

**Chestnut Hill Friends Meeting**  
**Worship and Ministry Committee 2020 Annual Report**  
**January 17, 2021**

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic has deeply affected the meeting community as a whole and touched many of us personally. Mindful of our primary responsibility of nurturing our community's spiritual life, the Worship & Ministry Committee helped our community transition to virtual meetings for worship with the invaluable assistance of members with technical expertise, including Craig DeLarge, Thomas Taylor, and Eileen Flanagan, among others.

Some have found online meeting for worship to be grounded and nurturing, whereas others feel it does not meet their spiritual needs. As local regulations allowed, we have been able to support a small group of in-person worshippers for early worship outside the meetinghouse. At the same time, our experience of online communal worship is in some ways richer than before, as we welcome the participation of community members who had been unable to attend in person because of distance or other challenges. Vocal ministry from these Friends has enriched our worship while we continue to yearn for deeper grounding for some messages.

This year we began projects to nurture the spiritual health of our Meeting during a time of national tragedy, personal isolation, and yearning for community (see specifics on the following pages) including:

- Organizing adult classes on George Fox, Sabbath Economics, and Vocal Ministry
- Offering Quaker Path sessions on Quaker belief, worship, and ministry
- Creating a joint committee with Care & Counsel on End-of-Life Issues
- Committing to a more active role in the membership process
- Organizing a called meeting for worship on racial injustice
- Holding a vigil for George Floyd, joining in spirit with other local Friends Meetings

Our leadings for 2021 include:

- What more can we do to nurture vocal ministers and/or elders?
- How can we more fully support the spiritual leadings of individuals in our Meeting?
- How can we support a transition back to in-person worship that is safe, spiritually grounded, and inclusive of people joining us online?

We are very grateful to all who have organized and led alternative worship opportunities including Esther Gilbert, Jon Landau, Thomas Taylor, and Sarah Whitman. As always, we invite the meeting community to share with us your hopes and concerns so that we may better understand how to best nurture the spiritual life of the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rebecca Heider, Clerk  
Ellen Deacon  
Diane Dunning

Katy Hawkins  
Dan Evans

Janaki Spickard Keeler  
Betsy Wallace

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**Details of our work in 2020:**

**Tending to the health and vitality of our meetings for worship in a virtual setting**

- We have tried new ways of conducting meetings for worship online using the technology available, ranging from experimenting with unmuting everyone during meeting (which ended up being distracting rather than calming), to posting a video of the worship room that people could choose to highlight during worship, and preserving silence at the beginning of the online meeting to bring us closer to the experience we have in the worship room. We continue to search for ways to capture the spiritual grounding and connectedness of in-person worship while taking advantage of the unique opportunities provided by the online format.
- We joined the Care & Counsel Committee in reaching out to people who weren't attending online worship to help them access Zoom.
- Although overall attendance at online meetings is slightly lower than in-person meetings (averaging in the mid-50s rather than mid-60s) and has decreased somewhat over time, we continue to have guests join us, some of whom have become regular attenders. Online meetings are more accessible to those who have disabilities and to those who are able to join us from afar.
- Having now experienced the greater inclusivity afforded by the online format, we are committed to providing online access to worship even after we return to the meetinghouse. We will need substantial support from the Meeting to make this happen.

**Supporting grounded meetings for worship**

- We found that online meetings gave rise to vocal ministry from people who had not spoken at in-person meetings. We will continue to reach out to first-time or infrequent vocal ministers with encouragement and support.
- The tensions of the presidential campaign sometimes entered the online meeting via "us versus them" messaging. We addressed this with some ministers specifically and supported modeling more positive messaging in general.
- Outdoor meetings are reported to be deeply grounded with infrequent but Spirit-led vocal ministry and much-valued personal connection.

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**Offering a variety of opportunities for worship and spiritual engagement**

- We support outdoor meetings every Sunday, weather permitting. We are thankful for the assistance of Thomas Taylor and others in organizing these meetings while adhering to COVID precautions.
- The messages at the meeting immediately following news of George Floyd's murder expressed anguish at inescapably witnessing the tragic and graphic death of another person of color at the hands of the police. At our June committee meeting held two days later, we dispensed with much of the agenda and instead entered a deep discussion of how we, as a committee and as a community, were called to answer, which led us to:
  - join with Abington Friends and other local Friends Meetings in holding a peaceful protest/vigil at our respective Meeting Houses in honor of George Floyd and others who have been killed simply for being Black, and
  - hold a called meeting on racial injustice on June 7, 2020, which was attended by about 30 CHFM members/attenders and focused on the six queries contained in Barrington Dunbar's essay, "Black Power's Challenge to Quaker Power."
- We transitioned our biweekly Bible-study group online, using the "Friendly Bible Study" method to study Corinthians I.
- Two meetings for healing were organized by Sarah Whitman and Rebecca Heider in January (in-person) and March (online). Although sparsely attended, these meetings offered the opportunity for more focused healing prayer.
- We continue to offer virtual weekly midweek meetings, led by Esther Gilbert, focusing on the new *Faith and Practice*.
- Before the pandemic, we continued to offer hymn singing before meeting for worship on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays, but we were not able to find a good way to replicate this activity online.

**Facilitating deeper understanding of Quaker beliefs and practices**

- We organized adult classes on George Fox's meditations (led by John Gallery), Sabbath Economics (led by Will O'Brien), and Vocal Ministry (led by Rebecca Heider and Dan Evans).
- The Joint Committee on End-of-Life Issues (ELI) hosted an adult class on the Mysteries of Dying Well (led by Gary Soulsman).
- We held monthly sessions that ended in February 2020 focused on considering the five "Suggested Queries for a Spiritual Self-Assessment of the Meeting" (PYM Faith and Practice, p. 214). The responses collected at these sessions formed the basis of our 2020 State of the Meeting Report.
- We offered three Quaker Path evening sessions jointly with the Outreach Committee on the topics of Quaker belief, worship, and vocal ministry. These sessions started out in-person, and the last was held online. These classes were well attended and offered a chance for new attenders and seasoned

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members to get to know each other through engaging in deep discussion about Quakerism.

- We rewrote the paragraph “What Quakers Believe” on the Meeting’s website to give the public a clearer understanding of Quakerism.

**Nurturing individuals in their ministry and spiritual growth**

- We continue to support Eileen Flanagan in her minute of religious service with an anchoring committee. Her 3-year minute of religious service ends in 2021.
- We laid down one informal support committee at the Meeting member’s request, and we continue with a formal support committee for one other Meeting member.
- We continue to sponsor and support Katy Hawkins’s Shiné Yoga program. COVID brought its challenges, but Katy found a way to hold classes online and outside on the meetinghouse property, weather permitting.
- Although there are no new W&M-sponsored Spiritual Friendship Groups this year, at least one group continues and some new ones have sprung up organically within our community.
- We hosted the Friends for LGBTQ Concerns weekend at the meeting house on Presidents’ Day weekend in February, which ended with Friends from this group joining our Sunday meeting for worship. These Friends offered rich ministry that otherwise would not have been heard. Members who attended the LGBTQ Concerns weekend said that our hosting the event made them feel seen and valued. We encourage other committees to consider such benefits when deciding whether to sponsor an outside group’s use of the meetinghouse.

**Bringing spiritual grounding to our business, decision making, and other community activities**

- We continue to appoint elders to hold the body in the Light during meetings for worship with attention to business.
- We work with other committees in considering issues of COVID safety and budget.
- We held worship at two online memorial services for Ernie Cuff and John Bieniek.
- We wrote “In Memoriam” obituaries for beloved members Phil Jones (which was published in the *Friends Journal*) and John Bieniek.

**Pursuing our own spiritual development and understanding our leadings**

- We formed a joint committee with Care & Counsel on End-of-Life Issues (ELI) that is charged with developing a process for the Meeting’s engagement with loved ones of a deceased member/attender regarding memorial and burial services (in person and online), developing resources for families/loved ones

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of the deceased, and educating the CHFM community on end-of-life issues and planning.

- We held a committee retreat at which we discussed how we incorporate spiritual practices in our ongoing daily lives. These yearly committee retreats deepen our understanding of each other on a spiritual level and help us discern our way forward in the next year.
- At every committee meeting, we worship around the query “How am I led to serve the Meeting?” and we share brief responses to the question “How fares the Spirit with thee?”