

Gunpowder Friends Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report for 2017

Gunpowder Friends gathered on 14 First Month 2018 to discern the spiritual state of the meeting. Friends joined in a worship sharing setting focused upon queries provided by BYM's Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee. While all were welcome at this gathering, the meeting additionally held separate sessions for the meeting's Friends aged 6-17 and at the nearby Broadmead Continuing Care Retirement Community, where many Gunpowder Friends live. The Young Friends were asked the following queries: How are we, as young Friends, experiencing the ways our Quaker faith is a part of our daily activities, lives, and choices? How do we feel like the first day school allows us to grow in our faith and to understand our testimonies?

As Gunpowder Friends settled into a time of worship sharing about the spiritual state of our meeting, our hearts first turned to the role of beloved elders in our community. One Friend pointed to the “changing tapestry” of our Meeting as some of our elders, some of whom reside at Broadmead nearby, can no longer be with us on First Days. These older Friends expressed gratitude for the Broadmead Worship Group, as “a great source of spiritual nurture and maintenance.” We spoke of cultivating a ministry of accompaniment and availability as these Friends experience physical limitations and failing health. Being with one another on all stages of this journey is a blessing. One Friend affirmed “what a joy it would be if we could interact even more as a Gunpowder-Broadmead community.” Gunpowder was especially affected by the death of our member (and BYM recorded minister) Marshall Sutton, whose service and spiritual wisdom still guides us. Friends appreciated how organically the meeting organized the community to provide care for him and each other during his decline and after his passing.

Similarly, we are aware that many of the children who bring life and Light to our community are now teenagers and young adults whose lives often keep them away on First Days. We acknowledge that this is a natural evolution, but still, we miss them. Some of them are finding new ways to stay connected to the Meeting and to the wider Quaker world (through Friends schools, camps, and Young Friends conferences), and we are grateful to see that their Quaker roots are allowing them to grow in new ways. The First Day School program is also challenged by meeting the needs of the children who do attend, because of their very wide range of ages, from elementary through high school. The meeting is working in the coming year on finding ways to serve the needs of our youth in all their various stages of development. Parents expressed gratitude for the ongoing love and support for our children.

Even as change is sometimes felt as a loss, we acknowledge that change also brings us a regular flow of new attenders and members--including children--who find themselves drawn to worship with us. One newcomer expressed gratitude for the “culture of welcoming” within the Meeting. Another Friend spoke to the “kindness and support” she experienced during an

especially difficult time in her life: “Gunpowder stewards its members in a way that is truly a gift.” We need to be attentive to and intentional about how we weave new Friends into this ever widening circle of care so that we can all give and receive nurture and support. Our Spiritual Formation program is often described as a way into this circle of caring. One Friend recalled the first Spiritual Formation gathering he attended: “I had tears in my eyes, because it felt like the quality of being together and listening and sharing and holding the space was something I was yearning for without really knowing it.” One of our youngest Friends enthusiastically asserted that Meeting gives her something to look forward to on the weekend.

Many Friends experience worship as deeply gathered: “when I walk into this room every First Day, I can feel a certain quality that is here in the room, a quality that has a substance to it. I feel that we are truly getting to know one another--as George Fox encouraged--in that which is eternal.” One young Friend connected his creative life to his worship life: “I’m writing a lot of poetry right now, and sitting in Meeting helps me to write haikus. Experiencing the moment really does help me to enjoy the small things in life.” Some Meetings for Worship are entirely silent, but vocal ministry that arises is deep and grounded; some Friends hunger for more vocal ministry. In silent worship, however, one Friend noted that “spiritual strings plucked in other moments resonate among those gathered.” In the closing moments of Worship, “joys and sorrows are shared with vulnerability, to be met with compassion and with knowing of others’ journeys.” One Friend observed that the physical act of worshipping on our porch overlooking the burial ground in the summer months allows us to remain connected to our forebears, and to experience the “continuity of generations.”

Our work as a Meeting is also guided by this continuity. While doing sometimes difficult discernment about how to steward our historic meeting house and grounds, one Friend expressed gratitude that our Quaker forebears “structured a non-hierarchical community so that everyone would come together and engage fully in the sometimes difficult but necessary elbow rubbings that come with decision making.” Differences of perspective, in this structure, can be experienced in a respectful, loving, and nurturing way that allows us to “get the business of the Meeting done.” In another area of business, we are discerning how to best steward our financial resources so that we can be generous to outside organizations and ensure the vitality and stability of the Meeting community for generations to come. Even when the work is challenging, we affirm that there are “many enthusiastic and loving volunteers who do the work of this Meeting” through committee service and through Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, with 20 or more Friends in regular monthly attendance.

Being open to difference--and growing and learning through difference--is possible when we remember that “our faith rests on a bedrock that is deeper than country.” Do we always rest on this ground or do we find ourselves caught up in the divisive political whirlwind of this moment? Some Friends recalled past political turbulence and their gratitude for those with the

“courage to speak truth in times of great trouble.” We are called to the work for racial justice, learning about white and other forms of privilege and how to create cultures of inclusion and equity both within and beyond our Meeting. Having recently brought in a member who has fostered a longtime supported ministry in advocating for the needs of Native Americans, we look forward to embracing this ministry in the coming year. We are also called to right relationship with the earth and our environment as we live into the fullness of our Minute on Spirit and Nature. We endeavor to carry out this work in the spirit of our youngest Friends, who affirmed that they “enjoy service projects at Gunpowder because we are doing them together.”