

Business Meeting for Blue River Quarterly Minutes for 4/29/2006

Camp CILCA, Cantrall, IL

Attending:

- Bloomington Normal Monthly Meeting (BNMM) – no one present
- Clear Creek Monthly Meeting (CCMM) – Grayce Mesner, Michael Dennis,
- Columbia Monthly Meeting (CMM) – David Finke, Robert Wixom
- Decatur Worship Group (DWG) – no one present
- Evanston Friends Meeting (EFM) – Clyde & Jeanette Baker
- Peoria-Galesburg Monthly Meeting (PGMM) – no one present
- Friends Meeting of Rolla (Preparative) (FMRP) – no one present
- St. Louis Religious Society of Friends (SLRSF) – Steve Hinson, Dawn Rubbert
- Southern Illinois Friends Meeting (SIFM) – no one present
- Springfield Worship Group (SWG) – no one present
- Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting (UCFM) –Mariellen Gilpin, Peter Lasersohn, Bobbi Trist

Clerk: Peter Lasersohn (UCFM)

Recording: Michael Dennis (CCMM)

Opening

Meeting began with silent worship.

State of Society

The following reports were offered:

- Bloomington Normal Monthly Meeting – no report
- Clear Creek Monthly Meeting – Michael Dennis read the following report:

Easter potluck signaled the end of another nomadic year for Clear Creek Meeting. This last year seemed a year of movement, both of where we worshipped and where we were led to journey. After moving and carrying boxes back and forth between buildings, moving benches and tables to accommodate changes, it is a welcome relief to be inside the Meeting House again.

The moving and dealing with changes to the buildings is good for us. It makes long winter months disappear more quickly than we expect. Having witnessed the scary beginnings and the gratifying endings of several building projects does not make new ones easier but each project is a journey we are learning to take together.

Our year included a group of “Dancing Rabbits,” an ecological community who quietly and efficiently deconstructed the dorm and set aside reusable materials. They accomplished this task more quickly than expected and finished in about a week.

All winter it seemed we traveled to various places both individually and as groups. Some of us visited prisons and other Monthly Meetings, traveled to Pennsylvania and some of us flew south and west for the winter.

Amid all this moving about our “Committee of Three” gathered financing and supplies to deliver to the Westwebro Library in Louisiana. They will travel south to

deliver these supplies in person.

New members have joined and jumped into this swirling dance. Their creative energy and willingness to immediately participate in decision-making and creative projects has invigorated the Meeting as a whole.

- Columbia Monthly Meeting – David Finke reported they are 2 weeks away from completing their Sabbath year (during which they have not submitted state of society reports). They had two members pass, Gary Walden and Lisi Bansen. They had two spiritual retreats in October and a third in March, each facilitated by Maurine Pyle (Field Secretary) & Margaret Katranides (M&A visitor) and brought a board with pictures and writings from these retreats. Thus they have been both grieving and envisioning. They have actually been doing a good job of thinking about how to come out of Sabbath and identifying the next steps. The meeting kept a point person for property, but also developed list of who is on call for advice or work. The meeting has avoided the word “committee” and instead used the term “group”. The Nominating Committee was replaced with the Group on Gifts and Leading. A point person was replaced with a Group on Social Concerns, Peace, Justice and Sustainability. The structural recommendation was that the work that had been done by M&C will be done by two groups: Pastoral Care, Counsel & Clearness Group; and Spiritual Life & Nurture Group. Other committees were still on call during the Sabbath. They came out of the Sabbath with greater awareness, trust in God’s will and trepidation as they still need to take up decisions about space and about same gender issues.
- Peoria Galesburg – no report
- Saint Louis Religious Society of Friends – Tom Paxson read the following report from St. Louis Meeting:

There is a sense among Friends at St. Louis Monthly Meeting that our focus has become more deeply spiritual in the last year. The meeting is growing, both in numbers and in its work in the wider world. Yet challenges have accompanied our growth. Friends who remember a much smaller meeting miss the tightly knit sense of community that smaller meetings have. Though we have many hands, it does not always feel as if our work is made lighter. Friends are struggling with a sense of fatigue – that there is simply more work than our committees can handle or possibly do well – that standing for Friends testimonies in a violent and unjust world can be frustrating and seem to make little difference. Though many of our members and attenders are passionately committed to and involved in specific projects in the meeting, some of our community wide events have not been drawing a response from Friends. This has led us to wonder if our attention has fractured, or whether we are failing to convey the sense of corporate responsibility that is central to Friends practice.

Our meetings for worship are sound. There are some First Days when no one speaks and we are rejuvenated in the silence. There are other First Days when many Friends speak, and we are nurtured by the messages. We are especially grateful in this difficult time for those who stand for peace, that our meetings for worship have not become

overly political – or forums for political debate, but rather that there is a deep sense of expectant waiting upon the Spirit to lead us to speak.

We continue to wrestle with the angel that is our meeting for worship with a concern for business. With the help of Friends General Conference's Traveling Ministries Program, we conducted a workshop this winter about Friends' business practice. We have begun using etiquette guidelines for the meeting for business. We have seen improvements and are better resisting the temptation to do committee work in the face of the meeting. Still the meetings are frustratingly long and are often attended by a small group of the same Friends. We are tender to the need to both include more Friends and to better express that the work of the meeting for business is central to our faith. We are confronted with the idea that there may be a culture in our meeting that holds that business prayerfully handled cannot also be efficiently handled.

Our many committees are doing good and important work. The newly formed Social Concerns Committee has been inspiring in its work with the survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, both sponsoring a family of survivors here in St. Louis and working with the Houma Indians in Louisiana. They have also undertaken work to prepare our own neighborhood for disaster response and have reached out to many organizations in our area. We are glad that this work is weaving us more tightly into the fabric of our St. Louis neighborhood. Our First Day School continues to thrive and expand. Through the work of our First Day School Committee, it is clear that our children are growing spiritually, taking their Quakerism seriously, bonding with older Friends and that they have a sense of belonging in the meeting as a whole. Our Peace Committee has continued to work against the war in Iraq, and this year drafted a declaration of Peace which was adopted by the meeting. Property Committee has risen to the difficult task of caring for our aging building and we are grateful to report that due to their hard work to rescue us from the depredations of the mold monster we have been able to return to using our meeting room. Although the work of our other committees may be quieter and perhaps less overtly evident, we are grateful for the hard work they do in keeping our meeting vital.

Spiritually we are strong. We give individual members a safe base from which to work as they go out into the world on behalf of Friends testimonies. If there is something we seem to be lacking, it is, perhaps, a sense of joy. With the help of the Spirit we hope that we might stop trudging wearily over the earth and begin answering George Fox's call to "walk cheerfully over the earth, answering that of God in everyone."

- Southern Illinois Friends Meeting – Dawn had car trouble and was unable to make it. Peter Lasersohn read the previously submitted report:

When all the children, attenders and members of the Southern Illinois Society of Friends are seated in one room, we fill about twenty chairs. In worship, we consistently have six to eight, sometimes more. For the past couple of years we have held worship-with-business less than monthly – four to eight times a year – and during our usual worship time, as part of worship. This has worked well for reaching broader unity with more Friends in attendance for business.

Since this fall, we have undertaken a monthly Adult Religious Education session, using Quakerism 101. We all feel exhilarated by these studies and discussions, and it has

created a stronger sense of community for us. We are also brought into community by discussing the challenges surrounding our rental space, the Carbondale Interfaith Center. Funding for the center is collapsing, and drastic changes are likely to occur in the next two years. The IYM Field Secretary has challenged us to use this as an opportunity to clarify our long-term vision for our monthly meeting.

Our First Day School must meet the needs of a 1 year-old, a 4 year-old, a 7 year-old, a 10 year-old, and six teen boys (three of whom are graduating high school this year). At present, stories and art fill the bill, and in the coming quarter the children will produce another Tom Leverett play, this one based on conscientious objectors in World War II. We hope to take this one on the road, as we did years ago to St. Louis with our play on Lucretia Mott. My have the children grown since then!

We recently enjoyed a very well attended Saturday pot luck, where we took turns telling the stories of our first experiences with SISF. We also enjoyed the visit of Maurine Pyle as Field Secretary, and participated in a foot-washing activity for Easter. On April 29 we will head to Giant City Park for our annual spring camping and worship event. It has been a very good year for us.

- Urbana-Champaign – Mariellen Gilpin read the UCFM report:

Meeting has been in transition – from the small dedicated group who told each other, “If we build it, they will come,” and planned and constructed the new meetinghouse, to a much expanded group, often three or four times larger than our usual attendance in spring 2004. These new attenders are often new to Quakerism as well as new to our meeting. New Friends are plunging in and helping with responsibilities large and small: hosting Blue River Quarterly; running First Day School; keeping financial records for the meeting; planning monthly silent mini-retreats; conducting meditations for peace; collaborating with other churches on Hiroshima Day commemorations; initiating an interfaith radio show called Acting on Faith; and participating in committees for clearness for membership and marriage.

There are also new voices in the spoken ministry, sharing with one another out of a deep and living silence. Sometimes there is a living sense of the Presence. Worship is often completely silent. The Spiritual Journeys series, with one speaker on Sunday mornings during February and March, drew a group of 10-15 Friends to hear the talks, which featured deep sharing and authentic witness. Questions have been thoughtful, and worship afterwards is deep and reflective. One speaker shared that he had benefited greatly from the effort to prepare his talk. Both newcomers and oldtimers have presented a rich array of experiences and reflections.

We welcome new faces in meetings for business. Some business meetings attendance is almost double what it usually was two years ago. We are working to make our business process smoother and more efficient while remaining reflective and centered. We are not always successful at this, but there is an upward trend. We hope this improved process will help all of us, not just new Friends, persist in the work of the meeting.

We have noted with concern that Friends have been leaving the spiritual

nurture of our children almost exclusively to their parents. Ministry and Oversight and Religious Education committees have been encouraging Friends without young children to participate actively in our children's spiritual growth. Friends are responding positively to active recruitment and seem to be having a good time. RE recently conducted a lively Intergenerational Sunday, during which Friends had a choice of several fun and meaningful activities shared with the children. Friends had a great time and hope to do similar things again soon. We recently experimented with a four week Tweens Friends class of five ten to eleven year-old children. It is good to see their faces in meeting.

New voices, new energies, new thoughts are rippling through the spiritual life of our meeting. We enjoy and learn from each other in a rich symphony of Spirit.

Clerk's Report

Letters were sent to BNMM and PGMM, but no reply was received. Letters of support for the Religious Freedom Tax Fund Bill were sent to the representatives from the BRQ communities. Bobbie Trist supplied several sets of older minutes, missing from our archives, but Peter is still looking for minutes from Fall 1999, Fall 1995, Spring 1995, Fall 1986, Spring 1983, Spring 1981, all sessions 1971-1980.

Treasurer's Report.

Grayce Mesner distributed a treasurer's report showing a starting balance of \$1720.53, deposits of \$1722.83, and expenses of \$2168.45, for an ending balance of \$1275.07. The report was accepted. Meeting also expressed appreciation to Grayce for her continuing role as BRQ treasurer.

Proposal from Urbana-Champaign MM for a BRQ meeting "Worship and Ministry Committee". Mariellen Gilpin presented the following minute from UCFM for consideration by BRQ:

Urbana-Champaign Friends recommend that Blue River Quarterly build the spiritual life of the Society of Friends in our widely scattered meetings, often isolated, by nominating a committee on Worship and Ministry. The committee, in coordination with IYM Ministry & Advancement, would organize regular visits to our meetings, help form new worship groups, and help smaller meetings plan and carry out retreats for their members. To further this end, BRQ should help defray costs of committee members for travel to meetings, etc.

The proposal was discussed at some length and carried over to the next day.

Proposal from Urbana-Champaign MM in support of "green burial." Mariellen Gilpin read a copy of her letter of concern about the problems with modern American burial customs being financially, spiritually, and environmentally destructive. (For more

information, Google “green burial”.) Green Burial is a simpler alternative that allows the body to decompose. While funeral directors often make it sound like this would be illegal, it is in fact already allowed and common practice for Orthodox Jews and Mennonite communities. The following minute was proposed:

“Green burial” refers to a method of body disposal that involves no embalming, minimal casket/shroud, no grave liner, and minimal grave marker. The intent in green burial is for the body to decompose in the ground naturally and quickly. In a green burial cemetery, the “perpetual care” portion of the plot fee is devoted to restoration and maintenance of the area as a nature preserve (forest, etc) rather than as a lawn.

It is the sense of Blue River Quarterly Meeting of Friends that green burial is in accord with Quaker testimonies of simplicity, equality, and environmental care. We support the concept of green burial becoming an available option throughout our area, and we recommend to Illinois Yearly Meeting, and indeed to all Friends, consideration of a minute similar to this one.

There was agreement to approve the minute. Meeting agreed to appoint a committee (Steve Hinson, John Gilpin, Jeannette Baker) to advance this idea, eventually bringing a formal proposal to IYM business meeting. The committee will be charged with gathering further information on alternative methods to the final disposition of human physical remains (e.g., green burial, cremation, spreading ashes) and bring them forward to BRQ & IYM through things such as IYM workshops, articles, research on legal issues and resources, and/or proposals to BRQ or IYM. The committee is also empowered to invite/add other members. Steve Hinson will be the initial convener.

Right Sharing of World Resources. Clyde Baker made a presentation on Right Sharing of World Resources (RSWR) and requested a one-time use of the BRQ mailing list to send out a copy of the RSWR newsletter with the offer to send more if they sign up. They would only receive additional mailings if they actively signed up. A major problem is that BRQ’s mailing list is only of people who come to the quarterly meetings. The constituent meetings have more extensive lists. Thus Dawn Rubbert proposed the following minute:

BRQ was moved during their Spring 2006 gathering by a presentation by RSWR. We believe it would be appropriate for the IYM website to include a link to the website of RSWR. BRQ requests that its constituent meetings consider allowing the RSWR to use their mailing lists one time for the purpose of sending Friends one copy of their newsletter. Only Friends actively requesting future RSWR mailings will receive them.

The minute was approved.

Spring 2007 meeting. There was a discussion about whether to return to Camp CILCA or try someplace like Camp Menno Haven (815-646-4344 or www.mennohaven.com). The latter is a little more expensive, but has better meals, a better range of

accommodations and similar in price to Camp Dubois. Meeting agreed to look into the availability of Camp Menno Haven for the 3rd to 5th weekend of April 2007, trying to avoid the Quaker Earthcare Witness, and IYM's Women's retreat meetings.

Meeting closed with silent worship.

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Minutes for 4/30/06**

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IYM property improvement fund. David Finke expressed a concern that BRQ (and IYM) Friends continue to contribute to the IYM Property improvement fund. Gifts of \$500 or more by June 30 will still be matched 100% (up to \$50,000).

Proposed Committee for Worship & Ministry Committee. After additional consideration, it was decided to season this idea further in our local meetings. Mariellen Gilpin agreed to coordinate this seasoning.

Other Business:

- Meeting agreed to contribute \$50 to RSWR in thanks to the presentation by Clyde and Jennette Baker.
- Bob Wixom reminded everyone that David Wixom and Mark/Dawn Amos will be leading the 33rd Float Trip May 5-7 (see details in Among Friends and e-mail). Bob Wixom indicates that this will be his last year. He would like to see it continue and it would be nice to have a rafting trip. David, Mark & Dawn need help from others to keep these trips going in 2007 and beyond. As one of the co-sponsors, BRQ needs to talk to David Wixom, Mark and Dawn Amos and find out what kind of support they need for 2007 and beyond. Meeting delegated this task to Peter Lasersohn.

Next Meetings:

- Southern small meetings have scheduled the fall 2006 BRQ on 9/15-17/2006 at Camp Brim Shire, Mo. (<http://www.campbrimshire.com/>). Small Southern Meetings will be responsible for planning.

Meeting closed with silent worship.