Our monthly Meeting was held on-line using Zoom, a video conferencing application. Annette Breiling, Lynn Diviak, Michele Hartley, David Kunz, Julie Kunz, Carlotta Joyner, Karen Lockett, Julie Odland, Ann Payne, Isaac Smith, and Steve White attended. Betsy Tobin presided as Clerk and Greg Tobin served as Recording Clerk.

The report was approved. The Clerk of MC will send the report to BYM. Some discussion followed.

A Friend asked if we could discuss the concern related to whether vocal ministries are spiritual or political.

One Friend replied that the topics in some vocal ministries seem to be political or social in nature and this may reflect the issues that are on the forefront of Friends’ minds due to our over-political times. In contrast, many Friends come to Meeting with the hope of having a respite from daily controversies and are not aligned with political messages. Thus, there needs to be a balance between speaking truth to power and holding ourselves in worshipful silence.

Another Friend observed that when a Friend speaks from their Center, a different Light arises compared to when a Friend speaks to a social or political injustice. This Friend reminded us that we have an element of continuing Quaker education and community building that can help Friends discern this balance more clearly.

A Friend referenced Quaker Traditions. By reading the words of Friends in our past, we can reach back and gain strength from this tradition to gain a deeper grounding on discerning when we are speaking from the center. This Friends suggested that we approach these types of educational opportunities in Second Hour sessions.

Another Friend related an experience in which Friends were asked to consider the query, “How has the Spirit dealt with me/thee since last we met.” The Friends counseled that this simple query can help us prepare ourselves prior to coming to Meeting. Consideration of this query can help us overcome the mundane as we seek enlightenment. Another Friend suggested that this type of powerful query could be posted as a small banner or needlepoint in the Meetinghouse to help Friends center before Meeting.

A Friend reminded us that MC has continuously discussed issues surrounding Vocal Ministry. A few years ago, MC prepared a statement on vocal ministry that we can use again or revise. One idea recognized earlier is the discernment process on whether a potential oral ministry is a
message for the speaker alone or for all in Meeting. The Friend encouraged MC to consider whether to include a similar statement in the printed announcements or to continue discussing the topic in a way that would be helpful to Meeting.

A Friend reflected that not all messages might speak to all in attendance. This Friend suggested that if a message does not speak to you, perhaps you can hold the speaker in the Light.

Another Friend suggested that quotes or guidances could be presented as artwork and displayed somewhere in the meetinghouse.

2020-04-03 Letter to the Editor of Frederick News Post - Annette Breiling and Ann Payne, Peace and Social Concerns Committee (PSC)
PSC drafted a letter to the editor requesting that State and local governments release as many prisoners as is safely possible to prevent their infection with SARS-CoV-2.

Dat Duthinh drafted an initial letter which Annette, Ann, and Carlotta helped edit. Various versions of the draft were circulated in the past few days using the Listserve. After some confusion over identifying the latest draft, Carlotta read the draft letter. Friends supported the letter and offered some minor edits. Annette read out the few edits.

Friends approved sending the letter to the editor of Frederick News Post. Friends also approved sending the letter to appropriate people at the State and County levels.

2020-04-04 Annual Retreat discussion (Karen Lockett, Program Committee)
Karen requested that we consider creative and different ways that we can electronically share our experiences during the time that we had originally reserved for the annual retreat.

2020-04-05 Closing
Meeting transitioned into a period of silent worship.
Our next meeting will be held at 9AM on May 12, 2020.

Appendices:
1. Spiritual State of the Meeting Report
2. Letter to the Editor of Frederick News Post

Frederick Friends Meeting 2019 Spiritual State of the Meeting Report

In the time since our meeting began to draft this document, the whole world has been turned upside down. The novel coronavirus pandemic has forced everyone to invent or discover new ways of maintaining the bonds of community amid unprecedented threats to life and livelihood, and we are no exception. We do not yet know what we will become when the pandemic is over; but one thing we can do is examine what we have done, thought about, and held in the Light over the previous year. Such self-knowledge can only help prepare us for whatever changes may come our way.

We are grateful that what has been termed a “culture of appreciation” has been foundational to how we encounter one another. Several years ago, the meeting set time aside to invite members and attenders to identify both gifts they believed they brought to the meeting and gifts they saw
in others. Participants in this activity found it quite inspirational. Similarly, at our annual retreat last spring at Catoctin Quaker Camp, we affirmed the intrinsic value of all of the tasks and initiatives which we undertake as deepening a sense of fellowship. The richer that sense of fellowship becomes, the more it brings to light our individual gifts. Despite such affirmation, the gift of vocal ministry remains the subject of disagreement. When do calls to “speak truth to power” end up distressing Friends eager for spiritual respite from the ills of the world? In one Friend’s words, the challenge is to speak “worshipfully.” The practice of worship brings us to see that the answers we seek are not rooted in human nature, but in something better than that. At the same time, the more personal a Friend’s ministry is, the more it may resonate with others’ experiences and thus be a more universal message. However we approach vocal ministry, our goal is to bring the meeting closer into harmony with the divine, whether that be by speech, song, or silence. We continue to deliberate over the ways in which “structure” has played, currently plays, and should play a role in the spiritual life of the meeting. The apparent open-endedness and simplicity of Quakerism belies the fact that meetings rely on many protocols for making decisions and handling disagreement. When these protocols are not observed, as when certain institutions or traditions are laid down, we may be weakened more than we may be aware. At times, structural commitments, whether that be from committees, meeting property, or the meeting budget, can feel burdensome. Yet structure also harnesses individual and collective energies, in turn making fellowship and service in our community more feasible. We recognize that structures change, and we should not necessarily lament when they do; only if they drive Friends apart, or prevent Friends from coming together, should we be disheartened.
A humane and smart thing to do
Letter to the Editor of Frederick News Post

The United States has more people incarcerated and more cases of corona virus disease (COVID) than any other countries in the world. In the absence of a vaccine or herd immunity, an effective way of slowing the spread of the pandemic is physical distancing between potential asymptomatic vectors. That is hard enough to do in dense cities, as seen in the exponential growth of cases in New York City, for example. In prison, it is impossible to do, given the overcrowded conditions and the sharing of facilities. Already, the first few cases of COVID have been discovered in Maryland correction institutions (FNP 4.4.2020). We have seen how fast the disease spreads on cruise ships. Prison conditions are certainly worse, and the prison population is also less healthy than average. Sick inmates will contaminate their guards, who will in turn spread the disease to their families and communities. The burden on the health care system will be even greater and make the recovery of the rest of society even harder.

We urge the State of Maryland and the County of Frederick to expeditiously start a program of early release that would include non-violent offenders, the elderly, the medically vulnerable, those too poor to post bail, and anyone detained solely for immigration violations, or within 18 months of sentence completion. Such a program would have to be done with community safety in mind. Before release, the detainees would have to meet certain conditions to minimize their risk to society, including the possibility of quarantine or test for COVID. Early releases would free up space and allow more social distance between those that remain incarcerated, for whom easy and affordable remote access to family and lawyers should be provided.

One of us knows a family whose daughter was scheduled for immediate release to a treatment facility. A mother of two small children, she is currently trapped by the closure of all services, including the one that would have enabled her transfer. Surely there are others similarly trapped who don't deserve to die. Let us not make any sentence into a death sentence. It is the humane and smart thing to do.

Frederick Friends Meeting