged for the main floor fire extinguisher to be replaced. The geothermal has continued to function well.

**Minute:** Friends expressed their appreciation to the committee for keeping up with the "invisible work" of keeping the building and grounds in good working order.

A Friend noted that the Meeting may need a new first aid kit. Deborah will check the kit in

the basement to see if it needs to be updated. Friends also discussed whether we should add an AED to the Meeting House with a training on how to use it. The Finance Committee will look into the cost of an AED.

### **Religious Ed Committee Report** (Dorothy Lifka)

Katie and Dorothy will be meeting Saturday, Dec. 16, at 10 a.m. for a clean-up of the child care room. We would love to have others join us.

The teens will be meeting next Sunday, Dec. 10 at 5 p.m. to make Christmas cards. Snacks will be served. All are invited, but please let Dorothy know if you will be coming so that we will have sufficient snacks.

There is a need for Friends to step forward with providing childcare on First Day. Friends discussed the best way to coordinate this and the matter of obtaining background checks for volunteers. Dorothy suggested that one person be available to provide childcare for a month at a time, with a second individual to assist, in order to provide consistency for the children. The Clerk volunteered to coordinate individuals to serve in this capacity so long as she has a good roster to draw from. Friends also suggested that selecting childcare providers become part of the nominating committee process. Katie will clarify with the insurance company about payment for the background checks and whether childcare providers must first be vetted to be covered for liability purposes.

**Minute:** Friends expressed gratitude to the committee for



their work on behalf of the children of the Meeting, recognizing the need for additional Friends to step forward to participate as childcare providers.

### **Friends House Board** (Dorothy Lifka)

Report from December 1, 2023 Meeting

Present: Dorothy Lifka, Billie Wade, Deborah Fisch, Cole Fuller, Renee Cawthorne, Heidi Yang, Zuleyma Solmus

We began and ended the meeting with silence. We introduced ourselves. This meeting was Dorothy's first as clerk. We do not currently have an assistant clerk. Heidi agreed to take notes. Renee will officially join the board at our January meeting when Zuleyma leaves. The board approved giving DMVF a key for the connecting door between FH and the meeting house. Dorothy will try to locate a key.

Dorothy sent out Randy Adams' current financial report. He was unable to be at the meeting but said he will try to be at the next one. Billie and Dorothy met to work on a budget but needed further information. We now have a full-year financial report from Randy, the key information we needed. We briefly looked at the webpage that Katie Jacoby designed for us. We agreed that it is impressive. We had previously agreed to pay for this. Cole will send us information about FH's nonprofit status, which could decrease the cost of web hosting. Dorothy will ask Katie to attend our January meeting to go over the website with us.

Immigrant Dreamers will leave Friends House at the end of December as Mr. Yang will be retiring. Appreciation was expressed for all that Zuleyma and Heidi have done during their time at Friends House. Renee will be moving her office space on the second floor to the first floor office space that Immigrant Dreamers was using, and the second floor space will be available for rental.

We discussed finding a property manager to manage FH. Attempts to find someone have not yet been successful and the one company that was interested would require an up-to-date facilities assessment. Angelo Architecture, which did an initial assessment more than 10 years ago, has agreed to do a re-assessment but cannot do it until January or February 2024. The board agreed to have Heidi continue as manager short-term. Renee may be interested in being the manager long-term. We will work on amending the existing job description, and Renee will send us a letter of interest once she has the job description.

We talked at a previous board meeting about adding board members from the community. Dorothy brought that up again and suggested that we talk about it at a future board meeting. We set meeting dates for 2024: Friday, January 19<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m. on Zoom; Friday, April 19<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m.; Friday, July 19<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m.; Friday, October 18<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m. Additional meetings may be scheduled, if needed.

Friends are encouraged to bring items of concern related to Friends House to Dorothy Lifka, Deborah Fisch or Billie Wade.

Dorothy Lifka, Clerk, Friends House Board

**Minute:** Friends received the report with a thank you to the Friend's House Board representatives for their work.

### **Peace & Social Concerns Committee** (Patty Wengert)

We met at noon on Dec. 5, 2023 via Zoom.

We discussed fundraising for Doctors Without Borders and agreed to round up our donation to make it \$150.00.

The following donations were approved:

- Iowa Peace Network \$50.00;
- 8 College Connection \$100.00. This is an immigrant program located at Trinity United Methodist Church. People from Afghanistan and Venezuela are currently being sponsored in that effort;
- DMARC \$100.00;
- Food Bank of Iowa \$100.00;
- The Iowa Center for Children's Justice \$100.00;

We will meet again Jan. 2, 2023, and consider shelters in our community for support.

The Feast of the Holy Innocents will take place the end of this month. The committee approved a \$100 donation.

Please continue to call our government leaders to call for a permanent ceasefire and freedom and justice for the Palestinian people.

The Treasurer reminded the committee that the Treasurer needs the documentation from Peace and Social Concerns in order to make the donations.

**Minute:** Friends expressed their thank you to the committee for their work.

### **Outreach Committee**

No report.

### **Library Committee (Deb Fisch)**

No written report.

Deb reported that Jan, 21, 2024, was proposed by the Library Committee to host a book sale in the Meeting House, but that is the same date as the Meeting for Remembrance. The Library Committee will consider other dates.

**Minute:** Friends expressed their thank you to the Library Committee for their on-going work.

### **Nominating Committee (Claire Cumbie-Drake)**

No report.

### **New/Other Business**

1. Planning for Scattergood visits Feb. 4-9, 2024. The Outreach Committee will confirm with Friends House about the students using the showers at Friends House. Katie will confirm with Scattergood.
2. Renee Cawthorne, the newest tenant at Friends House (Clothe the Children), asked if DMVF would be interested in renting the basement space to her childcare provider who wants to expand out of her home (A flyer about the child care provider was attached to *Clerk's Notes*.) Renee initially thought that our basement space is part of Friends House.) Friends expressed concerns about how much it would take to make the space child friendly and safe, and that it would tie up the entire basement five days a week. On the plus

side, it would provide income to the Meeting and most of the time, the Meeting is not using the basement during the daytime.

Friends further discussed concerns about liability, configuration of the space, and committing the space for childcare in lieu of use by other groups. There was also discussion about this being a mechanism to provide more affordable childcare.

After considerable discussion, the sense of the Meeting was to decline Renee's request.

3. Friends discussed the fact that there is currently no key available for Friends to enter from the Meetinghouse to Friends House. The Meeting Representatives to FH Board reported that the Board had approved giving the Meeting a key for this purpose. Further discussion of this matter was reserved for a later meeting.

The Meeting closed with a Moment of Silence

### **Query Discussion #7 Home and Family**

January 7, 2024

Present: Fred Nelson, Steve Shivvers, Peter Clay, Ann Robinson, Billie Wade, Michael Luick Thrams, Carol Spaulding-Kruse, Pam Blackburn, Andrea and Jack Holveck

The impact of social media on the development of children has been profound. Friends recalled growing up before social media and television became so omnipresent and so influential. We are concerned about these

impacts on the development of children. Some parents are considering not providing cell phones to their children until they are older. We are also aware that some parents seem reluctant to limit their children's time on phones or on social media. Why is that?

The interposition of technology of so many kinds seems to have had a negative impact on real person to person friendships and interactions. This includes friendships and relationships between children.

One Friend observed a family with children at a restaurant where nobody was on a phone. They were all talking to one another! This Friend stopped by the table to compliment the family on how they were all interacting personally rather than interacting with technology. The parents smiled in response to this positive feedback.

Those of us who have had growing up experiences enjoying books contrast that to today. Those who recall loving books and reading commented on how that is so different from the experiences of many people today who are so often captured by their devices or various platforms for "watching." Clearly, many Friends are also quite concerned about the cumulative impact on our children, our families and our society from ubiquitous social media and cell phones.

How do we discern how much to share with others in our families? While we may want to "go deeper" and strive for more authentic intimacy how do we do that without making others uncomfortable? Alternatively, is

it OK for us to share deeply even if our friends and family members are sometimes uncomfortable with what we may decide to share? How do we discern the right balance?

Our families include non-human family members who are precious to us. Opening our homes to needy animals is part of how we open our homes generally and share love and hospitality.

Some of us have “families of choice” who are very different from our families of origin. For some of us who live alone, Des Moines Valley Friends meeting really IS our family. We can easily forget this reality despite the advice for Query #7.

The nuclear family is very meaningful for many of us but for many others finding other and different ways to create family is essential. Notions of family that extend beyond the patriarchal and capitalism-based structures we are familiar with are very important to consider. Compartmentalizing us into structures (the “nuclear family”) that advantage the functioning of capitalism is ultimately dysfunctional for many individuals and doesn’t serve many of us very well. The nuclear family is largely a creation of the twentieth century. It is not how humans have lived for much of our species existence.

How do we feel responsible for and support the children of other families?

Finding the proper balance between making time for meditation, reading sacred or inspirational texts and renewing our spiritual lives within our

homes and families and dealing with life’s many demands can be difficult. However it is important for us all to reflect on how we strive to find that balance.

We are really one human family across the whole world. Our inability to understand this at a very deep level has profound impacts. Materialism and the accumulation of “things” seems to some of us to have moved us away from appreciation of our one human family and how that one human family is part of the family of life on our one precious home, planet Earth.

If parents are not showing and teaching their children how to deal with life’s challenges and adversities their resiliency and vitality will suffer.

Technology is not just a liability. Zoom and other related technology has kept us together and allowed people with physical limitations to be gathered with others in intimate, if virtual settings. Many Friends are profoundly grateful for this.

One Friend observed that if her “body was busy” that she could more easily focus on a one on one conversation with another person. Walking and visiting is one way this happens for some of us.

We need to cultivate compassion for one another as we attempt to keep up and deal with our ever changing and continually challenging technology. Our nervous systems did not evolve with the bewildering modern communications technology that brings us both challenges and benefits.

Our everyday practices are key to creating homes and families that serve us best. Each day we must choose, consciously choose, to follow the practices that serve us and help us to live with one another in more caring, intimate and authentic ways.

-- Recorded by Peter Clay

### **Query for Feb. 4, 2024 #8, Personal Responsibility**

Find it in the IYMC Faith & Practice, online at <https://www.iymc.org/announcements-events-reports/advices-and-queries-2/>

### **News of Our Friends**

**Logan Jimenez** has shared that he plans to perform at two upcoming events in central Iowa: in Jefferson, Saturday, Jan. 27 at 3:00 and 5:30, at Clover Hall, Jefferson County fairgrounds; and in Carlisle, on Sunday, Feb. 18 (a portion of the proceeds will benefit the [RIP Medical Debt](#)). Learn more or get tickets at <https://www.giantbubbleshow.com/shows>.

**Patty Wengert** reports that **Chuck Day** resides at Ramsey Village now. His address is 1611 27th St. Des Moines Iowa 50310. He enjoys receiving cards and having updates on our meeting. (Note: Visitors should push a button before opening the door to avoid setting off an alarm.)

**Peter Clay** shares news that **Edith Munro** and her cat **Gracie** are doing well and would enjoy visits or letters. Early evenings or at non-meal times during the day are good. Contact her at 3520 Gand Ave., Austin Center 201, DM, 50312, phone 515-271-6663.





Osh Andersen sends greetings and a picture used in *City Pulse*, captioned "Not all holiday lights are stationary: Lansing Bike Party members take advantage of an unseasonably warm December evening for a ride and holiday celebration." Photo by Raymond Holt. (Osh is in the back, with reflective vest.)

## Quaker Light for a Diverse World

Polls regarding religion tell us that the number of people who identify as spiritual but non-religious is growing. More and more people are seeking a community in which they can explore and share their spiritual hungering without a preordained orthodoxy or rigid concept of something greater than themselves.

As Quakers we know how to do this! We do it somewhat organically, but we also do it intentionally. We offer a way of being a spiritual community that emphasizes the importance of active listening, to each other and to the Divine. As Quakers we work to create an inclusive and welcoming space that respects diverse beliefs and fosters meaningful connections, while recognizing that our Quaker faith is rooted in Christian beliefs.

We encourage individuals to

reflect on and share their spiritual journeys (which often land us in different places). Through our Advices and Queries, we discuss aspects of our faith and actions, which can lead to new insights and strengthen our community. From this wellspring of active listening comes energy to address the many issues our society and world face. It also fosters a community of seekers who care for and support each other in times of need and joy.

We live in uncertain times, and personally, I feel a lot of trepidation about the future. Sometimes it's hard not to despair. A solid faith community helps us weather our fears. I believe we have what many people are seeking. How can we broaden our reach and build connections with individuals who may not be familiar with Quakerism? How can living our Quaker values bring Light to a diverse world?

-- by Katie Jacoby

## Why I Don't Hold Hands After Meeting

Friends can disagree about when it is important to shape our practices to meet the needs of one person. I hope that at the very least we always consider those needs.

When our clerk mentioned that someone had expressed discomfort about holding hands at the end of Meeting because of past trauma, it resonated with me. I don't have that particular reaction to holding hands with Friends myself, but like many women of my age, I have been in situations over the years when I felt pressured to be physically close to others when I didn't want to and felt that saying no wasn't an option. I don't know who in Meeting had this concern, and I don't need to know. I do want them to know that I honor their concern by choosing not to hold hands after Meeting.

-- by Dorothy Lifka

## Update on Scattergood Center – Haus for Ukrainian Refugees

After almost two years of operation, the Scattergood Center in Bad Langensalza, Germany continues to thrive. To date, 49 Ukrainian refugees have found a safe haven there, the last 11 of whom are still residing there. As the Russian War of Aggression seems to have reached a stalemate, the current residents are likely to remain for some time. Co-founder & director Michael L-T, thanks all F/friends for their generous support even as he reminds them that it is still needed. GoFundMe donations can be sent to:

<https://traces.org/ukraine/>

## **Linaja's Journey to Friends**

*(continued from page 1)*

by my atheist boyfriend, launched me into a series of questions: (1) How did I end up at this church in the first place? (2) Should I leave? (3) If so, where would I go?

### **How did I end up at this church in the first place?**

To tell you how I ended up at a small evangelical church in downtown Des Moines, I must first tell you how I ended up in Iowa at all.

I moved to Iowa, from California, on December 28, 2020; for “one year, to watch corn grow.” I am not a botanist, I am not in agriculture. Watching corn grow was a metaphor for me. Having just gotten divorced ostensibly because I wanted children and my former spouse didn't, I felt like everything in my life was gone. I needed to believe that after the winter, there would be a planting of seeds, those seeds would grow to maturity, and there would be a harvest. Corn, to me, was poetry.

Moving to Iowa, I had big questions for God. I was—as the poem says—searching for my initials in the geese flying overhead. I believed the Midwest could be my place for wandering; I'd leave Egypt and spend precisely 12 months in the desert before arriving to my promise land. I came and prayed generally for discernment and specifically for clarity on whether I would ever have children. I considered remaining celibate and becoming an oblate.

I came to Iowa without much by way of furniture. I did not acquire WIFI in my home. I sent

my iPhone to live with my sister in Seattle. I really wanted uninterrupted contemplative time after I left my office. I sought spiritual direction, I read books, I sat in silence, and I prayed.

One thing that I prayed for was a church community. It was still the earlyish days of COVID and given that I was new to town and not inclined to attend large gatherings in person, I continued my practice which had started in March 2020 of viewing sermons online live from a church in Portland. I'd walk to my coworking space downtown on Sunday at noon, log on to the church's website and attend a service virtually. One morning when I was watching a sermon, a man approached me in the common area of my office, pointed to my laptop displaying the live video, pointed to his headphones and said “I'm watching the same message right now.” It made no sense that a man living in Des Moines should be watching the live sermon from a relatively small church in Oregon. That man became my pastor.

Attending his church was easy. It reminded me of the churches of my childhood. I was baptized as an infant in the Catholic church, but as a child I primarily attended nondenominational evangelical churches. I was the eldest of three daughters of a single mother who struggled immensely with intense, stormy moods. When she was low, she struggled to get out of bed. When she was high, she struggled to stay out of hospitals. Her spiritual beliefs, like her moods, were intense. We attended services religiously. Church and

school were my safe places. I never doubted God's grace and love. I believed I had a heavenly father and heavenly mother wrapped into one spiritual being; heavenly hosts would parent me even if my earthly parents were nowhere to be found.

During one of my mother's particularly challenging times, I went to live with my aunt—a wonderfully warm woman who homeschooled me along with my adopted cousins. I was about 12 years old at this time. We would take fieldtrips to the museum of creation, where I learned the earth was no older than about 10,000 years and created in precisely 6 days. We studied the Bible. We attended church.

Even when I was young, I thought it a great mystery that I happened to be born into a nation that is predominately Christian, into a family that purportedly loved the “one true God.” I understood that had I been born elsewhere, I would have known God by another name. I used to pray that if I was wrong about the name of God, that the *real god* would forgive me. These minor doubts about the faith did not stop me from attending a Christian undergraduate university and then a Christian law school. I loved God and wanted to please my heavenly audience immensely.

After law school, my spiritual journey shifted. I realized I did not believe in a literal hell of eternal condemnation. I acknowledged that evolution best explained the origin of man's life on earth. I became unrecognizably “progressive” to my conservative family, but I still found great meaning in my



spiritual practices. When I moved to Iowa, I was so relieved to find a church that was—by evangelical standards—fairly progressive. Many members did not believe in a literal hell where “nonbelievers” would suffer for eternity. While we were in the minority, many of us did not interpret Genesis literally. There was lively debate on these issues. I felt free to openly discuss my perspective at church until it came to issues of marriage equality.

### **Should I leave?**

In the late summer 2022, my pastor preached a series titled “controversial issues and the church.” It included such *controversial* topics as: women in church leadership (my pastor thought gender equity was a critical issue), belief in a literal hell (he said this was not necessary to salvation), and inclusion of LGBTQ+ members on church staff (totally fine, so long as they are celibate).

Though I had discussed the sermon on marriage equality with my pastor numerous times, had recommended books for him to read, read the books he recommended to me, and tried to discuss the issue civilly, there was no way that my pastor would acknowledge the civil rights of the queer members in our community. I was devastated by this and decided that remaining in the church would be a tacit endorsement of the pastor’s position on this issue. It would make me part of the problem. I decided to leave.

### **Where would I go?**

I started my search for a new church at gaychurch.org. I knew

that a so-called “open and affirming” community was the only community I wanted to be a part of. With my atheist boyfriend in tow, I attended Episcopalian, United Church of Christ, Methodist, and other services. I, having never attended mainline churches, found the liturgy beautiful but it did not feel authentic to me. The creeds felt empty. Instead of joining a family table for the Lord’s supper, I felt like an anthropologist observing another culture.

At a birthday brunch in January of this year, a friend mentioned she used to play guitar at the Friends meeting house for a group of Sufis. I was intrigued. I had read Thomas Kelly’s “A Testament of Devotion” in 2020. I was familiar with an essay by the Friend, Elise Boulding, in “Homosexuality and the Christian Faith,” a book I read in 2021.<sup>1</sup> I liked what very little I knew about Friends. I decided to attend a meeting on Feb. 5, 2023.

I knew immediately that I wanted to keep coming back. Feb. 5 was a first Sunday. After meeting for worship, we discussed the query of personal responsibility. In true Friend fashion, I was invited to share my responses even though I knew nothing about the queries, and it was my first meeting in attendance.

David Drake was hosting that week. He explained before the meeting that people in this room hold all sorts of beliefs; some believe in God and are Christian, others don’t and aren’t. I knew that it would be a place I could find community and I believed it was a place Forrest could safely

attend—when he chose to—and not have to worry about being proselytized to. In this fellowship, I found a spirit of peace, love, and inclusion that I had not really witnessed elsewhere.

One of the things I’m most grateful for in this community is the witness of diversity within relationships as a gift. Growing up evangelical, it was severely beaten into me that I should never marry someone who didn’t believe precisely the same thing I believed about God. At Friends meetings, I’ve learned it may be okay if you attend a silent service while your partner goes to Plymouth. It may be okay if one person is a Christian who finds immense value in the message of Jesus while the other is agnostic about whether God exists or can be named. I’ve learned that sometimes second or third marriages can be blessed. That no matter how old I get, I will probably (in some ways) never be done with the desert wandering I thought I would have crossed off my list on December 28, 2021—when I was originally scheduled to leave Iowa.

In these meetings, I’ve learned to listen for the small & fond & local voice, to embrace the suffering and stop looking for my initials in the geese flying overhead.

-----

<sup>1</sup>This article can also be found on page 16-18 at <https://www.friendsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/emember/download/1987/HC12-50820.pdf>

## Upcoming Events

### **FCNL Advocacy Training**

FCNL is hosting an Intro to Advocacy Training on January 18 at 7:00 pm. CDT. You will learn how to effectively advocate for the issues you care about.

Future trainings are scheduled for the third Thursdays at 7:00, winter into spring.

Get more info or register here: <https://www.fcnl.org/introtoadvocacy>

### **Friends are invited!**

From **Susan Myers**: Come to our celebration of **Charlie Brown's** 70th birthday! Please join us on Saturday, Jan. 20th, from 3-6 pm, at the Racoon River Nature Center in West Des Moines. We'll have appetizers, non-alcoholic drinks and cake. Cards are welcome, no gifts needed. Please respond by Jan. 15th by texting or calling Susan at 515-537-7778. Let's celebrate Charlie!!

**Scattergood Students visit DM & DMV Friends** – Feb. 4-9, More info to come.

### **Save the Date: IYM(C)**

**Midyear Meeting** is planned for 23-24 Third Month (March) 2024 at Bear Creek Meeting near Earlham, Iowa.

#### **Upcoming Hosting List**

Jan. 14 – Deborah & Katie  
Jan. 21 – David & Claire  
Jan 28 – Jim & Catherine  
Feb. 4 – Steve & Kari  
Feb. 11- Charlie & Dorothy  
Feb 18 – Ann & Linaja  
Feb. 25 – Deb & Katie

### **Feast of the Holy Innocents Service - Short film**

If you weren't able to attend the Feast of the Holy Innocents service in Des Moines on Dec. 28 – or even if you did – you may want to watch this short, moving film from the event, sponsored by the Des Moines Faith Committee for Peace. Video by Rodger Routh. Shared by Kathleen McQuillen. <https://youtu.be/bxXQRkzRAzs>

### **Middle East Info and Peacemaking Resources**

DMV Friends have shared these links recently for those who want to stay updated on the conflicts in Palestine and the Middle East.

- Friends Committee on National Legislation - [Resources on the Middle East & Iran](#)
- American Friends Service Committee - How to support people in Gaza: <https://afsc.org/news/6-ways-you-can-support-palestinians-gaza>
- Video in the Washington Post: [You Carry Your Home With You - A Palestinian Poet's Journey Out of Gaza.](#)
- Resources at [Jewish Voice for Peace](#)
- Resources at [Amnesty International](#)

### **Des Moines Valley Friends**

**Meeting for Worship:** Sundays at 10 a.m., at the Meeting House and by Zoom via email invitation from clerk, Carol Spaulding-Kruse, at

[carol.spaulding@drake.edu](mailto:carol.spaulding@drake.edu)

**Meeting for Worship/Business:** Regularly held on the second First Day each month at 1 p.m.  
**Upcoming Second Hours & Events:**

Jan. 21: Meeting for Remembrance

Jan. 28: The DM Immigrant Connection-Patti McKee

Feb. 18: A White Psychiatrist and the Ute Mtn Tribe-David Drake

**Query Discussions:** First Sundays, 11:45 a.m. - Online & in person. Billie Wade, facilitator.

**Child Care:** If you have a child who would like to be included in Zoom childcare or first day school for older youth, contact Dorothy at [dmlifka@yahoo.com](mailto:dmlifka@yahoo.com).

**Building & Grounds:** Questions about the building or grounds of the Meetinghouse to Building & Grounds Committee Convenor, Dick Douglass, 515-864-1119.

**Hospitality Committee:** Questions about housekeeping at the Meeting House to Hospitality Committee convenor Charlie Brown, 515-689-6470.

**Friendly Line:** Send info for January FL to Ann Robinson at [anny@mediacombb.net](mailto:anny@mediacombb.net) by Friday, Jan. 26.

**Find us online at:** <https://www.desmoinesvalleyfriends.org/>

**Check out our Facebook group** for members/attenders. To be added, email Jan Falb, at [jfalb0326@yahoo.com](mailto:jfalb0326@yahoo.com).