

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

February, 2025

First Friends Welcomes Gwendolyn Leslie



Exciting new things will be happening in 2025 on the corner of Philadelphia and Washington Ave. at Whittier First Friends Church, a Quaker Meeting! Gwendolyn Leslie has accepted the 30/hr. weekly position as our Community Engagement/Christian Education Coordinator. She and her daughter are relocating here from Texas and will be arriving soon.

Gwendolyn's passion and skills for community engagement and commitment to helping others, along with her knowledge and ability to integrate her faith and understanding of Scripture into practical tools that help to empower others, will be of benefit to her and the Meeting.

This new ministry encompasses several

areas of responsibility. They include working with us to educate, support, and advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion work within and outside the Meeting; developing and supporting intergenerational, educational, and specific ministries for all ages while empowering Friends' participation and leadership; and working to strengthen the ministry and partnership between Whittier Friends School and the Meeting. This position is not meant to recruit new members for us but is to work with us in reaching out and engaging our diverse community with the intention of growing our Quaker Meeting.

With a robust background in the non-profit sector, Gwendolyn is dedicated to serving individuals and families across diverse communities. As an Office Manager for a Chicago-based non-profit, she supported a team that extends vital resources to regions in Illinois, Africa, and the Caribbean. Previously, as a Community Specialist, Gwendolyn provided training that enriched lives through practical courses in resume writing and employment skills. Her role as a Career Counselor involved guiding clients in navigating their educational and professional paths and advising them on necessary steps to achieve

Gwendolyn Leslie Continued on page 7

Friendly Fare by Lea Wright

Dear Friends, I have been searching for news from our First Friends friends and feel like I am coming up short again this month. People tell me that they love to read the *Friendly Fare*, but in order for there to be a *Friendly Fare*, you all need to share your stories with me. The *Friendly Fare* in the *Living Light* is the place to share with your "First Friends family" the non-church events that happen in your life. This can include holiday news, family news, travels, milestones, special projects, celebrations, special events, and school or work news. Remember, when you travel, take the *Living Light* with you and take a picture of you and your travel group. We welcome your submissions. (or you will see mostly mine again.)

Friends About Town: The 68th Annual Holiday



Motor Excursion presented by the Horseless Carriage Club of So Cal was again attended by

the Wright/Caringella family. **Dan, Lea** and **Milton Wright** rode in the 1914 Model T driven by Dan. **Cassie, Steven, Landon, Avalon,** and **Hudson Caringella** rode in grandpa Dan's 1929 Model A driven by Steven. (1932 and older *stock* is required for tour participation) Dan and Milt have participated for over 20 years.

School and Work: **Cedric Woirhaye** has moved into university housing at Cal Poly Pomona for the semester. Congratulations to **Avalon Caringella** who was awarded Principal's Honor Roll - straight A's - for her first semester in 6th grade at public school. **Landon Caringella** also

earned straight A's for his first semester in high school, awarding him "Top 25" of the freshman class. His rank was number 7 out of all the freshmen!

Friends Travel: The **Woirhayes (Brendon, Deanna, Cedric and Elyse)** celebrated the New Year in New York City with daughter



Anathea. They enjoyed visiting the Empire State Building, One World Trade Center, the top of the Rockefeller Center, and

Coney Island for Cedric's January birthday at the same time. In January, **Cassie, Steven, Landon, Avalon,** and **Hudson Caringella** enjoyed a visit from Steven's aunt, Debbie Goode, from Ohio. Together they traveled down to San Diego, stopping in Laguna Beach for gelato on the way. Their San Diego experiences included a three-hour bike ride in Coronado and the children's first trip to SeaWorld, as well as a meal at Nonna's Italian restaurant in Little Italy (To her numerous grandchildren, Aunt Debbie is known as Nonna, the Italian name for Grandma).

Friends Remember: On January 25, **Pastor Loletta** officiated **Bill Peterson's** Celebration of Life (FFC's Interim Pastor from 2008 to 2010) at the United Church of Christ in Claremont. **Milton Wright** and **Candice Ryder** also attended this moving and inspirational service.

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. Send a picture if you have one. We all love to hear what you have been up to. See you next month!

Loletta's Lines



Truism - If I always do what I have always done, I get what I always got. If I want something different, I have to change. The first step is to identify if I am happy with who I am. I mean, if it isn't

broken, why fix it? Sometimes I negotiate with myself. "Maybe it isn't really broken... maybe it is almost 'there' and it just needs to be tweaked a little. Do I still have to change? (Sigh) Yes." Then I hope it won't be too hard! But like most projects I start, I find that a little pull here, a little adjustment there, and the whole pile comes spilling down because the box it was all in - that I was in - was just too small. I just hadn't noticed.

Our meeting is growing spiritually as a community. We don't need big change. We continue to explore new ideas, invite and welcome new people, and try new ways of doing things. Sometimes it feels strange or uncomfortable, but it is often surprisingly fun. I have also seen us put the brakes on, take a breath, share our queries, "season" where Spirit is leading, and continue without change. But we need to be aware: every once in a while the whole pile may come spilling down, and we will find out our box was just too small. It is then God calls us to step out in joy and hope. In the end we trust and know - wherever the Spirit leads will be good - inside or out! I found a quote from Rebecca Solnit that spoke to me. "Hope is not a lottery ticket you can sit on the couch clutching, feeling lucky. It is an axe you should use to break down doors... Hope should shove you out the door... to hope is to give yourself to the future, and that commitment to the future is what makes the present inhabitable." Who'd have known it?! Hope is not just an *abstract* noun, it's an **active** verb!

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First Friends Hosts Mission Collaborative Hygiene Kit Assembly Event



How many empty prescription bottles can 35 volunteers fill with laundry soap, shampoo, hand/body soap, and hand/body lotion in three hours on a Saturday afternoon? On January 18, members of the Whittier/La Mirada Mission Collaborative churches gathered in Fellowship Hall to find out. They washed and filled bottles for hygiene kits to be donated to the Loving Thing ministry (formerly known as the Soup Hour) of St. Matthias Episcopal Church in Whittier.

The Loving Thing serves members of our community experiencing housing and food insecurity. It provides a permanent mailing address for over 300 clients, daily "to-go" meals of fruit and a nutritious sandwich, and gives out an average of 20 hygiene kits per week containing shampoo, soap, detergent, lotion, a razor, toothpaste, and a toothbrush. While the ministry receives monetary contributions from their parishioners and other supporters, it depends largely on donations of food and toiletries. The volunteer staff normally fills the hygiene bottles on a weekly basis, so the collaborative's donation will free them from this task for several weeks.

Hygiene Kit Assembly Continued on page 5

Russ' Reflections

What's the Score?

I've been thinking about scores lately, though I am not keeping score in the way of sports or competitive pursuits. Perhaps, however, I am keeping score with myself.



Of course, the printed copies of music are known as scores. I have been looking at lots of music in the quest of planning music for the Friends Choir in the next couple of months toward Easter. What are we able to prepare with the resources we have? How does it fit together with the people and money we have and with worship plans?

A score is also a measure of time. In Psalm 90, we find a reference to one's life: *"10: The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away... 12: So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."* I have recently reached three score and ten. I don't usually make much of my birthdays, but this one is a milestone: I guess I am now an old geezer! These sorts of milestones become times to evaluate one's life and accomplishments and to, perhaps, make adjustments and set new goals. I always enjoy learning new music and have been presenting recitals in order to keep my mind engaged in music-making. I would love to find ways to share my knowledge with younger church musicians.

On January 26th, I will have reached one score as Organist at First Friends Church. I have a year to go as Director of Music. This is the longest I have served any church, though time flies, and it seems like yesterday that I moved in my music library and started getting to know the Harris organ and began accompanying the Friends Choir and congregation. We have

presented a huge pile of music over twenty years, and I am proud of the efforts of many singers and ringers over the years. The next year will be filled with pondering the future of music at First Friends and the role I will play in its creation. I hope we can do some projects to improve our organ. I am always grateful for the gifts and opportunities God has given me and am listening for God's leadings about the pathways to come. Thank you for a score of support!

Winter Mission Project

This year's Christmas Giving Tree in the foyer, which collects cold weather gear for individuals experiencing housing insecurity, was well-decorated with 11 pairs of gloves, 6 scarves, 14 caps, and 40 pairs of socks! Our red wagon also filled up with food and drink items. All these gifts will be donated to our friends at the Loving Thing, a ministry of St. Matthias Church, and the Interfaith Food Center. In addition, generous Friends supported our Winter Mission with monetary contributions totaling \$320.00 which will provide grocery gift cards for these two deserving organizations who serve the vulnerable in our community. Thank you, Friends, for participating in our Winter Mission Project!





News from Whittier Friends School

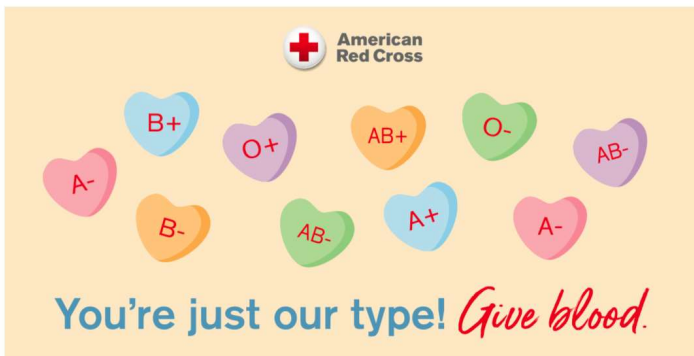
Returning to school after winter break is made easier for Whittier Friends School students because of our tradition of taking a field trip on our first day back. This year, over 50 students, parents, and siblings gathered at the Los Angeles Zoo on Monday, January 6. The children found joy in seeing all of the animals, while having a chance to catch up with their friends after a couple of weeks off of school. It was a great kick-off to the next science unit: earth's biomes. Some of Teacher Marielle's class had important things to say about their trip. A second grader says, "I saw a tiger. I called him 'Shere Kahn the tiger. He was cute, not scary!" Another second grader says, "I saw 3 parrots. They were rainbow and medium." A kindergartner says, "I saw a baboon. He was good!" It was fun getting their perspective on what was a well-attended, community-building trip.

not signed up yet, and would like more information, you can email Cassie.wfs@gmail.com. And as always, you can follow Whittier Friends School's adventures on Facebook at www.facebook.com/whittierfriendsschool/ and on Instagram at www.instagram.com/whittierfriendsschool/

Hygiene Kit Assembly Continued from page 3

Also collected as part of this event were trial size mouthwash bottles, feminine hygiene products, chapstick, and over 100 pairs of new socks in which volunteers tucked hand-written notes of love and affirmation. At the end of the day, the empty soap/lotion jugs and bottles were tallied, and it was estimated that 10+ gallons of laundry soap, 8+ gallons of shampoo, nearly 3 gallons of hand/body soap, and 1-½ gallons of lotion filled over 700 prescription bottles. While each kit provides a small measure of support and dignity to those in need, these numbers remind us that the collective service of a group of loving, generous individuals does have an impact. Not to mention the camaraderie, love, and laughter shared by all who participated. A special thanks goes out to those who helped First Friends host this event by planning and organizing, arranging refreshments, and cleaning up afterward. All are invited to participate in any collaborative event, so keep an eye on the weekly newsletter for upcoming dates. If you have an idea for a service project or potential collaborative event that you would like to organize, contact Marilyn Fant, Clerk of CEO, and be sure to like and follow the Collaborative Instagram account at:

instagram.com/whittier.la.mirada.hope



Blood Drive Whittier Friends School

First Friends Church - Fellowship Hall
13205 Philadelphia St
Whittier, CA 90601

**Thursday, February 20, 2025
1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.**

On Thursday, February 20, WFS is hosting a Red Cross Blood Drive. If you are available and physically able, consider donating blood! Donors will be given snacks (tempting?) and an amazing gift card (extra tempting!). If you have

January AFFN Highlights the Benefits of a Friends Education



What sets a Quaker education apart? In recognition of Whittier Friends School's 50th Anniversary, Cassie Caringella, Whittier Friends School Director and teacher, explored this query

at January All Friends Fellowship Night. Following the abundant potluck dinner, she shared her presentation, entitled "Friends School Education: As seen through the eyes of Friends Council on Education and Whittier Friends School," which provided insights from Friends Council on Education as well as event photos and memories over the years by WFS alumni.

Since the founding of the first Quaker school in America in Philadelphia in 1869, Friends meetings have established schools rooted in Quaker values throughout the country. In 1931, two Quaker Educators, Morris and Hadassah Leeds, co-founded Friends Council on Education with the goal of "fostering friendliness and mutual understanding among these institutions and reinforcing reverence for truth and recognition of the divine element in each person." Today, FCE includes 76 schools across 21 states with over 20,000 students and approximately 5,000 faculty and staff. Whittier Friends School (originally the Growing Place) was established in 1974 on the grounds of First Friends Church and joined the Friends Council in 1976. WFS now includes a preschool and elementary program with a diverse yet intimately connected student body.

As Cassie explained, a Friends education does not teach "religion," but is based on the Quaker tradition of being open to continuing revelation and the belief in the "inner Light" in each individ-

ual. Students learn to seek truth through inquiry, scientific investigation, reflection, creative expression, critical thinking, dialogue, worship, and service. The children's spirits are nurtured and challenged to "develop inner resources for discipline, respect, compassion, and achievement." (FCE website). Students learn to explore and grow as a community and to respect diverse perspectives. Graduates go forth with a strong awareness of social justice, tolerance, and respect for others in addition to skills needed to deal with adversity and a solid sense of self worth - all tools they will need to succeed and make a positive impact on society.

Whittier Friends School is no exception. The small multi-age classes are taught by caring, well-qualified educators that truly get to know their students. The intimate setting makes it possible to provide individualized instruction, hands-on learning, and group projects. Students go on field trips and put on stage productions. Elementary students create an annual science fair and participate in service projects. Additionally, older students can compete in National History Day and National Novel Writing Month. Cassie shared photos of recent events as part of her presentation which reflect the students' joy and engagement in these activities.

With support from First Friends, Cassie has been blessed to be able to join other Friends School leaders at their Heads of School gatherings in Philadelphia. Her trips, in 2022 and 2024, helped to deepen her understanding of the Friends educational experience and to strengthen her connection to like-minded educators. She shared photos of the historic Arch Street and Race Street meetinghouses as well as Friends Center, home of Friends Council. She also expressed gratitude for being able to connect with other Friends educators: "It's an incredible blessing to spend time with educators that live and breathe the same philosophies as us." Additionally, she gave thanks to First Friends meeting for its support and belief in WFS school and its mission throughout the years. Here is to another 50!

Gwendolyn Leslie Continued from page 1
career aspirations.

Aside from these roles, Gwendolyn has made significant contributions as a Social Media Specialist and Content Manager, where she enhanced campaign awareness and online engagement through creative content strategies. Demonstrating her expertise and passion for empowering others, she has shared her insights as a panelist at a major women's conference in Atlanta with over 25,000 in attendance, offering personal and professional development services. Her work with women of faith in Chicago highlights her commitment to addressing socio-economic challenges and promoting gun violence prevention among diverse religious communities.

Deeply rooted in her Christian faith, Gwendolyn believes that spiritual growth is fostered by embracing diverse experiences and spiritual expressions. Raised in a devout Christian household, she treasures the "Lessons and Blessings" that have shaped her spirituality, learning to trust in God's plan and extending the same understanding towards the lived experience and faith journey of others. Her passion lies in exploring how God is perceived across different cultures and communities, viewing these diverse expressions as catalysts for spiritual enrichment.

The search committee felt the Spirit's leading and guidance coming to the place where all minds were of one accord. We are confident that her skills, experience, and heart for service will make her an invaluable addition to our ministry. We know you will want to join the search committee in welcoming Gwendolyn (Gwen) and her daughter into our Meeting's family.

*~ The Ministry & Development Search
Committee*

Gretchen Castle Brings a Timely and Practical Message



How can we maintain a sense of safety and serenity during these tumultuous and uncertain times? In her message on Jan. 25 entitled "To Feel Safe, Some Assembly May Be Required," Gretchen Castle, Dean of the

Earlham School of Religion, explored how we can "assemble" practices and ways of thinking that enable us to access God's eternal love and comfort.

She offers this advice: "We may need to be intentional about practices and thinking that will connect us to God's comfort and guidance," and she offered a few of her own personal strategies:

- Staying close to those she loves
- Focusing her energies on the mission of ESR
- Giving herself fully to the Life and Power that Fox talks about by living fully into the Quaker community
- Putting Light into the world every day
- Remembering that nothing can separate us from the love of God

She also offered these ideas along the same lines that may be helpful:

- Look for points of Light
- Remain impervious to external forces
- Focus on appreciation
- Let your lives speak
- Listen for the voice of Divine Guidance
- Keep showing up, even when it is hard
- Live into love - in ever increasingly courageous ways
- Listen well

What can you add to this list? In the upcoming year, how will you invite God's sustaining love to overcome adversity and suffering? What practices and ways of thinking will help you open to God's eternal presence?

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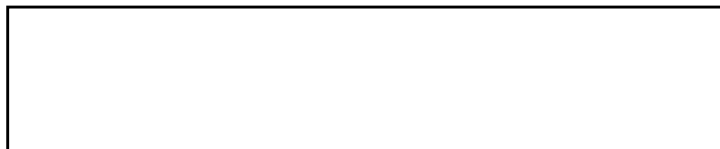
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Please remember in
prayer those Friends
unable to worship
with us regularly.

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Shirley Votaw