

## **2012 Spiritual State of the Meeting Report**

### **Meeting for Worship**

When asked to consider their experiences of Meeting for Worship in the past year, our children noted that in the quiet “you can think about things,” and that the stillness gives us “time to calm down.” Indeed: this sense of sinking “down into the seed” during worship was shared by older Friends as well. One noted that “I feel God’s presence in Meeting”; another that the Meeting for Worship reminds him how he is nourished by this “blessed community.” As we reflected on the gifts of this gathered worship, we also noted that they are the fruits of our intentional preparation for Meeting. Friends shared their practices of prayer, meditation, and reading in the days leading up to worship each week. During worship, there is a deep and rich silence, balanced by nurturing vocal ministry. One Friend noted that “many times the messages I speak are for me as well [as for others]; they are revelations as to what I should be doing.” Our children expressed gratitude for the queries read aloud in Meeting once each month, as “the queries help me to think about what I am doing.” The children would like to hear more vocal ministry during the time they are with us in worship. A sense was also expressed that Meeting for Worship helps to knit us together, and to “expand our knowledge of ourselves and our community.” A part of our knowing of ourselves as a community came as we restored the Meeting Room benches this year: the carpenters whose gifted hands made this work possible joined us in worship and sharing of this journey. From this deepening worship and sense of spiritual community, we realize that we are called to “take the Meeting with us when we go out into the wider world.”

### **Meeting for Worship With a Concern for Business and Committee Work**

Love for one another and a “spirit of listening and respect” has allowed us to live into our recent (Ninth Month 2011) minute in support of same-gender marriage under the care of the Meeting. As one Friend noted when reflecting on this continuing process, “our love is stronger than any differences among us, and it will always be that way.” Our work on this, and other matters, happens both inside and outside Meeting for Business. While our Quaker process can sometimes feel slow to some, we acknowledge that “it is meant to be that way: as the Light ignites our bones, the process lives in each of us.” Some of our children ventured into Meeting for Business this year, which is a good sign of their connectedness to the community and their readiness for their maturing roles in the Meeting. Our clerk acknowledges that she feels supported in her work, and she affirmed that “we all practice leadership [in the Meeting community] because we have to.” Our work in committees represents a place for growth into this understanding that each of us is responsible for the work of the Meeting; to this end we invited two outside Friends in Eleventh Month to lead a Forum entitled “Quaker Committees: Responsible to the Meeting, Responsible to the Spirit.” Friends acknowledged that our deepening knowledge of one another and our sense of caring for one another are important foundations for our business and committee work.

### **First Day School (FDS)**

Our younger Friends (spanning infancy to teen) continue to be highly valued for the life, joy, wisdom, noises, and occasional vocal ministry they bring to the Meeting. As one Friend put it, “the opportunity to gain wisdom from their insights is something that I see as an area for my personal growth,” and similarly, another said “children are spiritual teachers for me.” Following the first 15 minutes of Meeting for Worship, children gather in the First Day School rooms

and often outdoors as well. A number of Friends share the joy of teaching FDS classes. Regular monthly lessons have included Conflict Resolution, Environment/Spirituality, a Service Project, and Godly Play/Faith & Play. The Godly Play stories are valued by one younger Friend because they are “an interesting way to learn about Bible Stories” and are “really creative and fun,” while another found the conflict resolution lessons especially applicable to sibling relationships. When asked about their favorite Meeting activities and those that brought them closer to God, children listed a variety of activities that brought them into contact with a broader range of adults: “Exploring the Quaker Way,” the Coffee Social, the Camping Trip, the Christmas talent show, Godly Play, and Intergenerational Game nights. Children found it easier to get to know other children’s parents, FDS teachers, and adults who came to talk in FDS.

## **Activities and Gatherings**

Our Meeting-sponsored activities arise from our spiritual yearnings and provide opportunities for deepening our spiritual growth, broadening our knowledge, and cultivating interpersonal relationships. Various monthly First Day gatherings now regularly occur before and after Meeting for Worship. (See list.) Three highlights from 2012: 1) “Exploring the Quaker Way” has opened up much sharing on different aspects of the Quaker experience using a format from Quaker Quest. 2) The Spirit and Nature group has evolved to a worship sharing group on Matthew Fox’s Original Blessing, a gathering that Friends find deeply spiritual. 3) Friends have commented on the ongoing value of the Spiritual Formation program “where people get to know one another more deeply and care for one another.” Delving into one text, Cynthia Bourgeault’s Wisdom Jesus, has been fruitful for a number of participants.

### Monthly First Day Gatherings:

- Forum
- Coffee Social
- FCNL letter writing
- Spirit and Nature
- Exploring the Quaker Way
- Bible Study

### Groups meeting a few times a year:

- Quaker Parenting
- Intergenerational Game Night
- Property Committee Clean-up Days

### Other Monthly Gatherings:

- Spiritual Formation
- Silent Retreat

### Annual Gatherings:

- Meeting for Worship for Remembrance (Memorial Day)
- FDS Camping trip
- FDS Christmas program

## **Relationships in the Community**

We are mindful of and grateful for our connections with generations of Gunpowder Friends, past, present and future who have and who will steward our community and our home. We are fortunate to have vibrant groups across the lifespan for whom faith and spirituality are central to their lives. Their willingness to talk about this is a gift. The community draws strength from the deep and trusting relationships here.

Newcomers are welcomed to the Meeting. One newcomer stated, “In the brief period of time I have been attending Meeting for Worship and the Spiritual Formation group, I have felt embraced, I have felt accepted, and I have also felt immediately the sense this was a place I could grow by listening to a variety of different viewpoints.”

Friends spoke about relationships of the Gunpowder community with the wider Quaker community, with the local community, and with the cosmos. We could be more aware of Friends' involvement in activities in the wider Quaker community; steps are needed to help us broaden and deepen our understanding of such opportunities. One Friend noted the value of the Meeting fully recognizing what impact our individual and group efforts have outside of the Quaker world. Another Friend noted the importance of our awareness of, connection to, and respect for our cosmos and spoke of this as central to our spiritual lives.

### **Outreach**

"Exploring the Quaker Way" opens paths for newcomers and attenders to gain a clearer understanding of our beliefs, our worship practices, our history, and our testimonies. Other activities and gatherings, such as Spiritual Formation and Silent Retreat, serve as a form of outreach, attracting visitors and seekers.

Our Gunpowder Friends living at Broadmead Retirement community conduct informational sessions to educate fellow residents about Quaker beliefs and practices.

We understand that it is important to consider other ways to further our outreach efforts. Our young Friends continue to be exemplars in their dedication to community service projects.

### **Looking Forward: Queries for Our Worship in the Coming Year**

- For what is our worship preparing us as individuals and as a community?
- How can we best nurture the developing vocal and other ministries of our children?
- As we attend to our process of business, do we discipline ourselves to engage in a worship-based Spirit-led discernment process, to "really wait" before sharing and allow our clerk to recognize us?
- Do we make leadership opportunities and corporate discernment processes consistently accessible to all interested Friends, members and attenders?
- Do we find ways to speak Truth that some might have difficulty hearing? How do we continue to learn from the "pieces of truth" each of us has for our shared work? How do we invite one another and hold one another accountable in truth seeking? Do we remain open to continuing revelation?
- Within the Meeting community, how do we strengthen bonds -- between those who currently attend regularly and those who do not, between those who are actively parenting young children and those who are not?
- How can adults and children get to know each other better? How do we take advantage of opportunities for intergenerational interaction?
- Although we are diverse in our spiritual journeys and in some of our opinions, we are not diverse in race and ethnicity. What are the reasons for this lack of diversity in our community? What are the effects of this lack?
- How do we bring our Meeting with us when we go out into the wider world? What community service are we led to offer to the world? How could we be more involved in the wider Quaker community? What steps can we take in conveying Quaker Faith and Practice in the wider community?

*"May we think about our [responses] together in a loving way. Our Quaker process may feel slow but perhaps it is meant to be that way. Weariness is only temporary."*

-- Sharon Daily, Clerk of Gunpowder Meeting, 1/6/13