

# THE LIVING LIGHT

For the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.  
Ephesians 5:9

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Whittier First Friends Church

April 2026

## FCNL Advocacy Teams Meet Up

In February, the Whittier FCNL (Friends Committee on National Legislation) Advocacy Team joined online with other California teams to meet with staffers from Senator Adam Schiff's office. Senator Schiff is one of California's two U.S. Senators. The purpose of the call was to advocate for peace, both abroad and here at home. More than eighty people from across the state participated virtually. Although those we visit do not always share the same concerns, and the focus of these visits is on policies and laws, our advocacy is always guided by the values of peace and equality. One staffer reminded us of the people's power and influence over their elected representatives, encouraging us to continue to raise our voices of concern.

In March, the Whittier FCNL Team invited the Santa Monica / L.A. Team (one of the groups who joined the call to Senator Schiff's office) to Whittier for worship followed by a picnic at Penn Park. It was a wonderful time of enjoyable conversation, sharing of ideas and viewpoints, and community-building. Afterward, both groups expressed a desire to continue to find ways to connect and support each other.

The work of value-driven advocacy is not always easy. It can be complicated, demanding, frustrating, and even disappointing. For example, arranging and securing meetings might be challenging. Waiting for policy changes, and sometimes not knowing the impact of our advocacy, if any, can be



discouraging. That is why it is so important to connect with, and support, others doing the work. It was so uplifting to share company with these visitors from across town.

While FCNL's nationwide Advocacy Network has only been in existence for the past ten years, it is important to remember and honor the work of First Friends members from the past who historically advocated for peace, justice, and humanity in partnership with FCNL. Both then and now, much is done on a very personal level, grounded in the Quaker values of listening and seeing the Light of God in each person. Individually we are human beings desiring to help our neighbors, and through collective action we are able to strengthen our cause through our shared numbers.

~ Darrell Warren

# Friendly Fare by Lea Wright

**Dear Friends,** Happy Spring! Yep, it's my favorite season. What else can I say about it?

**Friends About Town:** **Marilyn Fant** and **Candice**



**Ryder** enjoyed **Jo Nita Beede's** performance at the Night Owl in Fullerton. Her two brothers (**Norm** and **Ben**) were there to support her as well. **Deanna &**

**Brendon Woirhaye** were happy to have **Elyse** down from Cal Poly Humboldt for Spring Break for a week. Some fun events attended during Elyse's stay included seeing **Aaron Espinosa** from our church choir perform as Patchy the Pirate in *SpongeBob SquarePants: The Musical*. Elyse also enjoyed hearing from Buzz Aldrin's son, Andrew Aldrin, with Whittier Friends School learning about the future of humans in space. By sharing cookies at our fellowship time, (buying and selling) **Carrin Bouchard** helped her niece **Claire Votaw** reach her goal of selling 2,000 boxes of Girl Scout cookies this year. Claire is the daughter of **Chris & Jennifer Votaw** and great-granddaughter of **Don & Shirley Votaw**.



**Friends Visit:** **Tom & Mindy Van Dorn** had a surprise visit from son **Weston** and his girlfriend **Audrey Thalman**. Weston moved to Portland, OR, in October, where he works for Heart Coffee Roasters. The visit was short but sweet.

**Friends Travel:** **Candice Ryder** enjoyed a trip with a long-time friend to El Cardonal in Baja, Mexico, a tiny little town south of La Paz on the Sea of Cortez. It was a relaxing week of pleasant weather, a deserted beach, and a calm blue sea. **Cassie &**

**Steven Caringella** enjoyed a short get-away to Santa Barbara including the Mission.

**School and Work News:** **Avalon Caringella's** art that was entered in the district-wide "Artastic" art contest got a 2nd place ribbon. Her piece "Together as One" had the flags of the world and drawings of facial features. Avalon

also performed in 7 performances of her school's production of *Mary Poppins Jr*, along with her friend **Rhett**, another alum of Whittier Friends School. Leading up to the show, Avalon and her brothers **Landon** and **Hudson**, and mom **Cassie** spent several Saturdays working on sets and props (so many kites!).



**Friends Remember:** This month, we received the sad news that **Lind Coop** passed away. Lind was an active member of Whitleaf Unprogrammed Meeting and the writing group at First Friends. Lind was the son-in-law of **Bill & Marygene Wright**, husband of **Jeanne Coop** and cousin to **Uncle Milton Wright's** kids.

**Friends Sharing News:** Help to keep the Friendly Fare going. Email me a quick note and tell me your news. Send to Lea at [lealouw@gmail.com](mailto:lealouw@gmail.com), or deliver to me at church on Sunday. See you next month!



## Loletta's Lines

This month we celebrate Easter. Our hope is fulfilled in the promise of resurrection's New Life, and the church gathered in the Light of God's Love. Grounded in gratitude, we continue building the Beloved Community, including all of Creation. We also celebrate the Earth this month, recognizing our role as God's stewards, and we acknowledge our brothers and sisters including, not only all human beings, but also the grass, rocks, and the trees, the birds and the bees, the creeping and the leaping, the swimming and the running. All of Creation, throughout the amazing universe, testifies to the Love of God.



I have been re-reading Howard Zinn's, *A People's History of the United States*. Perhaps the reflection on a June 1969 environmental disaster is so poignant because Cleveland is my birthplace. In the Akwesasne Notes newspaper, Vine Deloria, Jr. (a Native American) wrote an article, "mixed in with all that was an irrepressible [Indian] humor."

"Every now and then I am impressed with the thinking of the non-Indian. I was in Cleveland last year and got to talking with a non-Indian about American history. He said that he was really sorry about what had happened to Indians, but that there was a good reason for it. The continent had to be developed, and he felt that Indians had stood in the way, and thus had to be removed. 'After all,' He remarked, 'what did you do with the land when you had it?' I didn't understand him until later when I discovered that the Cuyahoga River running through Cleveland is inflammable. So many combustible pollutants are dumped into the river that the inhabitants have to take special precautions during the summer to avoid setting it on fire. After reviewing the argument of my non-Indian friend I decided that he was possibly correct. How many Indians could have thought of creating an inflammable river?"

This past February, we had yet another well-publicized water environmental catastrophe on the Potomac when a raw sewage spill prompted a federal state of emergency declaration. Friends, do not

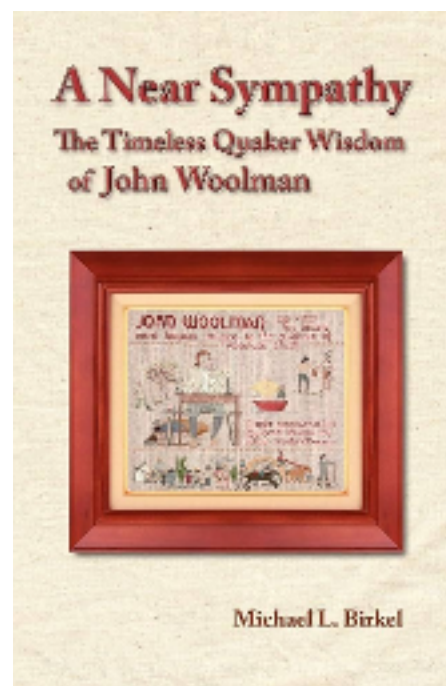
be discouraged. As we await the Light and nurture the Seed within, our lives are encouraged and empowered by the Truth. "...Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

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## Berkeley Friends Church Book Study on Zoom

Our Friends at Berkeley Friends Church invite us to join them for a Tuesday evening reading/study group on Zoom. The group is currently discussing Michael Birkel's *A Near Sympathy: The Timeless Quaker Wisdom of John Woolman*, exploring the spiritual life of the 18th-century Quaker, John Woolman, and highlighting his dedication to empathy, justice, and social conscience. No reading ahead of time or book purchase is required, but it's helpful to have a copy. It's available in paperback and digital download at Friends United Meeting bookstore [bookstore.fum.org](http://bookstore.fum.org).

The group meets at 7:30 p.m. every Tuesday night. Join online **Meeting ID 831 9955 9852 and Passcode 94702** or by phone at (669) 444-9171. Berkeley Friends is a like-minded congregation and fellow member of Western Association of the Religious Society of Friends, This book group is one of our new events planned in an effort to bridge our faith communities.



## Russ' Reflections

I have been thinking a lot about the future of Whittier First Friends Church. We have been working on building community for a while now and have been successful in becoming a closer group of people who are warm, hospitable, and welcoming. I hear it said that our values and way of living should be attractive to many in this crazy world who find institutional religion a turn-off: too judgmental, stuck in the past, Christian Nationalist, not doing anything to address the needs of people who need support.

So where are they? We have a few visitors, but what are we doing to attract people to Quakerism and Whittier First Friends Church? What are we doing to ensure our long-term future? Can we shift our thinking from an inward focused church (close and loving that we are) to an outward focused meeting that can convince people to live the values that we profess: the Quaker testimonies, taking action in the world, including all people?

Many of us strive to let our lives speak; don't we also need to have conversations and listen to people with whom we interact daily? Perhaps we can ask others about their spiritual journeys in order to start a conversation? Early Friends had a zeal that brought thousands to Quakerism. How can we emulate their witness?

We need to grow. We have been seeking tenants to use our facilities in order to help our finances. It is great to use our buildings, but how can we revitalize Quakerism in Whittier, grow our membership and financial resources, and fill our spaces with more Quaker activity?

Do we want to follow the path of several progressive churches in Whittier that have and are shrinking out of existence? Can we parallel the Easter experience and the witness of the Early Church?

How does our Music Ministry support our long-term future? What is your experience of singing together in Meeting for Worship? Does it give you a sense of community? How can music help us to be more hospitable? Does our music support our mis-



sion and our future as a meeting? We have brought people to us via the Friends Choir; can we invite others to join it?

Does our music inspire you to want to share what we do with family and friends who like to sing? Please write your ideas and share with me or our Clerk of Music Committee, Rita Barakat. Talk to each other! Talk to others! Share your faith and your values!



### **Easter Potluck Breakfast Sunday, April 5th from 9am-10:30am**

We are celebrating Easter Sunday with a Potluck Breakfast in Fellowship Hall. You are invited to drop in anytime between 9am and 10:30. Worship will be held at 11am as usual.

All are welcome, so invite your family and friends. If you are able to bring food, juice, plasticware, paper goods, or donations, that would be greatly welcomed. If not, please come anyway - we always have plenty.

### **Shelter's Right Hand 5K Walk Sat. April 25, 2026, at Central Park.**



This year marks the 30th Annual 5K Walk with the Shelter's Right Hand! Come walk, give, or pray as we help raise funds for the Women's and Children's Crisis Shelter together. Go to [sheltersrighthand.org](https://sheltersrighthand.org) for registration and volunteer information.

### **Whittier Founder's Day Sat. May 9th, 10 am to 2 pm, Central Park**



Join First Friends, the FCNL Advocacy Team, and Whittier Friends School as we reach out to the community and share our ministries at this friendly, family event.



## News from Whittier Friends School

March was full of exciting bonus learning opportunities at Whittier Friends School. On Friday, March 20, our students had the privilege of a Zoom lesson about the past, present, and future of space travel, presented by Dr. Andy Aldrin. Dr. Aldrin is the son of Buzz Aldrin, an astronaut on the Apollo 11 moon landing mission, and he shared a bit about what it was like to grow up with experiences like watching his dad walk around on the moon with his class, or playing with neighbor kids who were also offspring of astronauts. As a scientist and philanthropist whose mission is to teach and inspire students about science and technology, he reinforced with the children at Whittier Friends School that they are the future of space travel, and that, in the future, they might even have an opportunity to get a job on the moon! At the end of his talk, each elementary child got a chance to ask their own question to Dr. Aldrin, and he politely listened and answered all kinds of questions. Along with our students, several school parents, First Friends Church members, and former students were in the audience as well. It was an inspiring conversation with an inspiring public figure.

March was also an opportunity for a field trip to see the play *Charlotte's Web*, performed at Phantom Theatre's La Habra Depot Theatre. Elementary children got to have a picnic and play at the nearby park before enjoying the show. Teacher Marielle had just finished reading the novel to the lower elementary class, so they were especially excited to see it.

Six of our students participated in History Day LA 2026 on March 7, a history competition that requires students to put together a research project about an annual theme. Over 700 students from dozens of schools in LA County participated. This year's theme was "Revolution, Reaction, and Response." Students are required to research and analyze how their historical topic of choice fits this theme and then explain their project by themselves (without a teacher or parent present!) to a panel of judges they do not know. One of our projects, "The



*Hudson Caringella talking with Dr. Aldrin about how to build a rocket*

"History of Trains," received Honorable Mention in the Elementary Group Poster division. Other topics chosen by our students included Legos, Dolly Parton, All American Girls, Professional Baseball League, and Hammurabi's Code. Five of the six students were brand new to the competition, so it was an especially challenging year in the process of making the projects, and very exciting when considering the academic growth of all of these students. They are eager to return next year for another go at it!

WFS has begun enrollment for our Elementary Summer Enrichment Program, which will occur from June 22 through August 6, during six select weeks of summer. Some themes include "Camp Greece and Rome," "Animal Habitats," and "Music, Music, Music." Children do not have to be from WFS to attend the program. See our website [whittierfriendschool.org](http://whittierfriendschool.org) or email Cassie at [cassie.wfs@gmail.com](mailto:cassie.wfs@gmail.com) for information about this, or about enrolling for the Fall 2026 school year.

Be sure to follow Whittier Friends School's adventures on Facebook and Instagram at: [facebook.com/whittierfriendschool](https://facebook.com/whittierfriendschool) and [instagram.com/whittierfriendschool](https://instagram.com/whittierfriendschool) and check out our wishlist at [amzn.to/2QK8Yp8](https://amzn.to/2QK8Yp8)

*-Cassie Caringella*

## Mission Collaborative Sponsored Housing Advocacy Workshop



Most of us would probably agree that homelessness is a big problem in California and LA County specifically. If asked why, we would probably cite mental illness, drug addiction, and lack of services and

shelters. While these answers are not wrong, it turns out that research supports that the root causes are more complex. On Saturday, March 14, The Mission Collaborative sponsored a Housing Advocacy Workshop hosted at First Friends to explore the issue of housing insecurity and what can be done about it.

Presenters Alex Dobbs and Thomas Irwin from the Faith and Housing Coalition, joined Mahdi Manji of the Inner City Law Center to help us understand the big picture. They asked us to think of the child's game, Musical Chairs. The players are residents from one of four broad categories: 1) A long-time homeowner, 2) An aspiring homebuyer, 3) A burdened renter, 4) A "Deep Housing Insecure" individual - "couch surfer" (staying temporarily in other households), individuals and families living in shelters, and street homeless. Now, let's play a round: the long-time homeowner whose children are grown and have left the area wants to move somewhere with less maintenance. This opens an opportunity for the aspiring homebuyer to purchase. However, statistics show that LA home prices have increased 267% in the last 12 years, and housing inventory is limited, so the sale goes to the highest bidder with the best credit score and income, which squeezes out many aspiring buyers.

This does open a vacancy for a new renter, but with average rent increases at approximately 5% annually over the last 25 years, some become "Burdened Renters." (The Coalition calculates that



approximately 600,000 households in LA County spend 90% of their income on housing.) These burdened renters often settle for properties in poor condition in less than optimal neighborhoods. Additionally, they are at high risk of losing their home when faced with a catastrophic event such as major illness, layoff, or accident which would land them in the Deep Housing Insecurity category. So while those with mental illness, drug addiction, or low incomes may end up on the streets, if there were more housing opportunities up the ladder, fewer would be forced onto the streets - or, to go back to the Musical Chair analogy, without a chair.

What can be done? The presenters urge advocates to be proactive rather than waiting until people are on the street to help (although that is also an important and necessary mission). Crisis needs to be prevented before it happens. For example, Mahdi Manji works to match those in need with assistance for food, housing, transportation, SSI, eviction prevention, and veteran's benefits so they can afford to pay rent.

Ultimately, however, it boils down to a need for more homes at all levels. Solutions include mixed-use development, additional units in residential neighborhoods, reduced building costs, and streamlined approval processes. Advocacy at city, county, and state levels is needed to support legislation as well as educate the public about the importance of affordable housing at all levels.

Watch for future workshops and other opportunities to learn more about how we can love our neighbors with this work.

## Monica Sena Shares Her Organ Donation Story at March AFFN

Most of us have heard about organ donation and probably know how important it is. We may even know how to become a donor but just haven't gotten around to it. On March 11th, Monica Sena, retired middle school principal and environmental activist, shared her personal journey at All Friends Fellowship Night (AFFN) in order to encourage Friends to register as organ donors if we haven't already.

Her story began in 1992 when she was diagnosed with hepatitis C. After a failed attempt to eradicate the virus, (which she described as months of painful medication somewhat like being on chemo), the second attempt succeeded. Then, sadly, she relapsed. Finally, after her third pharmaceutical regimen, she was declared virus-free but had permanent liver damage which included scarring and cirrhosis. Eventually she qualified for a liver transplant and went on the UCLA waiting list for the next 8 years. During that time, she had to be extremely careful of her diet and salt intake. She suffered from encephalopathy - toxins invading the brain resulting in severe confusion and behavioral dysfunction. And, of course, more medication.

Then, in October of 2020, she woke up from a nap, paralyzed on her right side. That's the last thing she can remember before slipping into a coma, complete with hallucinations and pneumonia which required her to be on a ventilator. On November 19th, 2020, doctors advised her husband that her passing was hours away. All during the restrictions of the Covid lockdown

But that was not the end of Monica's story. The very next day, not 1, not 2, but 3 livers became available, and one of them was a size-match for her. She was finally able to have the 8-hour transplant surgery on that day, followed by a 6-hour surgery the next day. Monica shared that she endured a long, difficult recovery but last November celebrated the fifth anniversary of her transplant and finally feels like

she's back to normal.

Monica's story had a happy ending, but not everyone is as fortunate. Her friend, Julie, died waiting for a donated heart. It is estimated that an average of 22 people nationwide die

daily waiting for donated organs. There are currently over 100,000 men, women, and children waiting for transplants with over 90,000 waiting for a kidney. Thousands others need livers, hearts, and lungs, and the demand vastly outweighs available organs.

Monica was one of the lucky ones and has made it her passion to share her story as a reminder of the urgent need for organ donors. It is estimated that only 56% of the population is registered, and one donor can potentially save up to eight people. She reminds us that it's important to communicate your wishes to your family because, after your death, loved ones could block the donation. Organs are only harvested after a physician has officially declared the death of the donor, and not all registered donors will ultimately have viable organs to donate. Children can (and are needed to) be donors as well.

To register as an organ donor in California, you can sign up online through the Donate Life California registry or check "YES" when renewing your driver's license or ID at the DMV. Anyone 13 or older can register, and there are no health requirements. A pink "donor" dot will be added to your ID card. It's free, simple, and could potentially save a life. So what are you waiting for?

[register.donatelifecalifornia.org/profile/login](https://register.donatelifecalifornia.org/profile/login)



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**If we've missed your birthday, we apologize (and happy birthday)! We work hard to keep our birthday calendar up-to-date, so please let us know if we're forgetting anyone. Thank you!**



**Mark your calendars for this month's All Friends Fellowship Night (AFFN) - April 8th.**

A potluck dinner at 6 pm will be followed by stories from the Monday Afternoon Memoir Writer's Group. They will read some of their favorite memories and anecdotes. **You won't want to miss this presentation.** Bring a main dish, side, and/or dessert to share with our guests and your own plates and utensils. Everyone is invited, so we hope you can attend and invite family and friends.