

On January 15, Martin Luther King Day, our worship group had another very successful Banned and Black History book giveaway in Earl Brown Park. This time, our book inventory was almost double in size from our Juneteenth giveaway. Our booth was open from 10am to 3pm and in that time we gave away more than 600 books. That's more than 100 books an hour. We were busy!

We had received book donations from Friends and friends all over the country. A Friend in Pennsylvania read about our previous book giveaway (see the November, 2023 issue of Friend's Journal) and sent us a note of gratitude along with a check for \$150 to keep going, which we intend to do.

We had a wide selection of books for all ages, ranging from baby board books to early readers, chapter books, and books of interest to young adults and adults. We gave reusable lovely cloth bags made by one of our members to encourage people to take as many books as they wanted.

"Please keep doing this," we heard repeatedly from our "customers". "There is a real need here [for this action]." Some even handed us ten dollar bills to help buy more books.

The initial leading for our book giveaways was prompted by the book banning and removal of books on Black history from school and county libraries in reaction to laws passed by the Florida legislature which made it a felony for a teacher to promote a book to students which might make them feel "uncomfortable" about slavery and historical acts of racial injustice. Most books about LGBTQ issues have also been banned.

In keeping with our testimony of equality and dignity for all, we decided to buy up books being culled from libraries and distribute them free of charge to people who wanted and needed to read them.

In the process of spreading the word about our action on social media, we found that people all over the country were concerned about the book banning in Florida (and elsewhere). We got boxes of donations sent by New York Quarterly Meeting, the City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, and bags of books from local teachers and librarians in our community.

The response was nearly overwhelming. But after the first giveaway, we realized we were supplying a deep yearning, especially in the Black community, to know more about their history and make sure it got passed along to their children and grandchildren.

There was no hesitation in our minds that our leading had been right ordered and that it would become our ministry.

We have a registered wish list with Amazon Books. Anyone can go on the website, check our wish list, and purchase books to be delivered to us. We have opened a P.O. Box for that purpose. We are encouraging other Quaker meetings in our yearly meeting to start their own book giveaways. It's relatively easy, it's a wonderful way to bridge our still too segregated communities, and it's fun.

"I've been learning so much about the history of slavery and the long civil rights movement," says Kathy Hersh, a DeLand Quaker. "When the books come in, I try to read as many as I can before we give them away. My life is richer in many ways because of our ministry."