

June 2020



The Friendly News

San Antonio Quakers

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Dear Friends,

Welcome to June. Despite the Texas governor's "order" to "open Texas", we are still meeting by Zoom. Our city and county leaders caution us that COVID-19 cases could easily spike again and warn us to avoid events that would encourage its spread. We are exploring our alternatives, but for this month, at least, we shall continue to meet electronically. You can find detailed information at the calendar page of our website: <https://sanantonioquakers.org/calendar/>.

Here are the direct links for our weekly events. You do not need a Zoom account to join.

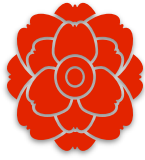
- **Meeting for Worship – Sundays 10-11am**, followed by check-in and discussion:
 - Join URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87952863787>
- **Course in Miracles discussion – Tuesdays 7-8pm**; led by David Hayes
 - Join URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83760992196>
- **Midweek Meet-Up – Wednesdays 7-8:30pm**; check-in and topical discussion
 - Join URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83760992196>

In addition, we are exploring ways to avoid "Zoom fatigue" while adding topical forums and other opportunities for discussion. In this vein, **we will use the June 24th Midweek Meet-Up slot for Meeting for Business**. We are asking Friends to read the May minutes and the June committee reports in advance online. We want to keep that meeting timely, but not rushed.

The rest of this newsletter comes in two parts. The first concerns Meeting itself (pp 2-4); the second concerns events in the wider world (pp 5-10). Both are important to Quakers. Please read!

Sign up to receive an email when this newsletter is posted at the Meeting website.

Write us at newsletter@saquakers.org if you wish a snail-mail copy.



June Query

How have you tried to stay connected to others during the current crisis: family, friends, Meeting , and the wider community? Are there new ways you can do so?



Pandemic

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

—Lynn Ungar

<http://www.lynnungar.com/poems/pandemic/>

Quaker Community

Last month, Peggy D. began a series on getting to know your Friends. This month, she brings us Julie Crum and Oliver Gerken. Both are active in Meeting and worth getting to know.

get to know your Friends

Friends Meeting of San Antonio

Julie Crum is a member of the Religious Society of Friends. She retired to her family home in Canyon Lake in 2019 after several decades in Virginia. She lives with her mother and sister along with her cat, Mandelbrot. Julie has 3 children, a daughter in New York and 2 sons in the Boston area. She enjoys volunteer work for political campaigns and keeping up with current events. Birdwatching is particular joy!



What is your comfort food?

Toast with peanut butter

How many states and/or countries have you lived in?

7 states ~ North Dakota, Michigan, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia & Texas

Where did you attend your first Quaker Meeting?

Lehigh Vallley Friends Meeting - Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 1984

Which of the Quaker testimonies speaks to you?

Integrity, because it's what I reach for every time I face a difficult decision. Simplicity as well--I try to keep these principles close to the front of my mind when I live my life. I really appreciate having a framework to structure my thinking and my actions.

Name one positive outcome from your Corona experience.

"I know I'll never be a digital native, but the quarantine has really boosted me into a higher level of competence with video communication, and I have been very glad to learn how to use Zoom and other platforms."

1

Peaches or Strawberries

PEACHES

2

Roses or Daisies

MOSS ROSES

3

Coffee or Tea

TEA

4

Modern or Vintage

MODERN

get to know your Friends

Friends Meeting of San Antonio

Oliver Gerken is an attender of FMSA and co-clerk of the FMSA Religious Education Committee. He is a husband, son, brother and guardian of two cats and a dog. Oliver is a Texas Master Naturalist, in training, who sometimes writes poetry. He will find food if there is any to be had and buys three books for every one he reads. Best of all Oliver thinks alpacas are just neat!



What is your comfort food?

Perogies

How many states and/or countries have you lived in?

3 states ~ Indiana, North Carolina & New York

2 countries ~ USA & Turkey (Istanbul)

Where did you attend your first Quaker Meeting?

Friends Meeting of San Antonio - San Antonio, Texas

Which of the Quaker testimonies speaks to you?

Integrity. I see Integrity as the root of all testimonies--knowing what is right or true, even if the knowing is painful, causes me to act for the better.

Name one positive outcome from your Corona experience.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has caused me to be more discerning about what businesses I choose to patronize. When the shutdown forced me to slow down my consumption, I discovered I had more space to deliberate about where my dollar is best spent."

1

Peaches or Strawberries

PEACHES

2

Ocean or Mountains

MOUNTAINS

3

Book or Movie

BOOK

4

Winter or Summer

WINTER

The Wider World

Issue #1: White-on-Black Violence in America

Over the few days, U.S. cities have erupted in violence over the public murder of George Floyd, who was crushed to death by a policeman on a Minneapolis streetcorner. This is merely the latest in a series of recent incidents of violence against African Americans, including the police murder of Breonna Taylor (Louisville), the White citizen murder of Ahmaud Arbery (Georgia), and a host of other events. These show – again – that things that White Americans do every day (walking, running, sleeping, going to the store) can cause African Americans to lose their lives.

Events during this weekend's peaceful protests as well as its riots sent the same message: the arrest (and later release) of a Black CNN reporter in Minneapolis, while a nearby White reporter was thanked for doing his job; the police killing in Louisville of an unarmed Black restaurant owner.

Friends spoke about their disquiet with these events during and after Meeting for Worship last Sunday (May 31st). We were clear about our need to be educated on this topic and also about our need to act. We expect to have conversations beginning at Midweek Meet-Up this coming Wednesday (June 3rd).

What follows are part of our education. They are two reflections by African American intellectuals. The first is by Esau McCaulley, a professor of religion at Wheaton College and an Anglican priest. The second is by Dr. Robert Sellers, a professor of psychology and the Vice Provost for Equity and Inclusion at the University of Michigan. They both have a lot to teach us.

Ahmaud Arbery and the America That Doesn't Exist

By Prof. Dr. Esau McCaulley

May 10, 2020; New York Times; <https://nyti.ms/2MiQypU>

Football does not prepare its athletes for a life of fitness. Its drills and exercises are meant to harden the body for collisions. After our playing days are over, we must find new ways to keep our bodies in shape.

Much like Ahmaud Arbery, the former high school football player who was shot and killed in Georgia in February, I took up jogging. I had a certain trepidation, but not because long distances gave me pause. I feared going on runs in the whiter neighborhoods that have marked my new reality in the portion of the Midwest that I now call home.

So I purchased the loudest orange and lime running shirts on the market. I didn't believe that they would save my life if someone saw my black skin and thought only of danger. But I did think that in the court case that would follow in the wake of my death, the lime shirt might make it difficult to claim that people didn't know that I was exercising.

After a few years of jogging, I thought that this was a silly practice and bought less blaring shirts. Now I'm thinking it wasn't so absurd. Mr. Arbery was wearing a white T-shirt when he was chased by a father and a son and fatally shot while jogging in a residential neighborhood in coastal Georgia.

Ahmaud Arbery is not a social or political issue, but a person with family and friends. Only those who knew him can remember and mourn him as he deserved. I pray that we take the time to do more than hashtag him on the way toward a reflection on what it means for African-Americans in this land.

The tragedy is not simply what his death reveals about how black life is valued here. The tragedy is not only the freshly invigorated fear that black men and women will feel as they jog the streets and trails of America. The tragedy is that his black life ended. For those who believe that all life is sacred, there is no bigger catastrophe.

Nevertheless, Ahmaud Arbery's name will move onto a list that stretches back far into our history. That list includes names like Emmett Till, Addie May Collins, Carol Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Rosamond Robertson, Medgar Evers, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, and Eric Garner. Black Americans have become adept at recounting this litany of suffering that began when the first chained black bodies arrived on this continent 400 years ago.

After video of the events leading up to Mr. Arbery's death became public this week, the father and son were charged with murder and aggravated assault. While we pray that once more of the facts are fully known justice will be served, courts cannot resurrect the dead. They cannot complete a life.

A particular decision will not wipe away the dread that events like this cause in the homes of African-Americans. They will not change the tenor of conversations that black parents have with their children.

Black folks need more than a trial and a verdict. Our problems are deeper, rooted not in the details of a particular case, but in distrust of the system charged with protecting us and punishing those who do us harm. This cynicism is well earned, arising out of repeated disappointments. To begin to heal this distrust we need this country to take responsibility for its devaluation of blackness and its complicity in violence against black bodies.

We need this country to become something different, something more. Black people need to be seen as fully human beings made in the image of God, not a menace to be managed, controlled and extinguished. In 1847, Leonard Black, who escaped slavery and became a prominent abolitionist, said, "Do you talk of selling a man? You might as well talk of selling immortality or sunshine."

He knew what we were worth. We are free things gifted by our creator with the ability to love and laugh and learn and pursue our dreams. Anything less is unacceptable.

Ahmaud Arbery never lived in that America, and I do not expect to experience it in its fullness either. In this way, I am not far from the ancient Israelites of the Bible. Instead of pinning their hopes on corrupt rulers, they articulated a theology of the kingship of God. The Psalms, Israel's hymnbook, are full of passages that say things like, "My whole being will exclaim, 'Who is like you, Lord? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them.'"

When kings and rulers would not bring about justice, the disinherited put their hope in God. This is the root of black faith in this country: when faced with the denial of justice we set our hopes on a higher court, a more definitive vindication.

For the Christian, this vindication came in the person of Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection is the great reversal, the emptying of the power of sin and death on the one hand and the

overcoming of the oppressive tendencies of the state on the other. That is, for us, the immovable fact of history.

There is no bigger rebellion or miracle in the history of these United States than that of the black Christians who saw in the very book used to justify their oppression a testimony to a God who disagreed. There is no greater audacity than their use of that Bible to construct, almost from scratch, a Christian anthropology that demanded a recognition of black worth. That struggle continues.

In the end, the question is not whether this country will finally fully value black lives. America doesn't get a vote in the matter. It lacks the competence. The question is whether this country will continue to find itself in the dangerous place of having policies, customs and laws that oppose the will of God.

My work, as a minister of the gospel, is not to fix America, but to remind it of what it is not. It is not the kingdom of God, our great hope. Indeed, far too often God has looked upon us and our notions of justice and found America wanting.

Alongside the litany of suffering that marks the black experience, there is a chant that grows in power in times of crisis. It is in the spirituals and the blues, in hip-hop, soul and gospel music. It is in black poetry, fiction, and film. This is a chorus of defiant joy, a refusal to let fear stifle hope.

Many committed to running 2.23 miles, a nod to the date Mr. Arbery was killed, on Friday, which would have been his 26th birthday. Another way to honor his life is to find room for joy, knowing that we are not alone in our struggles.

I Am So Tired

By Prof. Dr. Robert M. Sellers

May 29, 2020; University of Michigan Office of Diversity Website;

<https://bit.ly/2Xo3EbW>

Growing up the son of a minister and two civil rights activists, one of my favorite gospel songs is "I don't feel no ways tired." That song, like so many other songs from my African American culture, evokes an everlasting optimism about tomorrow that is built on "the faith that our dark past has taught us" as well as "the hope that the present has brought us."

I have always said that Black folks are the most optimistic subscribers of the American dream, despite our long history of dehumanization and degradation in this country. This other-worldly optimism is perhaps most famously exemplified in Dr. King's "I have a dream" speech (that America ironically likes to co-opt by trotting it out every year on his birthday as a self-congratulatory sign of how much progress we have made as a society since his death).

This morning, I woke up very tired. Not your normal tired. I woke up with a kind of tired that can only be found on the other side of loss, anger, frustration, sadness, and despair. This morning, I woke up in a state in which African Americans make up roughly 13% of the population but comprise 31% of the people with COVID-19 and 40% of the people dying from COVID-19. I woke up in a country where a White woman can not only accuse an African American man of threatening her because he is simply asking her to obey the law in a public space, but she can actually weaponize the police for her own aims simply by repeatedly referring to him as being African American.

The scary truth of the matter is not that she believed (or even hoped) that she would get a different response by evoking race when making her 911 call. The really scary thing is that she

was right. By evoking race and Blackness specifically, she placed a target on his back, putting a man's life in real danger. The recent murders of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery make this point abundantly clear: being a Black male interacting with law enforcement can be hazardous to one's health. Lest we get it twisted, being a Black woman in these situations is no picnic either. I woke up in a country where a Black woman is being repeatedly punched in the head by a member of my local sheriff department.

This morning, I woke up bone-weary tired.

Some people argue that this country, while being built substantially by us, was never meant for us. (They are not wrong.) As such, some of these same people believe that other-worldly optimism is a sign of weakness and is ultimately what has sealed our fate as a people. They question the wisdom in holding out such faith and hope for change in a system (in a society) that has time and time again demonstrated that Black dignity, Black bodies, and Black lives matter a little less. (It is hard to argue with the logic of the question.)

These times really do raise for me the question of how long must we wait, plan, work, march, agitate, forgive, and vote before we have a society in which all lives matter equally, regardless of race or color? In my bone-weary tired state this morning, before I even got out of bed, I asked myself why should I continue to fight to try to change a system that has proven time and time again that it simply does not regard me and people who look like me as fully human.

As I woke up this morning, I could not get out of bed. I laid there for a while trying to grapple with my feelings of exhaustion and despair. Often, when I am struggling to understand important things in my life, I turn to my parents' example for guidance. I tried to access the collective wisdom of those who came before me, those who sacrificed so that I could have more. I wondered what they would say about the state of race in today's society and what my role should be. From birth, my parents instilled in me and my siblings through their words – and more importantly their actions – that the fight for racial justice is a long, intergenerational one. It is also one that we are destined to win because right is on our side.

No matter the nature of the setbacks they faced (and there were many and some brutal ones at that), they were always able to get through them through tears and laughter, forever keeping their eyes on the prize. In many ways, they epitomized that other-worldly Black optimism. Don't get me wrong, they never hid their own feelings of frustration, anger, and tiredness from us. In fact, that is how I recognized my own feelings this morning. Nonetheless, my parents never veered from their belief that the brightest day only shone on the other side of the darkest night.

As I laid in that bed thinking about what lessons I could glean from their lives and what they had said to me and my brothers and sister, I was hoping for some form of instant relief from my feelings of tiredness. I was hoping that their legacy and story would wipe away my doubts about our society and where we are going. I was hoping that my reflecting on my parents' lives would magically re-charge my batteries and somehow soothe my pain. Sadly, my reflections did none of that.

What my recollections of my parents' example did do was provide me with a perspective, a lens through which I can view and understand all that is happening now. This lens reminds me that this struggle is not new, nor is it likely to be won in my lifetime. Sadly, it is likely that more Black people will die before we become the country that remotely resembles the one described in our constitution. This lens also reminds me that this country is MY country. My ancestors sacrificed their lives in building this country.

Their blood, sweat, and tears fertilize the rich soil upon which much of this country's wealth and standing in the world is built. I have no choice but to fight for it – to fight to make it live up to its creed. I owe it to those who came before me, those who fought and died to make this country just a little bit better for those who came after them. They fought for me. To not do so would be akin to walking away from my birthright. It is a birthright that does not belong only to me; it also belongs to future generations of Black folks.

What reflecting on my parents' example provided me was renewal – not in the form of relief, but instead in the form of resolve. My reflections on their example gave me new insights into that other-worldly optimism that is foundational to the strength and resilience of Black people.

That optimism does not reside in a belief that America will simply change, it actually resides in the knowledge that each generation of African Americans has changed America for the better and a great faith that the next generation will take the next steps in changing America even more (even if it feels way too slow). This perspective has renewed my resolve to do all that I can to make whatever change I can. For me, to do otherwise would be turning my back on the investment that my ancestors made in this country and disinherit my descendants.

I am still tired of this shit though.



Issue #2: Call for Action on the Rural Health Care Bill

By Gretchen Haynes

The Wednesday Meet Up group suggested individual and Meeting actions to support public health policy changes to come out of the wreckage of the pandemic. The CBS program [60 Minutes](#) aired an analysis of the plight of rural hospitals and clinics nationwide. We decided to focus on those in Texas and to network with others concerned with this problem.

Here is one response we got from Elizabeth Ellis of the Bédias, Iola, and Singleton Community Health Clinic in Grimes County, Texas:

"If you would like to truly support rural health, contact your Senators/Congressmen in Washington to support S.1037 Rural Health Modernization Act sponsored by Sen. Barrasso and Sen. Smith. This bill will provide long term support and modernization of rural health clinics across America. Additionally, speak to your State Senators/ Representatives to ensure rural America receives high speed/fiber internet to help ensure health access for all! "

For us, that would be Senator John Cornyn at www.cornyn.senate.gov and Senator Ted Cruz at www.cruz.senate.gov. To find your state senator and representative, go to <https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home>. Fill in your address, city, and zip, then click “Find” and you’ll be given your representative’s and senator’s names and addresses.

The legislation is S.[enate] 1037, “Rural Health Clinic Modernization Act of 2019” co-sponsored by John Barrasso (R - WY) and Tina Smith (D - MN). It has been referred to the Committee on Finance where it would amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act provisions relating to these clinics under Medicare after 30 years.

S.1037 concerns facilities not directed by a physician by “modernizing” and specifying the requirements for physicians, physician assistants and nurse-practioners. It would allow flexibility in contracting with physician assistants and nurse-practioners. Further, it would allow rural clinics to be distant sites for telehealth visits and increase the reimbursement scale which was set in 1988.

This is one of 12,285 currently pending bills of which about 7% will ever become law. If Meeting approves, we can mobilize support, join with Yearly Meeting, and other organizations to bring pressure on our congressional representatives to get the bill in line for passage. If this project is approved, we can register our support on Govtrack website. The second issue is within Texas, to bring high speed/fiber internet to these areas. Let’s tackle that later and laser-bean our attention on S.1037.

It is a small step for our congressional delegation but a giant step for health care in rural areas.

The Community Engagement Committee reviewed this information and recommends that F/friends inform themselves on these issues. As we cannot have regular Forums yet, our Web-master is putting this information on a new Special Issues page of the Meeting website. It will contain links to background information.

Once it is posted, please read the material in the links and direct questions and comments to Gretchen at jmhaynes@earthlink.net before June 19. The Community Engagement Committee and/or the Peace and Social Concerns Committee will review the comments, collate them, and present them to Meeting for Business for discernment.



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