

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

May 2026

Loletta Begins Her Sabbatical

On April 19, Friends held a celebration to launch Pastor Loletta Barrett on her much anticipated 2026 sabbatical. The occasion included cards, presents, cake, and much well-wishing. Loletta expressed her appreciation for the love and support of our faith community, and, although she will miss us, relayed her confidence that our missions and ministries will be in good hands during her absence.

Although her sabbatical has just begun, the planning commenced a year ago when she felt the leading to apply for the highly competitive Clergy Renewal Program Grant funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. and administered by Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. This grant program was established in 2000 to allow Christian congregations to support their pastors with the gift of extended time away from their ministerial duties and responsibilities. "Pastors play such important roles in nurturing the spiritual lives of individuals and families and guiding the ministries of congregations," said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly Endowment's Vice President for Religion. "Yet the demands of ministry can seem relentless. We hope that these grants help congregations honor their pastors for their extraordinary service and support them with the time and other resources to step away for rest and renewal so they can return to their congregations reenergized."

Last spring Loletta worked with a committee to

complete the rigorous application process which included submitting a video featuring congregation members expressing what First Friends means to them. After an anxious wait for the results,



notification was received last August that the Meeting had been one of 233 congregations selected for this year's grant program. Dr. Robert Saler, Director of the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Programs at Christian Theological Seminary, noted that interest in the grants has grown significantly in recent years, with higher numbers of applications leading to increased competitiveness.

"We certainly owe the success of our application to the wonderful video of Friends speaking about why they are part of our meeting," says Pastor

Loletta's Sabbatical Continued on page 3

Friendly Fare by Lea Wright

Dear Friends, It's been a busy month for me and my family and friends. **Cassie Caringella** and I flew to Philadelphia for a quick turnaround trip to attend the Friends Council on Education (FCE) Spring 2026 Heads Gathering at Historic Arch Street Meeting House. (A very cool Meeting House to see.) Although I am not a head of school, my value at being there was quickly recognized when we arrived at the Philadelphia airport an hour and a half late. I was grateful to be able to travel to the hotel with Cassie, arriving there at half past midnight! The events of the next two days included a special (very gourmet) Annual Meeting Luncheon by Culinart (a food supplier of many Friends Schools back East). The Annual Meeting included affirmation of the new officers, the Leadership Institute Graduation Celebration with Presentations, a dinner for heads of schools at The Plough & Stars, Friends Council Business/Education Freedom Tax Credit discussion, Affinity Groups discussion, After-Meeting Sharing, and several opportunities for Meeting for Worship. It was a very fulfilling trip, but I wish there was more sightseeing time.



Friends Visit: John & Linda Marshburn, along with 3 of their kids and Linda's mother attended Easter Meeting for Worship with **Ted & Mary Marshburn**. Ted and **Milton Wright** happily posed for a picture featuring their almost matching Easter ties



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Matt Bouchard joined his dad, **George** in the kitchen to help make pancakes for our Easter potluck breakfast. **Stacy (Bouchard), Adam, Annabelle, and Adrian Day** joined the family as well. **Loletta Barrett** and others shared with the Hillcrest minister to honor **Yosh Nakamura** at his celebration of life.



School and Work News: Elisabeth Elliot came out of retirement and stage managed a corporate event in North Carolina with many of her former Disney colleagues. She also attended Meeting for Worship at High Point Friends Meeting and, while she was there, she spent a day with **Becky Memmelaar** and her dog Hank.

Avalon Caringella had artwork on display at the National Junior Arts Honors Society exhibit at her school. It was a fun exhibit to visit because the students in NJAHS



had freedom to create and display three pieces from any medium of their choosing. Here she is with the Living Light continuing our tradition: "The Living Light Travels." (Remember, your submissions are welcome and needed.)

Friends Remember: Prayers for the family and friends of **Lynne (Linda) Drayer** who died in March. Linda was an artistically talented person, and we were privileged to be the recipient of a lot of her artwork when she was at Whittier First Friends. See the lovely enamel artwork display of the Meeting Houses in the foyer.

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, or deliver to me at church on Sunday. See you next month!

Loletta's Sabbatical Continued from page 1



Loletta. She plans to use the grant during her three-month sabbatical to explore England, Scotland, and Wales. In addition, she has arranged to spend time at Pendle Hill Retreat Center in Philadelphia, as well as some well deserved down-time at home with her kitties, Zest and Joy.

The grant covers her travel expenses, some of her pastoral duties, and an all-church retreat after her return.

Loletta will return to bring the message on Sunday, July 26. Until then, retired Associate Pastor Lynda Ladwig will step in for visitation and bring a message in worship once a month. Other worship speakers include members of the Meeting: Deanna Woirhaye, Diane Wemmerus, Elisabeth Elliot, Lori Graham, and Cedric Woirhaye (for promotion Sunday). Additionally, Kelley Kellum, General Secretary of Friends United Meeting (FUM) and Michael Sherman, Coordinator for North American and Caribbean Ministries for FUM, will bring messages remotely, and beloved Quaker author J. Brent Bill will visit us in person to bring a message. For questions, concerns, prayer requests, or spiritual support during this time, contact Candice Ryder, Clerk of Ministry and Counsel at cryder@firstfriendswhittier.org or the church office email at firstfriendswhittier@verizon.net or by phone at (562)698-9805.



Easter at First Friends Church





News from Whittier Friends School

This year's Spring Event, *Sideways Stories from Whittier Friends School*, was a booming success! It was 17 years ago when Cassie and Steven Caringella brought back the tradition of including a silent auction and dinner to complement the Whittier Friends School Spring Performance as a way to help increase funds for the school of First Friends Church's heart. Cassie remembered the energizing hubbub of the WFS Spring Events of the 90s, when Fellowship Hall burst with exciting baskets, delicious aromas, and people EVERYWHERE. Those events "back in the day" were rivaled by this year's event, however, the biggest Spring Event Cassie and her crew have ever had the pleasure of organizing.

This year's auction included 67 items, plus a basket of little toys for outright purchase, and a wide display of vintage jewelry for sale (organized and priced by Marie Kaneko, School Committee Member.) The auction items were carefully curated by WFS Parent Volunteer Melanie Lakner, the auction itself was overseen by Financial Manager Lea Wright and Office Assistant Danielle Cabral, and Steven Caringella was the evening's emcee. Table centerpieces were designed by Parent Volunteer Lauren Quijada-Gamboa, and the delicious dinner was put together by Parent Volunteer Tony Gamboa. It was inspiring to have so many volunteers help with the auction and dinner. A special thanks goes to these helpers and all who donated items.

The crown jewel of the evening was, of course, the student performance. Elementary students performed four hilarious skits based on the book *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* by Louis Sachar. For example: Joe can only get the right an-

swer when he counts "wrong;" Calvin can't draw, so he helps Bebe draw hundreds of pictures by being her assistant; Dameon has to deliver a note from his teacher to another teacher who doesn't exist; and Leslie's pigtail talks Paul into pulling it. Along with the skits, the students performed some great song-and-dance numbers. Not to be left out, the preschool students danced and sang to some real crowd pleasers including "A Tooty Ta," a song that added an increasingly awkward motion with each verse until finally it was adorable chaos.

Besides being the biggest, best-attended Spring Event in these past decades, we had the most children performing at one time in recent years. Whittier Friends School's total enrollment has skyrocketed to 34 this spring, and we are eager to keep this trend going as we enroll for the 2026-2027 school year.

Consider visiting our Open House on Wednesday, May 13, in conjunction with All Friends Fellowship Night, to see our students' phenomenal science and history projects. Early enrollment discount for the 2026-2027 school year ends May 15, so we urge anyone interested in knowing more about our Quaker school to contact us soon. Members of First Friends Church receive a special tuition rate! You can email Director Cassie Caringella for more information at cassie.wfs@gmail.com

And don't forget, WFS has begun enrollment for our Elementary Summer Enrichment Program, which runs from June 22, through August 6, on six select weeks of summer. Some themes include "The Great Outdoors," "Camp Greece and Rome," and "Music, Music, Music." Children do not have to be from WFS to attend the program. See our website whittierfriendsschool.org or email cassie.wfs@gmail.com for more information.

-Cassie Caringella



AFFN Features Memoirs Writing Group

At April All Friends Fellowship Night (AFFN) on Wed. April 8, several members of the Monday Afternoon Memoirs Writing Group had the opportunity to share a piece they had written, and the results were varied and delightful.

John Beynan began the program with his reading about the time he was out to dinner when his neighbor called him to come home because his adorable white poodle had escaped. After fetching the dog from the neighbor, John returned home where he was greeted by . . . none other than his white poodle! That is when it dawned on him that he had brought home someone else's dog, and it looked exactly like his! Luckily, it didn't take long before the dog's owners came looking, and the unlikely mix-up was sorted out.

Mahlon Woirhaye followed with childhood memories of when families had just one of something: one wage earner, one telephone, one radio and, of course, one bathroom - which was in high demand at certain times of the day, often resulting in anxious moments, rushed visits, and heated exchange of words. He also poignantly recalled how his parents grew up in large families that had to manually heat water for the weekly bath water to be shared by every family member in succession. And while his family wasn't as big, and they had indoor plumbing, he admitted that he didn't experience his first shower until 7th grade P.E.

Mel Sturr read his narrative about driving his grown daughter, Bella, to her nursing program in Maryland. With the car packed and the song "You're Gonna Go Far" playing, they headed out talking about anything and everything. The miles and states flew by with stops each day to sample local cuisine. A highlight of the trip was arranging a visit with Mel's brother, Rob, in Canton, Ohio. When they finally made it to Maryland, they visited beloved FFC members, Bob and Sabron Newton. With Bella safely settled into her new apartment, they headed to the airport for the return flight home and it was Mel's turn to choose the music. He chose "What a Wonderful World" to remind him to celebrate "where she has been and where she is headed" during his bittersweet plane ride home alone.

Kathy Marin read a tribute to her mother, Helen

O'Brien, whom she describes as a woman of great personal strength. Born in 1911, Helen could read by age 3, skipped a grade, finished high school at age



16, and graduated college Magna Cum Laude. She married Robert O'Brien, a sociology professor at Oberlin College. Helen studied sociology at grad school in Seattle, directed an orphanage, and worked alongside her husband on the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) to help Japanese-American college students leave internment camps to attend schools in the Midwest and East Coast. When the family moved to Whittier, she established the first special education program for "orthopedically handicapped" students, all of this while raising her three children. Kathy credits her mother with giving her a moral compass, independence, and the gift of personal strength.

Former forensic investigator Nancy Cowardin offered a humorous case from her career involving an 18-year-old with learning disabilities who attempted to rob a McDonald's. When the cashier, also learning disabled, refused to hand over the money without calling his boss, the would-be robber agreed. During the call, the getaway driver fled, the boss alerted police, and when officers arrived, the young man ran outside and jumped directly into a police car. Nancy still refers to it as the "Mc-Genius" robbery.

The evening concluded with Mary and Ted Marshburn sharing memories of Yosemite. Ted's family vacationed there throughout his childhood, and he worked in the Camp Curry kitchen at age fourteen. He recalled witnessing the "firefall" at Horsetail Falls and climbing a dangerous cliff with friends for the view. Over the years, he and Mary returned with their children and later with friends, creating a lifetime of memories—from launching balsam gliders at Glacier Point to helping an injured hiker on the trail.

Musical Notes

Organ and Hymns Series Continues

First Friends is blessed to have the magnificent Harris pipe organ in the Meeting House as well as gifted organist and Music Director, Russ Litchfield. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the organ's original dedication on October 31, 1976, and Russ has been hard at work curating the Tuesday evening Organ and Hymns series as part of the year-long organ celebration.

Each month's program features organ arrangements and traditional church hymns based on a theme. The theme for Tuesday, March 31, was "At the Cross" in recognition of Holy Week. Each organ piece was composed by Johann Sebastian Bach (who happens to be Russ's favorite composer). The hymns were all very personal expressions of Christ's sacrifice and God's unfathomable love and grace. Through them we are encouraged to have hope through our pain, suffering, and fear.

The program for Tuesday, April 21, was entitled "Jesus the Shepherd", and each of the selections was a variation of Psalm 23, which emphasizes God's guidance, comfort, and protection. The first hymn, "The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want" highlighted God as a provider and protector, as did the next hymns in the program which continued the metaphor of God as our ultimate provider and protector with New Testament understandings woven in.

The Organ and Hymns series meets on selected Tuesday evenings at 7:30 pm. Although they are not worship services specifically, each session is very spiritual and inspirational, utilizing the profound power of music to convey a message and touch the soul in a way that words alone cannot. Music functions as a universal language and is often described as the "language of the spirit" and "medicine for the soul." Scientific research has shown that listening to music lowers anxiety, cortisol levels, and blood pressure while improving mood and cognitive function. It aids memory recall, reduces pain perception, strengthens the heart, and triggers the release of dopamine, the brain's "feel-good" neurotransmitter. And singing together



triggers the release of oxytocin which strengthens social bonds. So whether you like to sing, like to listen to music, or simply want to feel good, you are encouraged to join us for these powerful and inspirational programs.

The next Organ and Hymns evening is on Tuesday, May 26, entitled Spirit/Trinity. The selections will reflect the fire, wind, and mystery of Pentecost. It is an opportunity to reach out to others in our community to share this ministry, so spread the word, bring friends, and experience the beauty, inspiration, and joy of music.

Music Sunday in May

The next Music Sunday will be on May 24. Be sure to join us at 11 am in worship for this very special musical form of worship. We will focus on the experience of Pentecost, when the gathered followers of Jesus received the Holy Spirit and began the spreading of the Gospel. We will be joined by a group of instruments and will present anthems and hymns about the Holy Spirit, along with J.S. Bach's cantata, "Now Thank We All Our God," to offer our gratitude for the blessings of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



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Candice Ryder and Mel Sturr, Editors
Loletta Barrett, Pastor

Russell Litchfield, Dir of Music Ministries and
Organist

Telephone 562-698-9805

www.firstfriendswhittier.org

Whittier Friends School Staff
Candice Ryder, School Committee Clerk
562-945-1654



Jo Nita Beede

Cat Charest

Liz Ellis

Ellen Eggleton

Aaron Espinoza

Melissa Jones-Grabmiller

John Marshburn

Tim Root

Jean Sponsler

Chris Thomas

Linda Upton

Tammy Van Dorn

Anathea Woirhaye

Amy Wright



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.

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!