

Gunpowder Friends Meeting
Spiritual State of the Meeting Report
2013

Approved 3-16-14

We gathered on a cold January morning under threat of freezing rain. We were thirteen gathered for this time of sharing. We reflected on queries that were sent for our consideration by the BYM Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee.

On another First Day, the children shared their own reflections. Quotations from these two gatherings as well as written submissions were sorted under four headings for this report. We begin with “Community” because this arose first for the group, and Friends spoke at length about it.

Community

- I find this Meeting has a great sense of community – it is a very stabilizing part of my life. I think I put this first among my communities. There is a wealth of things to become involved in, and it is where we can relate to one another on a much deeper level than elsewhere. I have come to think of this community as a place where the everyday world and the sense of eternity meet; we find what many of us are seeking, a part of that “invisible world” of eternity. Gunpowder is the right place for me to experience this and I am grateful to be among all these Friends.
- There is a spiritual depth and breadth to the life of this Meeting that has always seemed to me one of its enduring characteristics. There is a commitment to spiritual formation by a number of individuals who are long practiced in spiritual practices that sustain them and allow them to bring that depth to the Meeting. There is a broad commitment to being open to continuing revelation and a deepening call, not only through the Spiritual Formation program, but also through the questioning, listening, and seeking in such forums as the Quaker Way sessions, First Day School, and Bible Study.
- There was a sense of great loss this year with the deaths of beloved elders in our community and friends and family outside the community. We bore this sadness together, as a community. I feel the great interconnectedness of our lives. We also welcomed many newcomers to our community, friends of all ages and stages of seeking, from young couples to families with young children to those further along their lives’ journey. More Friends also became involved in Spiritual Formation, in the life of our Meeting, and in the broader Quaker world. The groundedness of our community was felt, therefore, through sadness and loss, but also through welcoming of newcomers.
- There is a true sense of community in this Meeting which is felt by newcomers instantly; it is easy to feel nurtured, cared for and affirmed among Friends here. It is easy to feel that way will open, that we might find a voice and a path to help lead.
- The generosity of this Meeting is so heartwarming and I feel very accepted. When we received the holiday photograph of the Meeting community, I put a line under the photograph that says, “This is where my strength comes from.”
- Gunpowder Meeting is a place where the Spirit is alive and well in such a way that we can leave our egos at the door and be comfortable in our thoughts, feelings, and being.
- The inward and outward spiritual journeys are inseparable. This is why we find our individual journeys to proceed more fruitfully within a web of community, even as our gathering may be silent. At Gunpowder, I perceive an exceptional level of intentionality about “knowing one another in that which is eternal.” Meeting for Worship, sharing of joys and sorrows at the rise of meeting, forums, spiritual

formation, First Day school, bible study, Exploring the Quaker Way, meeting for business, monthly silent retreat days, weddings, memorial services, standing- and ad-hoc committees, newsletter, electronic communications and other celebrations of our spiritual journeys: these cannot but enliven and enrich each of our journeys when done intergenerationally in a spirit of openness and love.

- Ministry can be heard in our Meetinghouse as the children are taught, as we gather at Spiritual Formation, and as we do our committee work.
- *A FDS lesson involved making rope from natural fibers. The question was posed: How is rope similar to Meeting? One young Friend's response:*
Every person is like a strand and when you put them together you get rope.
Other observations: Rope is strong, flexible, lasts through time; it is used to tether things and hold them together.

Meeting for Worship

- I find myself thinking about the arc of Meeting for Worship each First Day. I especially like it when I can arrive a bit early and be among the first in the meeting room and watch the procession of Friends come in and settle. You can feel a sense of an oasis or being embraced by community, and I think we settle rather quickly, and the children settle remarkably quickly. It is wonderful to see even our very youngest friends learn what MFW is. And then I think of the “Joys and Sorrows/Concerns” at the end of MFW which is a place where people feel comfortable to share in love and support. There are many First Days when I am in tears by the close of worship, which speaks to an openness and tenderness of spirit-led life in this community.
- *Another Friend added:* The arc metaphor is “U” shaped—we start at the surface and go to the depth and then return.
- As Quakers we say that in an unprogrammed Meeting we do not have ministers, but I find that there are many ministers here. To be a good minister you need to listen deeply, and there are many friends here who are able to do that.
- The messages here speak to me. I am so grateful that this Meeting opened in my life.
- In our Meetings for Worship, I am so pleased when we meet both inside and outside on the porch. This is a special feature of our community.
- *More from the FDS rope lesson:* Meeting ties all of us together. That's why everyone comes here instead of staying home and sitting in the silence there. They want to be tied together in friendship.

Work of the Meeting

- I appreciate that our Meeting is encouraging younger people to take leadership roles in a way that is a salvation to the Meeting. I think our Meeting has many younger people who are willing to take on difficult tasks, and these may be done in somewhat different ways. It is important for the older members of the community to let go and for younger people to help the meeting develop in what may be different ways.
- I think both the young and the elderly are asked to stretch in order to change when it is right to do so.

- I appreciate the presence of those in our community who pay greater attention to /are mindful of the environment. They help to root our community in our biological and ecological place and remind us to find ways to be more attentive to sustaining the natural world. This work is such a gift to us.
- *Another Friend added:* We also value those who lead us in action for social justice via organizations such as FCNL and AFSC.
- Even as we attend to the spiritual aspects of our community, the work of the community/Meetinghouse gets done: newsletter, website, benches restored, snow and ice cleared, First Day school lessons delivered, etc.

Matters for Our Attention

- We have made an effort to educate our members and attenders about opportunities in the wider Quaker world for service, social action, and spiritual growth. Although more Friends have become interested and involved, this is still a growing edge for us as a Quaker community.
- I have a concern that we have not found a way to achieve more cultural and racial diversity. Visitors are welcome, but some may observe that there isn't a place for them here because they feel more alone. How can we achieve greater diversity? I don't know how except to live the question and continue to be welcoming.
- *Another Friend added:* Our community *is* quite diverse in age. I also appreciate the ways we have made the Meetinghouse accessible with the ramp and the hearing loop. People with handicaps are welcome here.
- I know that in the fullness of life nothing is ever complete and that we are invited to go more deeply in our commitment to knowing our impact as a Meeting on the environment. Reusable plates, launderable napkins, composting, etc., are some reminders of this work.
- We should be very tender with newcomers who come to us without their life partners. We need to be especially welcoming to them.
- In terms of our members and attenders feeling valued and cared for, we have people whom we don't see that often. I am not sure what we could be doing for some who are less present. How can we know more about those who are not here each First Day? It is always good to know more about our stories.
- There may be an opportunity for us to help and support parents of young children who want to fully participate in the life of the Meeting.
- Our Meeting could benefit from learning more about resolving interpersonal conflicts as they arise.
- Our ministry to each other is always evolving; there is always more that we can do.

Conclusion

Our clerk closed our worship sharing with these words:

We have evolved our practice of preparing the Spiritual State of the Meeting report. As I sit here today, among this spiritually led, heartfelt worship sharing, I realize how much we learn when we trust the process.