Meeting opened with silent worship.

Clerk welcomed Friends to the meeting for worship with attention to the stewardship of our property, especially regarding the rental space that has become available. He explained the purpose of a threshing session: an emphasis on listening, speaking as led from the light and the heart. The purpose is to gain the sense of how we steward our property.

The clerk read through the queries about stewardship, below. He then suggested that we proceed as in worship sharing, and address the questions one by one, speaking as led.

1. What does good stewardship of our property mean?

“Stewardship” in the Bible usually refers to monetary stewardship, such as the parable of the talents. What we’ve been given is a history of 350 years, a property, and people, including children, who need spiritual solace. We can’t disregard any of that. We need to create a space where our children can become people who grow in the Spirit.

My mind went to people outside of the meeting. Are we good stewards of having people with whom we are in alignment for social causes?

In my head I see the people who began the meetinghouse 100 years ago. 10 years ago, I went looking for deeds. What do we have that proves that this all belongs to us? I went to the archives in Downey and found old deeds. We had one lot, then a Friend bought the lot next door, then we had apartments, and then suddenly we had building 3. The property has been added on to over the years. I look at the empty Lutheran church. There was a vacant church in L.A. that was gutted by fire. There are too many empty churches.

I like the landscaping and coming in the west side and walking into a library.

We don’t live in a vacuum. We have good neighbors and need to make sure that we maintain this building in a way that doesn’t create a problem with the neighbors. I think we do that with outreach and our maintenance of the building.
2. How does acknowledging that our Meetinghouse is built on land that was previously owned and worked by the Tongva/Gabrielino people inform our use and ownership of the property?

3. How has our understanding of being good neighbors changed over the past few (or 100) years?

A few weeks ago I was a judge of the CA Arts Commission. We were awarding grants to individuals who would funnel the money granted into the community, especially underserved populations. How can we respect our spiritual stewardship—arts, culture, social programs—so that a greater number of people are impacted?

This summer at FWS each teacher chose a non-fiction book to read. The three of us all found texts that addressed the questions about the genocide, land theft, and erasure of the first people who lived on our land. We had a sharing session and worked through questions about how this affects how and what we teach. We have to think about ourselves as Quaker educators, not tied to the state curriculum. We have several connections to traditional people’s resources. What are the lies we’ve told so that we feel better about ourselves? For example, Quaker complicity with boarding schools. I’m grateful that we have a space where we can address a topic for as long as it needs to be addressed.

4. What about the open rental space?

An undercurrent seems to be that this space is an incubator where a lot of good ideas take form, and then move out as they grow and expand. I think about that winter when we made breakfast for homeless people. There was a broken asphalt courtyard, which has been replaced with a more garden-like space. This afternoon people put their feet in a small pool. This answers many questions. I love the idea that we are an incubator for how things move forward. But it’s hard to know how things will be in five or many years down the road. You do have opportunities to listen to others, and think, and be intentional about its use.

As a member of Property Committee, I often grapple with how to make sure that we have good space, that we tend to the needs of our renters. As a community member, I often think of how dark and lonely this space is in the evenings. I also remember the Friday evenings that WAL would host and the art space that was available in the summer. We had yard sales, and neighbors took some of this on. ACLU comes in and out of this space. I feel no connection to the people who once lived here, but I do feel a connection to the black and brown people who lived in NW Pasadena because nowhere else was available. Now this area has become so gentrified, it’s too expensive again. I feel that we need to invite in members of our community and helps them to make connections. For long term, I’d like to make connections that are above and beyond our Quakerism, and make this a welcome space.

I’ve also thought about what the building looks like when we’re not here, which is now most of the time. There are push and pull communications, we can tell, we can answer questions, but how do we invite people to ask us—for rummage sales, for use of the fellowship room for a
book club, or general community good. How do we push out communication to the community and say that we want to be a part?

A Friend expressed a concern that the consideration of the original people be a part of this discussion. I met a person on the bus who lived on Palm Street, like me, and also his parents worked as farmers on Hahamonga Village—acorns, three sisters (corn, squash, beans). I could see it in my mind. At Walker Creek Ranch (PacYM annual gathering site) there is a stone with a depression in it showing where people ground acorns for decades.

There was a program in Seattle, Quest, that made me think of the funnel mentioned earlier. They purchased a house and turned it into a youth residency, for youth who would be interns at centers around the city. Then the internship stipends would help support the program. Every time I look at buildings around, I think of that program. One of the things I keep thinking about is that FWS isn’t able to provide full scholarships for some children who need it. That makes it less able to reach out to the nearby community. Could our rental space be used to rent to people who were volunteering in the community? These things are milling around in my head. I’m interested to see what happens at the empty Lutheran church next door as the price drops. Friends Western School may be growing too big for this space.

5. What is our long-term vision for the property?

As Treasurer, I think we need to look at the ramifications for our rentals. We have three AA meetings, only $25 per meeting, but it adds up. If we decide to enter other agreements, we need to think of our income.

I think the indigenous people who owned and existed on the land. I think we should do something like Berkeley Meeting did, a land acknowledgement. Does that accomplish something? Maybe the acknowledgement itself has value. The indigenous people did not give it up willingly and were enslaved. Perhaps we can educate ourselves about them. I think a scholarship for someone who lives nearby for FWS is a good idea. If our purpose is to further Friends values, they aren’t taught in public school. We could have a fundraiser for a scholarship. I also wanted to give a grant to Friends Indeed for rent support, because it’s in our neighborhood. People who live in this neighborhood help us know how to be good neighborhood in this community. Being present is a way of interacting with the neighborhood. Just working in the yard is a way to make connections. Making our space available is a great way to do that. The woman who lives just across the street knows the community; there’s a master gardener down the street. The best way to be stewards of the property is to use it in a way that benefits the community. Also, we need to use it sustainably, in a way that’s environmentally sound.

In some of my mural projects we canvass the neighborhoods to get volunteers. It’s always fun. Every community has someone who knows everything that goes on. Maybe we could canvas our community, or talk to Friends Indeed, to find people who could use time and space to meet in our building.
We have a resource down the street that can help us—Madison School is desperately in need of resources. They’re trying to get something on the ballot to allow all parents, including non-citizens, to vote for the Board of Education. Other places in the states have this provision. This is a heavily burdened rental community.

What are the proposals for how to use the open rental space? Response: FWS is the only one right now.

Friends Western School would like to rent the space. The school would like to be in right relationship with the Meeting and the community. One of our concerns is to get to know the community: Villa Park Library, Baja Ranch. We are at the beginning of that journey. We bear a huge responsibility to this space and community. We are aware of the privilege attached to most of our students. Long term, we would love to be in conversation with other initiatives. We have an idea of re-wilding the land. That could be a simple way of pushing against gentrification.

I was so connected to this space for so many years. I tried really hard to reach out to the community, but it isn’t easy. Madison, the Berglund family, Casita, a Tongva person. I think it’s really hard to connect to the community. Yard sales and rummage sales work, but they’re physically a lot of work. You have to work hard for hours and have storage space before and after. Sometimes people would come to the Friday (WAL) events. Sometimes I had tables set up near Madison school when it let out and did activities and gave out flyers. The amount of work it takes to reach out is immense. If you don’t have a good user of the space, who care for it, then it gets trashed.

Mothers Club was started by this meeting and grew in and then outgrew this space.

Has the Meeting considered using it as an apartment again? Maybe that would be the best use of the space. Students, teachers, formerly homeless persons?

If we make it a living space, there are complications with having children on campus. Legally, we need to be very careful of that. We are a non-profit and have to be aware of that and how our tax status might be affected.

If we can find that person in the community who knows everyone, we should rent to that person.

The property stewardship committee will season these thoughts and will bring something forward to MfB.

In our outreach budget we give to many organizations. We could ask them if they know of anyone who needs the space.
Someone who might come and go might already be involved with what goes on here—a teacher, or a student at a college.

Every time there is an idea of someone from the outside using the space, there’s a concern about the children. We don’t assume that among ourselves. The same issue came up when we discussed the possibility of having a garden on Oakland. It was almost immediately squelched because of the possibility that the bad people in the neighborhood would interact with our children.

Clerk reminded us that this is a meeting for worship, not a discussion.

Are we being too hard on ourselves at the end of this pandemic? There will be other people who will come back. We’re just exactly where we need to be at this moment.

It sounded like the clerk was trying to say that the concern about fear of the neighborhood coloring our decisions was a response, not a spirit-led concern. (Clerks indicated that was not what was intended.)

Meeting closed with a few moments of silent worship.