

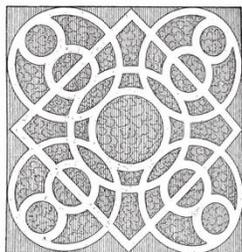
GUNPOWDER FRIENDS MEETING

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report for 2018

To reflect on our spiritual state over the past year, members and attenders of Gunpowder Friends Meeting gathered after the rise of meeting on 27th First Month 2019 for a time of worship sharing. We focused on the query prepared for the meeting by our Ministry and Counsel Committee:

How has Spirit been moving among us this year: in worship; in the Gunpowder Community; in the wider community; in our social witness; in our business and shared work; and in welcoming and learning from different perspectives?

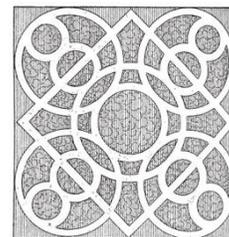
Shortly thereafter, our very young Friends met at First Day School to consider their relationship with the meeting, and in a separate worship sharing session, Gunpowder residents at Broadmead were invited to reflect on the same query.

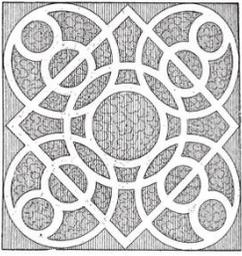


Our community expressed deep gratitude for the spiritual connection that abides among Gunpowder Friends—both from Friends past who have left with us their gifts, and through the work that we continue to do with each other. We grieved the death of several Friends this year but feel their presence in the loving space we create with one another. As one Friend put it, *“There is this space in between us that is richer and deeper and spirit filled.”* We also affirm our lived reality of knowing one another in *“that which is eternal.”*

Friends spoke to a widening sense of connection during our worship and shared work and learning on First Days and in monthly activities like our Spiritual Formation Program and Silent Retreats. Moreover, Friends find peace and wisdom in the readily gathered silence during Meeting for Worship. At the same time, we are being enriched by more frequent vocal ministry. One Friend described our quality of worship as like music—that the sound is beautiful, but also crucial are the silent rests between the notes. The spiritual stillness and connection we find in Meeting for Worship, Spiritual Formation, and other similar gatherings also extends itself to our meetings for business. In the summer, many of us read Michael Birkel’s *Silence and Witness*, and we gathered at three fall forums for discussions based on this reading to further enrich our understanding of Quaker faith and practice. Our librarians encouraged our Quaker education this year with the addition of many new books for reading and sharing. Part of our process is learning that all of us still have much to learn. We trust in the process: its non-hierarchical nature speaks to newer and long-attending Friends, as does the waiting and listening that are at the core of this process.

This spirit of listening and patience we experience among us helps us to carry the same peace into the world, even and especially when we are challenged by conflict among family or coworkers, or by the ongoing strife in our country’s politics. A Friend remarked that engaging in Quaker process on Gunpowder committees has helped her to *“let go of the idea there is only one way to do something because there is not. And that carries out with you into the world.”* Several Friends say our Quaker practice helps them be present with others, rather than rebut and defend reflexively.

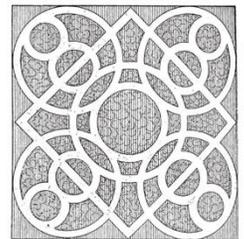




These reflections upon how our spiritual practice deepens in community and extends into the wider world through social witness led us to begin a whole-Meeting visioning process, which continues into 2019. With the assistance of an outside facilitator, we will engage in deep listening, meeting-wide retreats, and reconnection with Friends who have been part of our community over the years to distill a sense of how we are being led as a community. We address both the joys we share as well as what challenges and troubles us. Simply beginning this process has created a spaciousness and rising energy among Friends. We are eager to see what emerges through this process.

We have also carried our experience of process with other Friends communities, especially Broadmead, where many members and attenders live, and with Friends School of Baltimore, where several members work or serve on the board. At Broadmead, residents who are Gunpowder Friends have led, in their words, *“a mission to encourage administration to keep to Quaker values.”* They led an informational panel on Quakerism and published a pamphlet that answers many residents’ questions about the Religious Society of Friends. Twelve residents regularly attend the weekly worship group held at Broadmead, and two Spiritual Formation small groups meet there. Gunpowder seeks ways to engage with Broadmead more often, and a few of our (non-resident) members have been regularly attending this worship group as well. All of us delighted in caroling at Broadmead in December.

We are blessed not just by active participation by many retired Friends, but also a wider-growing diversity of ages. The past year saw more attendance by Friends between 30-60. Gunpowder held three well-attended community-building activities with true all-ages attendance: two game nights (with pizza!) and a visit to a minor league baseball game at Ripken Stadium in Aberdeen, MD. Taking the time to have fun and laugh with one another is priceless. Our small but regularly attending group of children thrives in our First Day School program, revived by many new committee members, who have in turn enlisted the community as a whole to participate in First Day School. All adult attenders have been invited to teach a class in a new “peace kids” curriculum, and every week, the children report on their activities to the body at rise of meeting. One very young Friend encapsulated how many of us feel: *“It is good that we are learning to be kind and to listen to one another and to be safe with one another.”*



Just as we strive to build and maintain a spiritual safe space of listening and waiting, so too we have worked hard to maintain our physical Meeting House and grounds. Children express delight in having safe outside space to play in; adults revel at the pastoral view, especially during our summer Meetings for Worship outside on the porch—but this takes constant attention and effort. This past year we began a multi-year restructuring of the retaining wall around the burial ground and improved our driveway and planted native plants on our bank to reduce erosion. Friends have begun rigorous study and effort to improve waste disposal and energy use; we are also exploring how best to contend with limited space in our existing burial ground, how to extend it, and how to honor the growing desire for natural burials. We cherish the space we steward, and our deepening connection to nature; we hope to ensure that these same gifts are available to future Friends.

This past year, we have also paid more attention to not just our local environment, but also our neighbors. Gunpowder Friends were delighted to join nearby Bosley United Methodist Church for a barbecue lunch in the summer. Friends are working to find ways to build additional connections with both Bosley and the nearby Stevenson African Methodist-Episcopal church. As we take joy in the light we build together among ourselves, we find renewed energy to carry it into the world, near and far.