

PIEDMONT FRIENDS YEARLY MEETING ANNUAL STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT 2020

This report is submitted by the PFYM State of the Meeting Working Group (Deborah Warot, Marian Beane, and Sally Freeman) for our PFYM Annual Sessions with gratitude for the information and insight shared by our member Meetings and Worship Group. (Reports submitted by individual meetings/worship groups are available in advanced documents for Annual Sessions).

SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THE YEARLY MEETING for 2020

How have we experienced the working of the Spirit this year?

Friends have experienced the working of the Spirit in a wide variety of ways. We recognize that the Spirit is always there, guiding us, when we gather together to worship. We have felt Spirit led to reach out and aid others within our communities via a wide range of activities and service projects.

When the onset of Covid-19 challenged us to explore and develop creative ways of sharing and worshipping, Spirit led us to understand that our sense of community is much more than gathering in person. For Chapel Hill Friends, this has meant “We have slowed down, taking time to breathe and appreciate what is there, to calm ourselves so we can feel the spirit working within.” Raleigh Friends, however, “experienced increased energy within the Meeting, as though there had been a quieting, a lull prior to this year. Now we find more energy and excitement in the meeting.”

What challenges have we faced this past year?

The greatest universal challenge to Friends has been adapting to the widespread Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions which ultimately resulted in our need to move to virtual meetings. Meeting via Zoom has been an easy transition for some Friends, while others are not comfortable with it or lack the technical skills required. They are missed, and their meetings seek alternate ways to be in community with them. Some meetings have begun to experiment with hybrid meetings, offering an opportunity to worship at home via zoom while others worship at the meeting house, and we are all in the process of determining when, and how, to reopen our doors for Friends to worship in-person. Our Friends at Fancy Gap Meeting have not been able to utilize Zoom, as the high-speed internet it requires is not available in their area,

limiting them to connecting via phone and email. We all miss the spirit and sense of connection we enjoy while worshipping together in our meetinghouses.

Providing a supportive environment for our children has been another challenge. One meeting (Chapel Hill) has used Zoom for First Day School and describes the experience as being “tough”. Charlotte Friends FDS Clerks are continuing their ministry by sending out weekly lessons for at-home use.

Fancy Gap has also faced the challenge of maintaining their ministry as the economic consequences of Covid-19 more than doubled the needs of their food ministry. Friends and friends of the meeting contributed to allow them to continue to provide food for those in need.

New Garden Friends suffered significant damage to their meetinghouse when a windstorm knocked down an oak tree at the end of October and remains grateful to their active and knowledgeable House Committee for handling this challenge.

What leadings are we excited about, ambivalent about, or challenged by?

As last year, while our leadings are diverse, they remain centered around social justice issues: anti-racism, food insecurity, immigration, and the climate crisis.

Raleigh Meeting’s work with the Friends of Oberlin Village has allowed them to see that many policies, laws, rezoning decisions, etc. are **not** race neutral.

Because the problem of food insecurity weighed heavily on their hearts, some Eno friends increased volunteer work for food banks, continued their support of a healthy snacks program in the public schools, increased their monthly donation to the food bank, and approved a mid-year budget dispersal for this work.

The Upstate Worship Group’s passion for the plight of immigrants led them to unite in a minute on the subject as well as take action to support the family of a DACA recipient.

Eno Friends Meeting started the year excited to provide their wider community with an educational event about climate change. Speakers were lined up and a date was set, only to have their plans cancelled by the pandemic. They hope to have this event in the future.

How have we responded to the growing awareness of racial injustice?

All our meetings are under the weight of this concern and the right or best responses for effecting change. Our pathways have been varied, including New Garden Friends Meeting approving an Anti-Racist Minute which, in part, will ask committees and business meetings to use the following queries when making decisions: “Does the process we are using (or have used) to make this decision support New Garden Friends Meeting in its goal to transform into an actively anti-racist faith

community? Does the decision we are considering (or have made) support NGFM in moving toward this goal?" This guiding question led their House Committee to actively seek out and hire a Black-owned business to repair damage to their meetinghouse.

Collectively we have marched with Black Lives Matter, formed book groups to educate ourselves, sponsored racial equity training, and much more. Sadly, though, due to the pandemic many planned events were cancelled, rescheduled, or switched to a virtual format. Friends look forward to playing a more active role in the future.

What kind of support would we like to see from PFYM?

Friends view PFYM as a resource offering monthly meetings and worship groups an opportunity to share information and learn from each other. The major topics most meetings would like to discuss and exchange ideas on include:

- * Plans for a return to in-person worship or hybrid worship
- * What are other meetings doing on the topic of racial injustice? Or Climate Change?

Friends are also interested in:

- * How can we encourage more People of Color to attend our meeting?
- * Guidance on discerning and navigating the wider Quaker community

Friends would also like to see PFYM continue to facilitate programs such as the Clerking Workshop.

Our Upstate Worship Group in South Carolina would very much like support designed for small worship groups not located in North Carolina and would welcome visitors to join them for worship each First Day at 3PM via Zoom.

What would we like PFYM to know about our meeting?

Some Friends chose to send a positive message:

"The challenges of 2020 have grown our meeting in unexpected ways and deepened our commitment to our Quaker values, to each other, and to our broader community and world."
(New Garden Friends Meeting)

"Despite all the challenges of this past year we remain connected as a loving community and joyfully celebrated our 60th anniversary together." (Charlotte Friends Meeting)

Raleigh Friends Meeting chose to use this opportunity to alert Friends to an issue they have been experiencing: "Raleigh Friends Meeting's Long-Range Planning Committee grapples with issues regarding the meetinghouse space and location. We have faced the challenge of options to meet parking requirements for some years and the immediate neighborhood is changing and

further limiting the options. The meeting is working to discern what the options are if we stay in the current meetinghouse or if we should consider relocation.”

How have we fared during the pandemic?

Although many of us know someone who has suffered, or even lost their life, due to Covid-19, Fancy Gap reports that most of its meeting community has had corona virus. They are thankful that all have survived, although they have lost people that they transport and deliver care to. We ask that you hold them, and all of us, in the light.

Despite the many challenges we have faced, most Friends feel cautiously optimistic, value the sense of community and fellowship within their meetings and would feel unity with Eno Friends “hope that the loving culture we are creating sustains, challenges, and enriches us.” We all eagerly anticipate the time we can all, once again, gather together to worship and celebrate our fellowship in person.

Compilation of Meeting Participation Statistics

Meeting or Worship Group	Average Attendance Meeting for Worship	Average Attendance First Day School	Avg Attendance Before/After Worship (Forums, Adult Ed, etc.)	Members/Attenders Active in Life of the Meeting/WG
Abingdon	6-9	**	**	**
Chapel Hill	43	5	33	135
Charlotte	33	1	19	70
Eno	12	N/A	5	22
Fancy Gap	5	N/A	4	5
New Garden	130	**	**	**
Raleigh	26	N/A	12 (plus 6-8 at mid-week worship sharing)	39
Salem Creek	**	**	**	**
Upstate WG	6	N/A	6	8

Note: ** Signifies Information Not Available