

Property Coordinator Update
February 7, 2014

My apologies that it's been 9 weeks since I wrote the last update. It's been busy.

The Snow

There's been a lot of it..... And every time it snows, I drive over from my house to shovel, sprinkle salt, and check the buildings. On big snow storms, I've done it twice a day. We do have an agreement with Tim Palmer's Snow Removal Service to shovel, but they aren't always timed with the use of the buildings, nor are they as thorough as I think they need to be for so much public traffic. I also have been shoveling the back deck, since this is the 2nd egress for 3 sections of the Community House, as well as the porch and walkway to the side door of Potter House closest to the Catholic Sunday School Building. (I'm very grateful to Katey who often comes with me to do this.) I am evaluating whether we should continue to have Tim Palmer's company shovel at all – it's not realistic for them as a small business to be on-call for this whenever I can't get there. We have to either have them plan on coming every time or none at all (to shovel). At \$45 an appearance – is it worth it?

As I begin my second year in this role, I will share that the most stressful time for me as the off-sight property coordinator is in the winter dealing with the snow/safety issues. (It was last year, too.)

Electrical Repairs

Jeff Kobza put in a new fixture in the outside entryway of the Meeting House in time for the Christmas Eve service. A week later he fixed a light on the stage and replaced both fans in the 2 bathrooms near the kitchen, all of which were not working.

Furnaces

Both were serviced by Brodeurs in December.

Cemetery Repairs

Mr. Rex from Rex Monuments came by to see the broken headstones. He will fix them in the spring.

Floors in Community House

Butch Belanger's company did a light sanding and put another coat of polyurethane on the wood floor between Christmas and New Year's. I may be imagining this, but it seems to me like it is scratching and denting more easily than it did before this was done. I talked to Butch today and asked him to take a look at it sometime. I am wondering if they took off more than usual when they do this annual coat (because it needed it), so that there is less protection, even with the additional coat, than there was before. It may be that when Butch comes back to do the annual one coat next December, we may need him to put 2 on – he and I will talk.

The contractor I had lined up to strip and reseal the vinyl tile in the Community House did not come through. I am actively working on getting it done this month.

Thermostats & Heat

On Sunday or Monday of each week, I reprogram the thermostats to coincide with the scheduled use of the buildings for the coming week. I am trying hard to keep the heating costs down this winter – Mother Nature

is not cooperating with this effort as much as I would like, however! Please speak with me if the temperature is not adequate at any point and I will adjust the programs.

Bulletin Boards in the Community House

They still look sad and lonely in the Community House, and I continue to feel they are a missed opportunity to “advertise” and spread the Good News.

Occupancy Limits and Town Inspections

We’ve had several failed attempts (a snow storm, a meeting with the fire chief, and a funeral all got in the way), but the Building Department official and I have hopes to get this done on February 13th. No promises, but we’ll keep trying.

Use of the Buildings by Others

In addition to the ongoing exercise classes, Brownie troop meetings, and Women’s Club meetings, we have had 4 private parties, a wedding, Quarterly Meeting, and an NEYM Youth Retreat use the buildings in the past 9 weeks.

Reflection

This week is the beginning of my second year as Meeting’s Property Coordinator. It’s a role I never saw myself in, and even when I said ‘yes’ to taking it on, I never expected to get so much satisfaction and enjoyment from doing it. Grace happens, sometimes in the most unexpected of places.

I’ve learned an enormous amount about everything from historical construction, landscaping, building maintenance, wells, septic systems and fire codes, to gutter screws, folding chairs, and wood floor mops. I’ve met and worked with a stream of very good people – both skilled artisans as well as honest and patient human beings – who have been my teachers and sometimes daily companions. I’ve become aware of just how much I love our two buildings and the old sacred land around them.

I have learned what every Friend in Residence before me expressed: each interaction is an opportunity for outreach and ministry. I’ve had deep and tender spiritual conversations with a number of people on site, including a wise painter, a grandmother organizing a family party, and a realtor. I had a young mother call me on the phone, after touring the building and deciding the space would not work for a birthday party, because she needed to ask “You said that you all sit in worship in Silence on Sunday – I want to know just who or what do you worship?” We talked for another 15 minutes. I’ve had the mother of a bride be softened by my available presence to her daughter over months of preparation. I’ve listened to and comforted heartbroken family members who have called looking for a place to serve lunch after their loved ones’ funerals. I’ve had blunt, honest conversations with AA attenders that have made me laugh, cry, and sigh in awe.

I have become convinced that sharing our property with the community is a right use of resources and one of the *easiest* things we can do. Yes, I know – I was as far away from this understanding as possible a short few years ago. However, these days I really feel true gratitude to the Macomber family for giving us the opportunity to extend hospitality – and it does feel like opportunity rather than ‘burden.’ Perhaps *bloom where you are planted* applies here. This is something that we have and the local community can use. I would love to explore how we might do more of this – intentionally extending hospitality to some who would never even think to ask, like the local chapter of a support group for parents of children with special needs

who currently squish into someone's living room for their meetings but might love a space of respite away for a couple of hours.

I have learned a lot about love.

I love our Meeting community. I did before I took on this role. When I said 'yes' to being the Property Coordinator I did so with clarity that remaining in love with my Meeting was most important, and that if this love started to crumble, that I needed to immediately step down. The past year has helped me to see just how difficult it would be for anyone to be in this role *and* to be part of the community, to be both part of the Fellowship of the Meeting and to be the servant of it. I now know what it is like to be holding a cup of tea during fellowship at the rise of Meeting, sharing a tender spiritual struggle with one Friend, and to be interrupted by other Friends who need to point out cobwebs, ask where to get more toilet paper, or complain about problems with a thermostat. My love for the other Friends in front of me has helped me to reach compassion (if not in the moment, almost always within the next day or two), trusting that the intention was to solve a problem or convey information. Love, and the desire to remain in our Meeting's Fellowship, has helped me to reach for understanding of where the other was coming from rather than get stuck in resentment or pride.

However, through moments like these I have come to understand how our Meeting's relationship with our Friends in Residence in the past so frequently went badly over time when there wasn't enough love to grasp onto. I have had to face my own part in the cumulative hurt feelings and broken relationships we experienced and intentionally or unintentionally caused. Many times in the past year, a word or exchange illuminated so clearly moments when I was not loving and compassionate to those in this role before me, moments when there was too much distrust and shrapnel from past unresolved issues in the way of letting Way open towards a solution in the Light. I am so sorry for these. I am trying to learn from them.

Many sincere Friends have wondered if the only way to decrease friction between the Friend in Residence and Meeting members is to contract out as much of the role and responsibilities as possible, creating a distance in a business kind of way. I no longer think this is optimal. I think what is needed is love – and lots of it. I think that the person in this role needs to be a grounded and seasoned Friend, open to a ministry of presence and hospitality, and that they need to be in love with this community -- with *their* community. And equally important, I believe that we need to be in love with them – as I know this community loves me. Westport Friends' love for me has been so evident and so important, conveying trust, compassion, and tenderness. Even while I have felt alone in this work, I have felt cared for – and that is so powerfully sustaining.

And so here I am, a year into this latest phase of our grand "experiment" feeling grateful – not at all resentful – and eager to see what unfolds in the year ahead. I don't have one, but if I had a furnace room like the school janitors all have (okay, I admit to minor jealousy), I would hang a banner across the doorway, readable from both directions, that said *Let us see what love can do*. I think that's what we're on a quest to find out.

Thank you dear Friends, for the opportunity to be here in this honest seeking of how we can be open to and channel ever *more love*.

Love,
Gretchen