

Gunpowder Friends Meeting
Spiritual State of the Meeting Report
2014

Approved 3/15/2015

Our Meeting community is grounded in the deep silence of Meeting for Worship. Meaningful and spirit-led vocal ministry arises most First Days, and we conclude worship together with the sharing of our joys, sorrows, and concerns. Through our gathered worship and the sharing of our life's journeys, we secure a foundation for our growth as a Quaker community.

Members strive for healthy, open communication within the Meeting, listening deeply to each other, growing together as we listen and are heard. We can work through difficult issues and address our challenges as long as we can be open with each other. Members continue to care for each other in a number of ways. One Friend expressed gratitude for the loving care that members provided to her family during an extended illness.

There are many ways in which we listen to, support, and nurture each other on our spiritual journeys. One member has described a "beautiful" listening in the large and small groups that are a part of the Spiritual Formation program. There are other forums for questioning, listening, and seeking such as First Day School, Bible Study, and a broad commitment to being open to continuing education.

Several Friends commented that the geographic distance of Friends in our Meeting presents a challenge for broader attendance at activities other than on First Day morning. An opportunity for our Meeting is to explore alternate venues and times for our community-building activities. In addition, as we plan activities for spiritual deepening, we need to be mindful of the stages of life of Meeting members and attenders, including absent Friends.

Our Meeting community welcomes newcomers in a genuine and natural way. New attenders have commented on how apparent it is that the Meeting cares about its members and visitors, and they hope that our welcoming process will continue to be enthusiastic and spirit-led. This year the Meeting has begun to present a book about Quakerism (*A Quaker Book of Wisdom* by Robert Lawrence Smith or *Letters to a Fellow Seeker* by Steve Chase) to new regular attenders. One such recipient commented, "It was a wonderful welcoming as a new attender to receive a gift about the spiritual life of Friends."

We are very grateful for the presence of children in our Meeting. Our First Day School continues to be active, flexing as necessary to adjust to changing family stages and schedules. Steps have been taken to develop programs/activities that maintain connections with our teens (e.g. a sleepover at the Meeting House). In addition, we initiated an annual presentation of books to our First Day School students at milestones in their school lives. Some young Friends have reported how much they have enjoyed reading and re-reading the books, and others have been delighted

to be affirmed and celebrated by the Meeting in this way. We have taken another step to support our families and children: a paid babysitter on First Days allows parents of our youngest Friends (kindergarten and younger) to attend Meeting For Worship and to participate in the work of the Meeting. The children themselves participated in the Meeting's discernment concerning the timing of their participation in Meeting for Worship, a process valuable for all generations.

We appreciate the presence of those in our Meeting who 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 attentive to sustaining the natural world. We remind ourselves of the importance of this in our use of non-disposable dinnerware, launderable napkins, composting, etc. We look forward to furthering this spirit-led environmental work within the wider Quaker community in partnership with Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

In years past, we have tried to develop a greater diversity among us, yet our numbers do not reflect this. One Friend presented her view that diversity "isn't about who sits in the [Meeting] room, but what we attend to." Indeed, we have called attention to issues of racial justice in our reading of *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander and several related educational opportunities. A Friend notes,

"Given the realities from the outer world this year, we are called to attend to the way in which the White community can be very blind to its own privilege, to our own lack of understanding of how we participate in, perpetuate, and don't understand racism... This is not only a political issue, a justice issue, or a public policy issue – this is a spiritual issue."

For some of us, this concern has led to a sense of urgency to discern what our corporate prophetic witness might be. An opportunity for the coming year is outreach to the nearby Stevenson AME church to connect with our neighbors there, and to continue with education and reflection on ways that we, as individuals and as a meeting, can be more mindful and active in this area. It is important to recognize that there are a number of Meeting members and attenders who are active in social justice work on racial and other issues and that the Meeting community provides a spiritual grounding and sustenance for these efforts.

This report was compiled by two members of Ministry and Counsel with the support and input of the full committee. The wider Meeting community had an opportunity to contribute through a worship-sharing Forum held 11th First Month, 2015. The guiding queries for this gathering were excerpted from "Recommendations for Monthly Meetings" from the report of the ad hoc Vision Implementation Committee of Baltimore Yearly Meeting.