

NOTES FROM FRIENDS

The monthly newsletter of West Branch Friends Church



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In Answer to Your Question by Nancy Thomas

Yes, I used to put God
in a box, but it turned
out to be a Jack-
in-the box, and God
kept jumping out
and scaring me
at the most inconvenient
times. One day God
jumped all the way
out, leaving me
with this empty tin
cube, red paint peeling.
I finally threw it
away. God remains
at large.

In Riotous Joy and Firm Resolve: Chris



Query for the Month

"Adherence to the peace testimony grows out of our experience of God's transforming love. It grows out of our ongoing life of prayer and worship which nurtures our relationship with Christ. But it also grows out of our obedience to the prophetic call of Christ to follow his will in faithful living in the world.

Peace is a gift, but it does not come magically through our passivity. Only in our faithful response to God's call do we receive God's peace."

— Sandra Cronk
Quaker author and teacher

How do you interpret the peace testimony?

Meeting for Worship



Join us in meeting for worship Sundays at 10:30.

This month we will explore kinship and spiritual disciplines

Worship Servants

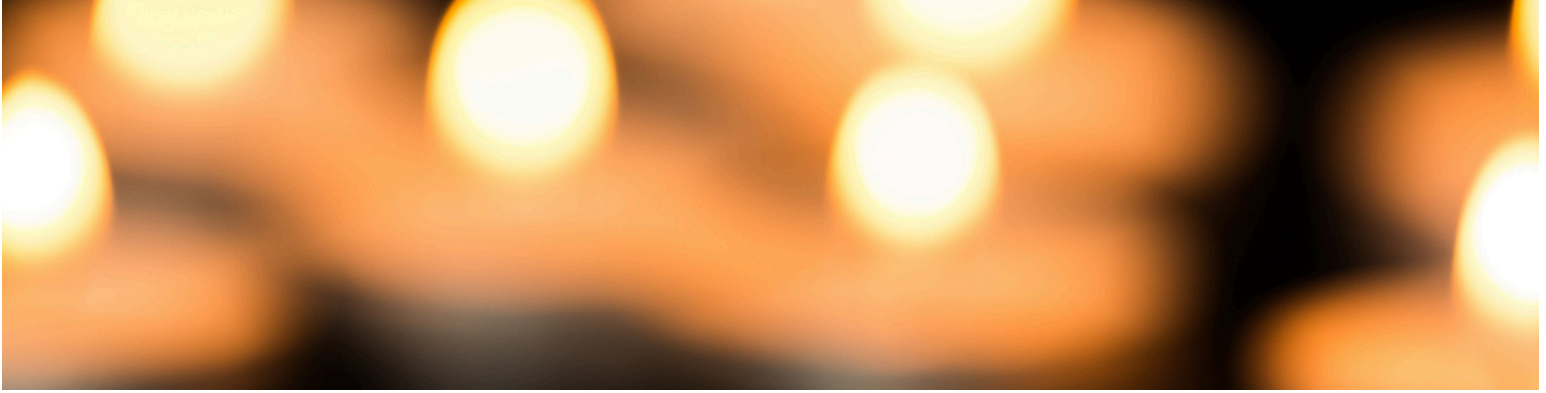
May 4
Greeter: Gordon Edgar
Zoom Host: Jim Glasson
Children's Message: Kathleen Darling
Special Music:
Piano: Gwen Senio

May 25
Greeter:
Zoom:
Children's Message:
Special Music:
Piano: Julie Tallman

May 11
Greeter: Gordon Edgar
Zoom Host:
Children's Message: Sue McCracken
Special Music: Mary Denmead
Piano: Gwen Senio

May 18
Greeter: Emily Peck
Zoom Host:
Children's Message:
Special Music:
Piano: Julie Tallman

Time for Prayer



Joys & Concerns

Pray for Our Elders

*Darlene Baum
Pat Bradley
Maria Denmead
Fran Fritz
Mary Humrichouse
Pat Langrehr
Donna Mortenson
Larry Reiner
Lois Semotan
Nancy Stacks
Mildred Torkelson*

- Feena did not get the results she was hoping for in her scans and will need radiation to further treat the lymphoma. Prayers for peace and comfort and for good care from family.
- Fran Fritz continues with confusion. Has lost a lot of weight, is very tired, and is forgetting to take her medications at times. Prayers that doctors may find the cause.
- Jim- mother Donna is frail and Ron (spouse) is in hospital.
- Malia's close friend, B.J., is in rehab following hospitalization due to addiction. Prayers that he will stay the course and be able to live a healthy life.
- Maureen- thankful for the warm and welcoming manner of our congregation.
- Joan- thankful for people who have been on the prayer list and are now able to be present in church!

Ecumenical Prayer Cycle for May

Apr. 27-May 3: *Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia*

May 4-May 10: *Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan*

May 11-May 17: *India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*

May 18-May 24: *Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal*

May 25-May 31: *Indian Ocean Islands: Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles*

Prayer for May

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

Holy One, we look to you and ask that you be the peace in our hearts. Help us to overcome ourselves again and again, that we may remain in peace. Then, may the power of your peace surround us and go out through the entire world in your name. In difficult times, may faith and hope take hold all the more firmly within us and may we trust in your promise each day. Amen.

Ecumenical Women's Group NOT MEETING THIS MONTH

Our Ecumenical Women's Group will pause this month and ponder our next study materials. We hope you will join us as the group re-gathers next month. Looking for spirited discussion, nurturing your faith, and meeting new f/Friends? Join us on the first Thursday of each month at 6:30 beginning again June 5. Invite a friend – the more the merrier!



EarthCare Group

This group, comprised of Friends from our meeting, Iowa City Friends and West Branch Friends Conservative (6th Street), has begun meeting monthly with a rotating site. Format is usually a speaker or movie about environmental issues with personal sharing and thoughts about how we can care for the Earth. We hope you'll join us and invite someone along!

May Earth Care Group Meeting
Saturday, May 3 at 2:00 pm
Prairie Hill Community Room 140 Prairie Hill Lane



Volunteer Opportunities

Juneteenth Community Celebration

Humans for Racial Justice is an ecumenical community group formed through our meeting after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020. This group works on anti-racism education and programming, MLK Day observances and other activities focusing on strengthening relationships and eliminating racism. Currently, they are working with the City of West Branch on several ideas for a community event commemorating Juneteenth. June 19, 1865 is the day that the enslaved people in Texas learned of the Emancipation Proclamation and received their proclamation of freedom -- nearly 2 years after President Lincoln issued the original proclamation emancipating all enslaved people. This date has been celebrated as Juneteenth in Texas since 1866. It was named a federal holiday in 2021.

Many different activities and educational opportunities are being planned. Our meeting is also working on efforts to replace/improve the educational marker located at the Springdale Cemetery which commemorates the Underground Railroad activity here in our area. If you would like to help with planning, set-up, working on a specific activity -- all hands are welcome! Please contact Gwen Senio or Jim Glasson to find out how you can help!

Ronald McDonald House Meals

The Ronald McDonald House of Iowa City provides a place for families to stay while their child (age 21 and under) is undergoing medical treatment at local hospitals and clinics. Any family traveling from at least 20 miles away is eligible to stay. The House provides all basic linens and towels and all guest rooms have a private bathroom. An evening meal is provided as well as self-serve breakfast, lunch, and snacks for all families staying at the House. The common kitchen is stocked with food staples as well as leftovers for families to enjoy. The House's common areas include living room areas, quiet spaces, a game room, and a playroom as well as an outdoor playground, playhouse, and relaxing deck.

Local organizations often help out at the house by providing an evening meal for guest families. Currently, the cook at The House is out for medical reasons, so there is an even greater need for volunteers willing to help plan and prepare a meal for current guests.

If you are willing to help coordinate and participate in a small team to provide an evening meal for these families, please contact Chris Humrichouse at 319-210-4038 or westbranchfriendschurch@gmail.com

News From Quakers Around the World

Refugee Quakers in Uganda Affected by Changes in U.S. Aid

At the FUM office in Richmond, Indiana, we recently received this report from our friend Alfred Wasike, former General Secretary of Uganda Friends Church, and currently a pastor in Uganda. He describes a visit he recently made to the Friends Church in the Nakivale Refugee Camp, and the effects that changes in American policies are having on residents of the camp, including those who are members of the Quaker congregation.

Recently, a unique congregation of Quakers gathered in a corrugated iron sheet walled Church building passionately sang a popular hymn called “Umugisha” (“Blessing”) in a mix of Kinyarwanda and Kirundi languages, making me think of the famous Negro spirituals because of the compelling rhythm, melody, tempo, and emotional depth of the lyrics:

Gusenga kwanjye kukugereho
Mana uri amahoro yangye
Ndagukeneye ku manywa na nijoro
Mu bihe byose umbe hafi
Gusenga kwanjye kukugereho...

May my prayers reach you
God, you are my peace
I need you day and night
Be near me at all times

May my prayers reach you...These are not “ordinary” or “normal” Quakers. They are refugees in Uganda. It was a very moving worship of refugees from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. They are members of the Nakivale Evangelical Friends Church in the world’s eighth largest refugee settlement camp, in southern Uganda at the border with Tanzania. This church of 140 Quakers, including children, was established in December 2020 with the help of a kind Australian Quaker called Pastor Abel Sibonio, a former refugee from Burundi. Pastors Alfred Wasike, Paul Kuloba, and Emmanuel Bazimenyera helped set up this unique gathering of Quakers who fled their war-torn homelands.

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A very dark cloud of uncertainty hangs over the survival and future of these Quakers, and 219,850 other refugees in Uganda's Nakivale refugee camp, which covers 184 sq km/ 71 sq miles, Africa's oldest refugee settlement. The U.S. President Donald Trump's January 2025 orders that abruptly cut aid to these very vulnerable people triggered a deadly crime outbreak in the sprawling camp. Speaking about the new situation, the visibly-depressed Nakivale Church Pastor Elias Kabula [38], a refugee from Burundi, says, "I fled from my homeland fourteen years ago. I have made a family with my wife Francoise [36]. We have four children: Brighton Irishura [13], Nickson Iranzi [10], Kelvin Arakaza [8], and Digne Irankeje [6]. Now, we have been told that the USA has a new President. Now, we have no feeding, no education support, no health support, life is more difficult for us now," he tells me with tears welling in his eyes as he struggles to dry them.

A Church youth leader, Brian Ndayiragije [27] shares another sad story about how he is struggling to fend for himself and his younger siblings Leah [26] and Rachel [26]. "We have been living here for five years now. We fled violence in Burundi. Our father was killed. We fled to Tanzania. Life was very hard. We lost our mother. Then we walked to Uganda. I have some secondary school education. My sisters never had a chance to study. I have been working for a Community-Based Organisation (CBO) which has closed. We were getting funding from an organisation from America. Now there is a lot of unemployment, hunger, crime, prostitution, etc. We are very depressed. How I wish the Church can help us."

I spoke to a top administrator of the Nakivale Refugee Settlement Camp, who told me, "My dear brother, the changes in foreign policy in the new U.S. presidency have affected our operations in the management of refugees very adversely. There will be no more resettlement of refugees. The World Food Program, Save The Children and other UNHCR implementing organisations which have been getting support through the USAID are pulling out. All key sectors of refugees' lives, like education, health, livelihood, are affected. Teachers in our twenty primary schools, two secondary schools, and a technical school are very affected. We are bracing ourselves for serious unemployment because many CBOs have shut down or downsized, and for a rise in criminality.

"As a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Uganda has been hailed as a model country in terms of accepting and treating refugees humanely. Most refugees in Uganda fled from Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan, among other countries.—Alfred Wasike