

Downingtown Friends Meeting
Peace and Social Concerns Committee
FY 2023-4 Annual Report
Present at Sixth Month Meeting for Business
Held 30 June 2024

“Living out the immanent and transcendent aspects of spirituality as a Friend has never been a private matter. Quaker structures depend on the shared inward experiences of members (*and attenders*) as the basis for worship, the ordering of business, and social and humanitarian action. The Quaker way takes on faith the seemingly irrational proposition that the inspiration of individuals can lead a community to unity and spiritual power...” *Faith and Practice*, p. 193

Actions and Callings from the year, 1 July 2023 through 30 June 2024

Fund Raisers

PSC sponsored three fund-raisers during the year. The fund drives involved making announcements to DFM members and attendees via email and at verbal announcements, as well as delivering the funds to the receiving charity. Some involved signs (made by our artiste *extraordinaire* Sherry McVickar) alerting Meeting to these fund-raisers.

- Chester County Food Bank (November/December) -- \$1250 raised from DFM members and attenders. Bentley Systems matched this with an extra \$1250.
- Good Samaritan Gift Card Drive (February) -- \$525 in gift cards raised from DFM members and attenders. This used to be a Christmas gift card drive but we shunted it to February because of the Xmas Food Bank drive, and packaged it as a “Valentine’s Day” drive.
- Summer School Lunches (money placed in a pool to be distributed by Good Samaritan Services) -- \$800 raised from DFM members and attenders.

FCNL

- DFM representative
 - Joe Laird has long served as DFM’s FCNL Representative for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and stepped down in March. PSC thanks Joe for his long and faithful service in this capacity.
 - Dick Whiteford (ex officio) took over from Joe in March
- Lobbying legislators
 - In person
 - Joe attended the FCNL annual conference in Washington DC in November, where the general cttee for PYM [150 people] worked on drafting reproductive rights legislation/wording and stopping prosecution of health care providers. He also joined 18 FCNL members to meet with staffers for Representative Houlihan and Senator Fetterman during the conference.
 - Via postcards
 - After a period of uncertainty, PYM lifted its concerns about undue political activity threatening its religious tax-exempt status. Thus we

resumed postcard-writing in the Spring (the resumption of Eating Mtg—when we typically do this—helped). Postcards on the following topics were prepared and signed by DFM members and attenders:

- Anti-gun violence (March)
- Lenape Tribe of PA recognition (April)
- PA Fair Educational funding (May)
- Peace in Gaza (June)
- FCNL discernment process
 - Every two years, FCNL asks Monthly Meetings around the country to identify topics of concern. The cttee suggested the following topics of concern to DFM, and sent them in to FCNL:
 - Advocate for peace in Israel, so the people of Gaza can be treated like human beings. Seek federal policies and practices that avoid violence and embrace peaceful forms of managing and resolving conflict.
 - Speak out against political discourse that demonizes people or political parties that they don't agree with and prevent political violence. "We're in the same boat, brother!"
 - Protect civil rights (especially voting rights), civil liberties and human rights, regardless of race, creed or gender.
 - Promote legislation that provides workers with a living wage. Support universal access to affordable, effective comprehensive health care.
 - Advocate the prohibition of brutal treatment of animals in food production and animal testing.
 - Promote fair trade policies, holding other countries to rigorous environmental and labor standards.
 - Urge that the federal budget allow for spending to meet the actual human needs and environmental stewardship, rather than military spending.
 - Support policies to promote renewable energy sources, promote energy conservation, reduce fuel consumption and increase fuel efficiency in the use of all energy sources.

Peace Vigils

- We had one Black Lives Matter curbside vigil this year, but generally we moved away from these owing to the war in Gaza and held our "traditional" Peace Vigils. These occurred at the rise of Meeting on every third Sunday, though sometimes they took place on different Sundays (and in February, we had two peace vigils).

POWER Interfaith

- DFM has been a member of this multi-faith, multi-racial organization for social justice for some years now. Our activities this year mostly centered around the fight for Pennsylvania Fair Educational Funding. The current formula was ruled unconstitutional in 2023 and all these activities were intended to push for this:
 - Staffing a table for voter registration at the Friends Fall Festival (October)
 - Attending Rally for all POWER divisions in Norriton (February)
 - Attending Rally for House Bill 2370 on steps of Harrisburg Capitol (May)

- o Organized DFM postcard drive for DFM members and attendees to send to their PA legislators (May)
- o Organized telephone “blitz” with weekly message that DFM members and attendees could use to write/call their PA legislators (six straight weeks in May-June)

Distribution of charities of FFF profits

- DFM has agreed that 60% of the profits from FFF should be used for charitable donations. Profits this year were \$5,000 and so we had \$3,000 to spend. We sent out a call for applications from Meeting members and attenders and received 10 funding requests. Of these applicants, we funded the following (funds were sent out in April):
 - o Good Works
 - o Central Presbyterian Syrian Refugee Resettlement
 - o Lord’s pantry
 - o NAACP Coatesville
 - o A Child’s Light
 - o Prison Program
 - o Restore our Roots
 - o Fair Hill
 - o Detroit Monthly Meeting
- “Announcing” these recipients to Meeting is a priority. We did so through colorful signage made by Sherry McVickar that was posted on the Schoolhouse announcements board.

Opening Exercise Presentations

- PSC sponsored or ran the following OEs. The first four were recipients of charity funding from the 2022 and 2023 FFF:
 - A Child’s Light (Leslie Holt, October)
 - Central Presbyterian Syrian Refugee Resettlement Cttee (Jane and Mike Butler, November)
 - NAACP Coatesville (Donna Rowlands, December)
 - Fair Hill (Sally Harrison, February)
 - Report on PSC attendance at recent FCNL conference in DC (Joe Laird, January) [Joe continued it afterward as a Brown Bag presentation too]
 - " Can we do anything about gun violence?" (Martha Bryans and Barbara LaVerghetta, March)
 - Discussion of PSC’s Land Acknowledgement statement for general feedback from DFM before producing final version (Julian Onderdonk, April)

Lenape/Native American project

- We pursued a multi-pronged “Lenape/Native American” project in connection with the drafting of a Land Acknowledgement statement. The idea was to back up the statement, which after all consists only of words, with actions. In this we worked closely with Kristy Herman, who has connections with the Lenape Tribe of PA and who is pursuing a PhD in education that seeks to consider ways to develop a school curriculum focused on Native American culture. Our projects and outcomes:
 - o Land Acknowledgement statement. This went through many drafts and many revisions, with many people providing feedback. PSC presented it to

DFM in April for a last round of feedback with the final result below. This statement was placed in Business Meeting minutes for April, and (by agreement at BM) will be placed on the DFM website and on the wall of the Schoolhouse in hard copy, with a frame:

- *Downingtown Friends acknowledge that our Meeting is situated on land occupied by the Lenape people long before the arrival of Europeans. We honor these original Americans for their guardianship of this, our only earth and for their continuing commitment to it. We see their faithful stewardship of the land as an act of Divine worship and likewise seek to treat with reverence and compassion the treasured resources and precious creatures found here. Their example strengthens our Quaker values of social commitment, inspiring anew our efforts to foster justice for present and future generations through deliberate action and collaboration.*
- o Other parts of the “Lenape project” included:
 - Postcards urging legislators to support the formal recognition of the Lenape Tribe of PA.
 - Invitation to all DFM members and attenders to take Lenape language classes on zoom taught by the Lenape of PA tribe. (No one took up the invitation.)
 - Creek cleanup: DFM members and attendees assisted in picking up trash and debris, including remnants of barbed wire fence, along the entire creek on the south edge of DFM property. The seasonal creek running into the creek on the west edge was also cleaned up.
 - Invitation to all DFM members and attendees to join the Lenape Tribe of PA Delaware canoe trip in summer 2026
 - Possible trip to the Lenape headquarters/museum in Scranton in July.

Monthly Meals for West Chester Salvation Army

- Meeting continued to provide dinners for about 30 people to the Salvation Army on the third Sunday of every month. PSC does not currently administer this though members contribute, and the program has traditionally been “housed” under PSC auspices.

Laundromat Library League

- PSC continues to support this program, which brings new books to the Rainbow Laundromat in Coatesville while trading out old ones. Members of the Cttee as well as members and attenders from DFM generally help in this.

“Civics Table” at FFF

Though not a PSC initiative, we helped organize and staff a “civics table” at Friends Fall Festival in October, with flyers and information about the following:

- o POWER Metro
- o FCNL
- o Chester County Food Bank and Lord’s Pantry

- o Good Works
- o Penn Futures (environmental concerns)

Interfaith Action Community

Though also not a PSC initiative, members of the committee involved themselves with IAC activities as follows (they were discussed and reported on at PSC meetings):

- One member of the PSC committee attended all IAC regular meetings, and reported to PSC on its activities
- Cttee members participated in/helped with logistics at panel at DFM on Quaker beliefs on death and afterlife (December)
- Participation at the IAC's Interfaith Shabbat at Beth Israel Congregation (June)

Heeding God's Call: An End to Gun Violence (June-July event)

This was a third project not directly sponsored by PSC, but a member was heavily involved and gave us regular updates. Some 60 T-shirts with the names of Chester County residents lost to (non-suicide) gun violence printed on them were placed on frames in front of the Meetinghouse, facing Lancaster Avenue. A memorial service, attended by representatives from different faith traditions and in some cases the families of those killed, was held in the Schoolhouse on June 23. Songs were sung. The exhibit will remain on display for two weeks. The hope is that it will then "travel" to other Chester County faith communities to go on display there as well.

Committee Membership changes

- Joe Moon through a mix-up started attending meetings in January. (He was appointed to the committee last year but no one knew!) Faith D'Urbano joined in May. Barb Smith and Dick Whiteford attended meetings in an unofficial capacity.

We thank Meeting generally for its support of our efforts.

Respectfully submitted,
Julian Onderdonk, clerk

Peace and Social Concerns Committee Members:

Ann Buki, Faith d'Urbano, Liz Hulse, Susan Kelley, Joe Laird, Barbara LaVerghetta, Sherry McVickar, Joe Moon, Julian Onderdonk (clerk)