

Dear Friends –

Friends Meeting at Cambridge is for many of us a beloved sanctuary from the world's problems. We have sought refuge there many times over the years when faced with personal misfortune, losses in the community, physical disasters, and tragic events. We are now confronted with another challenging time, and we need access to and the support of the community to help us through.

We have been inundated for quite awhile now with information about the coronavirus and the impacts of COVID-19 around the world and now in our neighborhoods. An ad-hoc group including representatives of the Clerks Team, Trustees, Ministry and Counsel, First Day School/Youth Programs, Fellowship and Outreach, and staff has spent considerable time this week assessing the situation. While we need our community to help us through the coming challenges, we need to consider the following factors:

- Our community includes a wide range of ages. The younger of us apparently can carry the virus without showing any symptoms, and indications are that some carry the virus for up to two weeks before experiencing symptoms. In addition, a large part of our community falls in the populations apparently most vulnerable to the virus. Mixing these two groups seems unwise.
- Most recommendations issued advise avoiding close contact with others. Sitting in a crowded Meeting House, sharing Coffee Hour or Simple Lunch in the Friends Room, or gathering for Forum or Afterthoughts in the Parlor thus seem to be dangerous.
- Handling items handled by others also is discouraged. In addition to sharing utensils, dishes, handles, and platters during Coffee Hour and meals, we also share contact with light switches, door handles, chair arms, paper towel dispensers, and many other facilities in the kitchen and bathroom. Keeping these clean would place an unfair burden on our staff.
- We have people living in our Friends Center, and frequently exposing them to large numbers of people places them in danger.
- By taking extra precautions now, we can help reduce the spreading of the virus and help those most in need of care find adequate health care in our limited local facilities.
- Our communities have recognized the need to cancel many of their large events and close many of their public facilities.
- We can maintain contact with one another through phone, Zoom, and other forms of communication.

With this in mind, the ad-hoc group has, with great reluctance, come to the conclusion that we need to **close the Friends Meeting at Cambridge facilities as of the end of the day today (Friday 13th March)** to any meetings for worship, group meetings, events, or activities. Key card access will not be available during this period. In the **unusual** circumstances that individuals may have special needs for **temporary** access

to the Center, they can make arrangements with the Resident Friend, the Facilities Manager, members of the Clerks Team, or members of the Trustees Committee. We are unsure how long this will last, but **we are closing the Friends Center and Meeting House now for four weeks, hoping to be able to reopen on Easter Sunday (April 12)**. We will reevaluate the duration as the health situation changes.

This unfortunately also means the All-meeting Retreat has been cancelled. The Raytheon Meeting for Worship this Sunday (15th March) is not cancelled, but Friends have to make their own travel arrangements, bring their own chairs and should spread out their seating.

We will prepare information about using the FMC's Zoom accounts for meetings and send it out soon. We also anticipate setting up online "Meetings for Worship", "Forums", and "Afterthoughts" this and future Sundays - details to come soon. Committees and other groups are encouraged to meet via Zoom.

The FMC Pastoral Care Team is available to provide support and assistance to our community and you will be receiving a more detailed email from them shortly. Please remember that if you are aware of someone in our community, or you yourself need support in some way you should email pastoralcare@fmcquaker.org.

We are sorry to have to send out this message. We will miss the joy of physically gathering in our Center and Meeting House. We look forward to hearing your voices over the phone and seeing you on the screen. Please keep in touch with us to let us know how you are doing. Let us all hold the Friends Meeting at Cambridge community and our fragile world in the Light.

Ian Harrington for The Ad-hoc COVID-19 Response Group