

2018 SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE MEETINGS

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BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING

No gift arose in our sessions more apparently than the gift of silence. That which unfolds in silence is the very substance of what turns our hearts toward the Spirit. Corporate silence is what strengthens our attention to Spirit in Meeting for Worship. It gives respite, brings renewal, and reveals direction in divided times. We are blessed by this silence. (York)

From every quarter we hear that worship is “deep, shared and peaceful.” Across the Yearly Meeting there is a sense of the importance of deeply centered worship, the expectant waiting in silence which creates a safe place, a sense of refuge. Many report that worship gives more than a sense of peace, it rejuvenates and prepares us for facing challenges with grace. Meetings which previously questioned the quality their of worship, report that there is a “deepening” of the silence in worship and an intent to take on the “care needed to protect these green shoots.” Several Meetings noted the attention paid to maintain “good order” in Meeting for Worship. “We strengthen the Spirit in Meeting by protecting the worship environment. The Worship and Ministry Committee provides guidance on vocal ministry individually and collectively.” “Our quality of worship is like music -- that the sound [vocal ministry] is beautiful, but also crucial are the silent rests between the notes.”

Arising from the silence, grace is found so that Friends can be responsive rather than reactive to challenge. This seems to be a common theme, that while worship is a refuge, it also sources the capacity to face challenges with an open heart, “to be present, minister with a generous spirit, and keep listening with sensitivity,” to “be encouraging of the good and to trust in the Lord.” “Worship helps us respond to friends and family who differ dramatically in their political and social views,” by providing the still point to be with those things which challenge us.

Having said all that, living in a climate of values which deeply challenge our own and facing conflict and discord on a daily basis are still hard for us. Numerous Meetings reported the tendency to “hold back so as to not engender tension,” or to end conversations too quickly due to discomfort. There is a realism in recognizing that “while we strive for integrity and truth in our world of turmoil,” not everything will be settled tomorrow. And several Meetings alluded to the reality that many of our Meetings are small, and “fragile communities may be risk-averse.” Still Friends persist: “we strive not to avoid the most contentious issues to ‘keep peace’” and “while grateful for refuge, [we]

**BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING
OF THE
RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

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seek more than shelter from the storm. “A lot of what we do here is about holding. We hold in the light, in our listening, we are held by the Spirit...The ability to hold allows us to hold the tensions in life and living together. I see a capacity to hold a great deal of tension. We are all called to be holders of tension whether we like it or not!”

Another theme threading through the tapestry of the Yearly Meeting is the strong and widespread desire to address the issue of diversity. Meetings identified both their existing diversities of demographics and beliefs while simultaneously calling out their lack of diversity along cultural and racial lines. While we embrace our roots, we also recognize that much of our history is complicit in perpetuating injustice. Meetings are working at these issues in many ways: seeking to understand the difference between pluralism and diversity; reading and studying the story of African Americans and indigenous peoples; unpacking the impact of racism, white privilege, and unconscious bias; trying to learn what we don't know. Delving into these issues is often a fraught process of miss-steps and even backsliding. As to how well we welcome this discord, one Meeting stated, “Discord sometimes gets messy. If we pay attention to the Light, we establish a bridge of trust strong enough to bear the weight of discord.”

One such “bridge” grew out of engagement with Michelle Alexander's The New Jim Crow among Friends in the Annapolis area. They were instrumental some years ago in founding Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) which had another year of strong presence in the state legislative process advocating for criminal justice reform. While MAJR still has broad support among Maryland Friends, it has grown well beyond its beginnings among Quakers to become a truly state-wide and multi-cultural justice organization. Yet another effort, supported by Baltimore Friends, is “Cease Fire” which seeks to raise consciousness to the toll of violence in all its forms, but particularly gun violence, and minister in tender compassion to all affected.

Our Young Adult Friends model for all of us the “intention to discern how our Meetings at all levels can be more inclusive and welcoming to all.” And they challenge us: “If we [in BYM] want to engage with young people, we must work with them on dismantling the implicit bias in our communities.” These young adults, busy in their early working years, make tremendous commitment of time and energy to implement these values through the Strengthening Transformative Relationship in Diverse Environments (STRIDE) program. Though this work they are “building relationships in four urban communities and raising money for camp scholarships... The powerful, transformative nature of the STRIDE program both sparks anticipation for the future of Friends and encourages us to undertake the significant efforts required of us.”

There are numerous other ways Friends are working for and with those in need and in efforts to pursue justice. Individuals visit prisons, help resettle refugees, write letters, organize, march, volunteer and train in efforts to provide relief and create social change. Meetings take on issues as a group, many are working on actions related to climate/environmental concerns, such as efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of their Meeting Houses, replacing old furnaces, installing solar panels, and even providing for green burials.

Several Meetings note the rich blessing of meeting in historic Meeting Houses, celebrating a sense of immersion in a journey with Friends throughout history as they care for old buildings and burial grounds they have inherited. They speak of both the joy and the burden of this care. Some also celebrated a sense of new life, even community outreach, found through the commitment of taking on the renovation of their historic buildings. Still other Meetings witness to an appreciation of the freedom they find to serve one another and their wider communities in being free of bricks and mortar, meeting in rented space or member's homes. On a broader level, the Intervisitation Working Group, a committed community of energetic Friends, continue to work beyond the bounds of BYM to share the vision of reconnecting and strengthening bonds within the worldwide Quaker fellowship. This past year they shared their encouraging "Ministry of Presence" with 30 communities in 6 countries, and facilitated the continuing presence of Friendly visitors from other Yearly Meetings to our Annual Sessions.

Undergirding all of this is an impressive array of efforts to develop avenues for nurture and spiritual deepening at the heart of the local Meeting community. BYM's Spiritual Formation (SF) and Women's retreats continue to grow and bear rich fruit. Friendly Eights were oft mentioned either as on-going or resurging ways of building stronger, more resilient communities, an impact also seen in the function of the small groups within the SF program. As Friends in these ways come to know one another more deeply “in that which is eternal,” they expand their capacity for deep listening, the Spirit is quickened among them and unity may be found with greater clarity. There is a sense that, as the times have challenged us, we have found refuge in one another and finding refuge we have been strengthened to meet these challenges in greater love.

“We are mindful of the need to be both patient and steadfast. Trying to be patient, we find help in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., ‘the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice’” (Goose Creek)

Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee is very grateful to the many voices of Friends across our Yearly Meeting community whose prayerful discernment and faithful work is represented herein. We carefully read each of the Spiritual State of the Meeting Reports (SSoM). Minutes from Interim and Yearly Meeting and Epistles arising from Annual Session 2018 were also considered. After a small group created a first draft, the committee seasoned it at our June Interim Meeting. The quotes in the body of the report, mostly from local Meeting SSoMs, are not attributed here for ease of reading. A copy with attribution is available in the Yearly Meeting office.

ADELPHI FRIENDS MEETING

In this time of political discord and violent expressions of hatred in our country and world, Adelphi Friends—from elementary school age to adults—find our Meeting to be a refuge and a safe space. Young and older Friends are not only affected by divisive and disturbing events in school, work, and our communities, but are aware of how others are affected, too. Our Meeting is a space where we can “focus on something different”, and “reconnect with beliefs we hold most dear”—especially our conviction that we are all united by our belief that there is that of God in everyone.

We are strengthened by the quiet of our worship and helped by the spoken messages. In the refuge of our worship, we can find the quiet within ourselves that we need as we each seek spiritual understanding and guidance for our lives, and as we grow in the Spirit, so that we are not merely reacting to things but living our lives from a deeper and more centered place. Our children and teens find that our First Day School program provides a lot of support. Nevertheless, some children and teens opt out of coming to Meeting on First Day, and we care about that.

For adults, worship has been strengthened by the Adult Religious Education program and the fifth Sunday “fishbowl” discussions on our experience of Meeting for Worship. While mostly the refuge of worship seems appropriate, we are encouraged not to “get stuck” in this refuge, but to hear “the leadings of the spirit that may be uncomfortable.” We are also encouraged to speak well of others outside our Meeting with whom we do not agree. And while adults appreciate the sense of refuge that worship brings, some wish for more direct guidance for being a Quaker in the world, especially in our current environment.

We understand our Quaker roots and strengthen them in a wide variety of ways. Our children feel that they are well prepared by their First Day programs that focus on our Quaker roots. For adults, though, our Meeting seems to provide some direction but could do more. Our Quaker 101 classes given at Friends Community School provide a good introduction for newcomers, and for all of us. Our monthly Adult RE program in the last year focused on Quaker lives from the past and the present, giving us yet more grounding in our Quaker roots. Some of us participate in other Quaker organizations and find deep connections there to our Quaker roots, and many of us read magazines and other written resources outside of our Meeting. While one new attender found it helpful to read materials left in our lobby, that Friend also noted that a more intentional program from the Meeting would be welcome!

There are different understandings of Quakerism among us. Some of the difference is between longtime attenders and members, and those who have more recently become active in our Meeting. Making genuine space for the ideas of newer attenders and members, and encouraging newer Friends to speak up is suggested. Having more in-depth conversations about Quaker beliefs and practices would allow all of us to grow together as a community. Our teens point out that Quakerism asks a lot of us – we each have to find our own answers, and that takes a lot of time.

Our Meeting’s growing edge is in the better handling of our different points of view and different life perspectives. While at times we embrace those who put forth what some would consider a discordant point of view, we are learning to value taking the time to hear and consider such views, even if held by just a few Friends. At other times, some views that differ from our usual way of handling things are not so welcome, and so are not given the space to be listened to and considered. In some ways we have grown; a wider theological diversity of messages is now more comfortable than in previous years. Talking about Quakers’ role in history, however, is at times problematic. For some younger Friends, some older adults seem complacent because of their pride in Quaker actions and testimony that happened in the past.

While we talk about our different points of view, Friends express the need for us to delve more deeply into subjects we disagree on and give more space and opportunity to sharing views and leadings, while seeking to listen to one another more fully. Our children and teens think that their group does this fairly well. Among adults, however, some are concerned that we now

end discussions too quickly because of discomfort. Being faithful through this discomfort as we seek to understand one another and seek the Spirit's guidance for our Meeting and ourselves as individuals is our challenge going forward.

In terms of interests, personalities, life work, and other things, our teens describe our meeting community as a "grab bag" of all sorts of people. Demographically, we would like to be more welcoming to a greater diversity of people. Adelphi is a racially and ethnically diverse community in ways, and more diverse than we used to be – but at all age levels we still long to be more diverse. As one Friend noted, Adelphi "is trying hard to be, but that is a long process and a challenging one." While we are not all white and middle-class, numerically these groups remain in the majority. Friends of color, through spoken ministry and shared concerns, keep all of us more sensitive to issues in our community and among Quakers. We are aware of the immigrant community that surrounds our Meeting and would like to do more outreach to this community. One Friend says, "White privilege and power is an issue we would benefit from taking up in a sustained manner."

We are theologically moderately diverse. Messages from Christian, non-Christian, and non-theist backgrounds are welcome. We have some diversity in our political views, but this is not wide. Some see this diversity as important for keeping our community a safe space for some members and attenders who are transgender, gender non-binary, or otherwise more vulnerable in our wider society. The bigger concern, though, is that in our Meeting's life we do not have the practice of bringing out more of the diversity we have. In business meeting and in potluck discussions, speaking from different perspectives is sometimes not welcome. Rather than eliciting more information when a different perspective is shared, sometimes a response is a quick "that's not how we do things." Understanding how to live into the diversity that we so long for while still appropriately respecting our Quaker heritage is another area of growth for Adelphi.

As we reflect on ourselves in 2018, we do want to mention that the number of children in Frist Day School has declined, and the number of adults also seems lower. We are open to hearing why this may be. We also recognize that we do not give enough support to parents of young children, so it is hard for them to join us for business meeting and other activities after worship.

And it is worth noting that we are taking the next steps in the process of adding onto and significantly upgrading our Meeting House. Our Building Committee has been working faithfully to bring us along in this process. We are likely to be as affected by internal affairs as by external affairs in 2019!

ALEXANDRIA FRIENDS MEETING

The current political and social environment challenges our meeting in many ways. The deep silence and sharing in our worship services help to join us together in spirit and to restore us. Meeting for Worship provides a refuge of kindness, inclusiveness and hope. Those values in turn challenge us to respond to our broader communities outside the meeting. There are no easy answers, but the journey informs our spiritual growth and our daily lives.

The Adult Religious Education committee organized presentations on topics including Quaker spirituality and history, explorations of the Bible and other inspired writings, the relationship of science and spirituality, and matters of social concern. We hosted presentations from local organizations, which help to keep us involved in our community. We are blessed to have in our Meeting those who have reflected extensively on Quaker history, teachings, and process. We are also blessed by guest presentations from the larger Quaker and faith community such as BYM, FCNL, the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and the Center on Conscience and War. We have been cautious in considering the potential for divisiveness in the topics we present. There is sensitivity to the concern of opening to differing points of view and the tension they can produce. We hold this concern in the Light and seek Guidance.

The Children's Religious Education Committee has experienced a year of ups and downs. We have a strong group of volunteers who provide childcare and offer classes for our children. Once a month the children prepare a meal for 25 homeless men and women who participate in Rising Hope's programs. The children bring infectious enthusiasm to the business of chopping vegetables for soup and making and wrapping peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. In December they collected coats, boots and blankets and delivered them to Rising Hope, each with a message of hope written by one of our children. The major problem facing our committee is that attendance is so variable. We are looking for ways to build more connections among the children outside of meeting. We will continue to welcome all children warmly, and offer them a variety of opportunities for exploration, learning, reflection, and service.

Our Meeting feels a part of our spiritual life resides in the shared heritage of Friends worshiping together in our meetinghouse for over 150 years. While we labor to maintain an aging property, its gift to our members and attenders are the gentle creaks of the wooden benches and the shared space of peace and community. The Hospitality Committee provides a common meal each week, which facilitates the connection and conversation by which many Friends start to know other Friends on a personal level. The Heritage and Community Relations and Property Committees work to preserve that home and its history, including providing input on a new sign describing the building's history installed by Fairfax County. This work and our community engagement activities are vital components of AMM's spiritual life. The historian adds perspective to discussion of property and building maintenance, providing cultural context for decisions. She seeks to contribute to the spiritual life of the Meeting by exploring and sharing AMM's experience, with the goal of reclaiming our history from mainstream interpretations that miss the spiritual basis of Quaker practice. Activities include participating in public events on the history of antislavery Quakers and African American communities and through research for revisions to Woodlawn historic district's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places to remedy the exclusion of African American sites and history.

The Library Committee is responsible for the upkeep of books and other material available in the AMM meetinghouse, giving priority to Quaker classics and other spiritual books that are not available in the public library system. We also maintain a Little Free Library in the front of the grounds as a community service. Overflow books and donations provide a steady stock of books available there.

Our monthly Quaker Speak discussions continued successfully in 2018. The group watches one short Quaker Speak program and then shares ideas stimulated by what they saw. Notably, Friends who participated found these discussions an open, non-judgmental framework to talk about their differences in background, political inclinations, personal faith, and views about our Meeting's practices. In addition, our Spiritual Friendship Program is made up of three groups that meet regularly to share their spiritual interests and journeys through various readings and methods as they grow in spirit together. We continue to encourage those new to AMM and Friends to join these programs.

In 2018, the Peace and Social Concerns Committee continued to meet its stewardship role by tending to the Meeting's charitable donations to several local social service organizations, as well as AFSC and FCNL. In May, the Committee provided a Simple Meal in support of Right Sharing of World Resources, which supports microloan projects in India and Africa. This year the Meeting again achieved its goal of contributing more than a ton of food to United Community Ministries, an Alexandria interfaith organization that distributes the food to persons and families in need. About 20 volunteers from the Meeting again participated in the Ventures in Community Hypothermia Outreach Program. In cooperation with many other local religious communities and organizations, the Meeting continued to support the Student Peace Awards of Fairfax County. AMM members also participated in a joint effort to provide a Quaker presence at Capital Pride events and advocated for peace as part of an FCNL advocacy team. In September, we held our annual homecoming event that brings together Friends far and near and raises money for local community activities and support for the homeless.

During 2018, AMM's Trustees continued to provide spirit-led focus on the Meeting's finances and on our historic Meeting House property. This year, we put special emphasis on ensuring adequate insurance coverage for full-replacement value of our Meeting House and Carriage Shed, and on the Meeting's policies about our historic burial ground, which continues to provide a quiet place of final rest for our members, attenders, and historic families. We continued to use some of the Meeting's endowment funds to support our scholarship program and financial gifts to a long list of organizations that amplify Quaker values. At the direction of the Meeting-at-large, we provided financial support to the William Penn House to support its vital contributions to Friends' work across the United States and around the world.

We formed the Who We Are Committee as part of our effort to address BYM's request for demographic statistics about those in the Meeting. Meeting for Business approved the group's resolve to "prepare and conduct a survey of the Meeting's diversity designed by our committee. This survey is to be framed as an opportunity to know who we are as a Meeting in terms of our diversity." Ultimately, the committee decided to solicit personal stories from members, to be shared as a means to know and celebrate our community. We shared some stories at an Adult Religious Education session, which stimulated positive interest in this project, so WWA will continue. We see this effort as an initial step in the complicated, sometimes awkward, effort to reach out to, welcome, and include other communities of color, culture, and ethnicity in our services and activities.

The Ministry and Nurture committee has a special concern for the spiritual life of the community as well as fostering mutual care and support. Our meetings for worship continue in right order and under the Presence of the Spirit. Sadly, we have lost a beloved Friend to death. She lived a long life as a Quaker, since her birth in 1914. We have been blessed by new attenders and members.

We are aware of areas in which we might improve the life of the meeting. Through our committees and individual leadings, our meeting attempts to weave our varied talents and callings into a fabric that supports us all. We find a deep peace in our shared worship and time together.

ANNAPOLIS FRIENDS MEETING

No report received.

AUGUSTA WORSHIP GROUP

Augusta Friends Worship Group is located in the Central Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is a small group of seekers, mostly older, who come together from a wide geographical distance as a chosen family to experience the corporate stillness of meeting. Our diversity lies in our previous spiritual experiences, since we hold a shared universalist perspective in our belief systems. In our seeking, we find that the loving nature and the lightness of the manner in which we meet changes over time, nurturing our personal spirituality and providing support for our journey. We feel this is a place of deep respect and caring—a place we can turn to when we face personal challenges and know that we will be supported. We believe that the experience of being with other seekers in the stillness is the basis for our continuing as a group. We are small and not typical of the Friends' experience and are not apologetic for who we are. We do what we can to carry on the Friends' traditions of attention to the Spirit and openness to the possibilities of service to others. We notice the “little things” that work together to create a spirit of caring among us that is reflected in our outreach to the community.

Our silent expectant waiting seems deep, shared and peaceful. By meeting in homes, we are freed of the responsibilities of a meetinghouse and can focus on the power of the silence and attention to individual needs. While spoken ministry is rare, we have extended times of sharing at the rise of meeting when Friends exchange thoughts and perspectives and share concerns. The consistent quality of the silence and the lively openness of the sharing in our discussions nurtures our spirituality both individually and corporately. That community spirit is an anchor for us in these turbulent times. We find ourselves recharged and able to develop a center of calm that sustains us in our everyday life.

This past year we experienced a voice among us that was more rooted in traditional Christian terms. We listened and understood the origins, but since it was a solo voice it led to the attender leaving the group. We recognize this possible barrier and hope that our openness is at the core of what we experience and project to others. We recognize that at times we may hold back so as not to engender tension. Generally, we share at deep levels with an honesty that is supported by our affinity with and love of one another.

This group just works for us.

BALTIMORE MONTHLY MEETING, STONY RUN

We continue to seek the divine in each other as we worship and share fellowship within the Stony Run community. Frequently we experience worship having depth and feeling, summoning many messages which weave together and are experienced as spirit-led. We hope to deepen this experience by listening inside and outside ourselves. We often hear messages that are in reaction to the difficult social environment in the US today. Some Friends feel that social action and political messages are more common than spiritual messages. If anything, the challenging social/political environment has moved people to respond with messages of love and hope and inspired the Meeting to turn faith into action. There is a tendency among messages to express how community is basic to everything and that we hold each other up through all difficulties.

Our early Meeting on average is attended by 10 people and is mostly silent, welcoming those who prefer this quietude and the opportunity to get to know each other better. The late Meeting is well attended by an average of 70 people, followed by simple lunch providing nourishment for our community and discussions that feed our souls; an ad-hoc group under Property Committee has been developing plans to renovate the kitchen to support this fellowship. We also have a weekly women's worship group and a monthly meeting for healing. We continue to support the programmed worship with Kenyan Quakers at our Meeting House and their presence has enriched our Meeting in many ways, including exposure to the global diversity of Quakerism.

There continues to be a large group of Stony Run members and attenders who participate in the BYM Spiritual Formation program and the small group sharing and community building can be felt throughout the Meeting. The Religious Education committee (RE) created a group that holds ongoing conversations about spirit-led parenting and is using FGC's Faith and Play resource in first day school. The Ministry & Counsel committee (M&C) led a discussion series on the experience of Meeting for Worship (preparing, centering, speaking, etc.) and has been focused on deepening meeting for worship.

Our community is thriving and taking steps to grow and find new ways to serve the individuals among and beyond us. We began our transition to a new clerk and recording clerk in June. Several of our members attended a FGC Facebook training to help with internet outreach. We are also an aging meeting seeking ways to take care of each other. The Community, Care and Clearness (CCC) committee conducted a survey to explore how the meeting can serve the elder population since it has been difficult to find ways to spend the Elder Care Fund. One result was a 70+ club which began some activities. Honoring those who have passed on, we have been making an effort to catch up on Memorial Minutes. A continuing concern is for more diversity in age in the meeting community, as we did not have an active Young Friends (senior high) group. We encourage youth in our community to attend BYM summer camps and Friends School of Baltimore through advertising and scholarships.

The Ad Hoc Vision, Functions and Structure Committee continues its work with new leadership, focusing now on Functions. We approved a vision statement: *To be a thriving Quaker worship community living our values by embracing pluralism, nurturing individual spiritual journeys, and honoring the Light in all peoples.* We acknowledge a difference between pluralism and diversity, and to meet our vision of embracing pluralism, we need a common understanding of what "energetic engagement with diversity" looks like in our community. We also want to be a more diverse worshipping community, recognizing that Quakerism was born in England and is a white, Anglo tradition. While we have been seeing a more diverse group of attenders recently in age, gender identification, and skin color, we seek a greater blend in the future and are working on ways to actively support that process. The Working Group on Racism (WGR) held forums to discuss race and a Friend spoke with Ministry & Counsel Committee about Change Groups forming in other meetings which address these desires to change the face of our Meetings regarding ethnicity and age.

Our relationships with other Quaker institutions are an important part of our heritage. We hosted the Chesapeake Quarterly meeting, a talk with the Friends Journal executive director and a potluck and discussion to support BYM STRIDE initiative. The Meeting examined the BYM apportionment process and the topic has led to a deeper conversation about our connection with the Yearly Meeting. Our giving levels were less than budgeted and lower than in previous years and this too has spurred creative conversations.

Expanded outreach is a significant activity at Stony Run and member involvement and leadership continues to grow locally, state wide and internationally, modeling our values for social justice and peace. Meeting advocacy and fund-raising efforts supporting community outreach for non-violence, immigrants, food poverty, underserved youth, criminal justice reform and Friends abroad have been very successful, and a very active ad hoc group called Cooperative Outreach continues to explore new ideas. Among other causes, we supported Friends internationally in Belize and Palestine, and the Immigration Working Group continued to support refugee families.

Stony Run continues as a gathered community supporting the seekers in our midst through worship, discussion, advocacy, education and outreach. Our tethered spirit is leading us to new ways of not only supporting each other, but also in discovering that of God in those beyond our knowing.

BETHESDA FRIENDS MEETING

No report received.

BLACKSBURG FRIENDS MEETING

1. With fierce winds of political discord and violent expressions of hate swirling in the world around us, what does your community do to strengthen our attention to the Spirit in Meeting for Worship?

Within our Meeting we do have a range of political perspectives, although a liberal political perspective probably predominates. Political issues are generally absent from Meeting for Worship. Our Meeting's messages are largely about loving our neighbors and learning about those who are different from us. Regarding political discord in the wider world, members of our Meeting have been reaching out to other groups in our geographic

community (churches and community organizations that seek peace and justice in the world, such as Re-entry, which helps people emerging from prison, and the NAACP). As a Meeting we participated in a community-wide event called “Love Thy Neighbor,” to show support for social groups (Jewish, Muslim, African-American) that suffered shootings in 2018. This particular event involved about 125 individuals representing local organizations, as well as the town mayor and police chief.

2. What do you do to strengthen the Quaker “roots” of your community?

We don’t have deep Quaker roots in our community. But we are strengthening our roots by leasing to The Mayapple School and working with other community groups to foster love and awareness in our community. The Blacksburg Friends Meeting has existed only since the early 1970s. This group started as the Roanoke-Blacksburg Friends, which was largely based in Roanoke until Blacksburg Friends started meeting in the early 1980s in the basement of the Presbyterian campus ministry (“Cooper House”) in Blacksburg. Blacksburg Friends continued to meet in that basement with flux in attendance until 2009, when we built our own Meeting House.

The Christiansburg Institute (CI), in the neighboring town of Christiansburg, was founded after the Civil War with the assistance of Quakers to educate freed slaves. Until the 1960s it provided the best high school education for Black students over a very large area. We sponsored a presentation by Daniel Thorp of the material in his book, *Facing Freedom: An African American Community in Virginia from Reconstruction to Jim Crow*.

3. There seem to be dueling forces among Friends. We recognize we can be a shining light and healing presence in troubled times, while on the other hand, we value our individual Meeting Community so much we can be unwelcoming to change or discordant voices. What is your meeting’s experience of this? Do you sense a tendency to avoid tension by not discussing differing points of view?

We would agree that we tend to avoid provoking tension. We generally do not experience discordant voices in the Meeting. We tend not to discuss differing points of view. That said, we have experienced differences with regard to the political situation. We do need to be careful not to make assumptions about this.

In some of our committees we have had discussions about differing points of view on issues (e.g., outcomes of the Gas Pipeline that is crossing our community/county/state).

4. Is your Meeting a diverse community: racially, philosophically/politically, theologically? How is that expressed? In what ways?

Racially and philosophically/politically, our Meeting is not particularly diverse. We are more diverse in terms of theology than political perspective. However, we have not conducted formal occasions to learn about the diverse perspectives among our members and attendees. We have in the past, and will propose to expand, a program for Adult Education that would, in a given session, invite three or four members or attendees to talk with us about how they came to Quakerism. This would allow others to learn more about the theological points of view of other members/attendees.

We have become more diverse in recent years by age group. That is, we have younger adults attending Meeting since we moved into the new Meeting House in 2009, but especially in the last 3-4 years.

When we built our Meeting House in 2009, we had it blessed by a Buddhist monk. He also comes and visits us on occasion.

In First Day School we teach diversity and respect for diverse types of people and groups. We have peace poles, expressing wishes for peace in different languages, in the lower floor room (which is being used by the Mayapple School—a nature-based preschool—as of January 2019).

We have members who are birthright Quakers, of course, but others who come from diverse religious traditions, including Judaism and Islam. Some of us are non-theists.

BUCKHANNON PREPARATIVE MEETING

No report received.

CARLISLE QUAKER MEETING

No report received.

CHARLOTTESVILLE FRIENDS MEETING

BYM asks that we prepare an annual report on the Spiritual State of our Meeting. We gathered during the Connections hour, between Early and Late Meetings, to take the temperature and pulse of Charlottesville Friends Meeting (CFM) as of February 17, 2019. After silence, we used three of the four queries offered by BYM as take-off points for discussion.

- *With fierce winds of political discord and violent expressions of hate swirling in the world around us, what does your community do to strengthen our attention to the Spirit in Meeting for Worship?*

Simply, “we exist,” was a theme that ran throughout responses to this query. We come together for spiritual community and renewal; constancy of attendance is grounding amid the storms of daily life; the very fact of our Meeting’s continued historical existence testifies to the values to which we aspire; we hold the larger community in the Light, which places our Meeting in the light as well; we gather to refresh and find peace; “be before do.”

In a world of sound and fury Meeting provides a locus and a moment for silence and peace. Attention is drawn away from the sound and fury and oriented instead towards transcendence. Intervisitation with other communities of worship heightens our openness to, and readiness for, the presence of the Holy Spirit. By providing meeting space to organizations outside of our Meeting we expand the reach of these moments of silence and peace; by providing material support we welcome those outside of the Meeting into sanctuary space; by our visible presence in the community at large we provide witness to the daily struggles of many. A sense was shared that life itself is a form of worship and that our experience in Meeting each week provides a platform and a source of strength and understanding for our individual worship and outreach.

Vocal ministry at CFM tends to take place more often in Later than in Early Meeting. Gratitude was expressed for two aspects. Political discourse, focused on those swirling winds of anger sweeping through our communities, is rarely the topic of vocal ministry. Rather the inward experience of worship and Light is shared, often in the context of inward sound and fury. Also, the children of the Meeting are present during Later Worship, and although vocal ministry often deals with the concerns of adults it is not “dumbed down” for their benefit. They have the opportunity to absorb osmotically, as it were, the adult values of the Meeting.

- *What do you do to strengthen the Quaker “roots” of your community?*

Nourishing the “roots” of our Quaker community was viewed by several Friends as far less interesting than appreciating ways in which we are now, in the moment, ourselves nourished by those very roots. For example, in the 1960s CFM was active in local civil rights organizing, and we are experiencing a re-awakening of social concern and activism. Our annual retreat featured a timeline and history of CFM and those people whose efforts built what we benefit from and endeavor to safeguard. We find in our interactions with the children of the Meeting that we are conveying long-standing Quaker concerns to them: how to listen for the voice of God? How to discern what there is of God in others? How to reflect in daily practice Quaker testimony? These ideas and practices are rooted in Quaker history.

At the same time, some frustration exists over the degree of educational opportunities available to learn about our Quaker roots. We have been able to offer “Quakerism 101” once a year, which is useful for oldcomers as well as newcomers to Meeting, and some Connections programs reference Quaker roots and historical figures. CFM includes members deeply knowledgeable about these topics. We organize Friendly Circles each fall for those who want to dig deeper into concepts or practice. The very absence of ritual and dogma in Quaker practice presents a challenge in the exploration of our roots. We might carry books of Friends’ quotations, or seek out Bible study to deepen our understanding, but the emphasis in our discussion was on practice: weekly practice of Meeting for Worship, daily practice of Quaker values. At our roots, we are grounded in silence and listening.

- *There seem to be dueling forces among Friends. We recognize we can be a shining light and healing presence in troubled times, while on the other hand, we value our individual Meeting Community so much we can be unwelcoming to change or discordant voices. What is your meeting’s experience of this? Do you sense a tendency to avoid tension by not discussing differing points of view?*

Our Connections programs provide fertile ground for the expression of opinions, questions and beliefs. Differences are more likely to come to light, and questions from newcomers more likely to be asked, during Connections. We learn about the spiritual travels of others, which may include joyful and intensely personal experiences very different from

our own. Messages revealed in Meeting for Worship, especially Later Meeting, reflect a broad spectrum of belief and experience. They can provoke thought; growth is to be welcomed.

Are we as successful in the event as we hope to be? There is always a concern about whether we adequately welcome newcomers, and do we really practice respect for opposing viewpoints as well as we could? Discussion of the dangers of assuming that all in the Meeting are “on the same page” revealed some specific and painful memories of times the Meeting was unable to embrace difference. We have lost members in the past by making assumptions about our beliefs on controversial topics like gun control, LGBTQ rights, abortion rights or political platforms. In the end we have had to learn to agree to disagree.

- *Final Query from the Clerk of Ministry & Worship: Are there general reflections we'd like to share with BYM and those who will read our report on the BYM website?*

We did a better job of listening this year; you don't know when you start where you'll end up; opportunities for service may materialize in surprising ways and responses of others may be unexpectedly gratifying; we've responded to the current political turmoil with consequential actions pragmatically and lovingly executed.

We ended the Meeting in silence.

DEER CREEK MEETING

The community of Friends at Deer Creek Meeting is a community of worshipers with a strong commitment to Quaker values, who revere silent and spoken worship and who experience meaningful fellowship with one another. Although the Meeting has gained several new families who seem involved and committed, absences continue to be a problem both among frequent attenders and those who have lapsed altogether. Nevertheless, we have a vibrant First Day School with approximately 12 children of various ages who are engaged and attend regularly. The Religious Education Committee has designed an exceptional curriculum with relevant, age appropriate lessons, focused on the Bible, Quaker beliefs and practices, and Quaker values.

Ministry and Oversight has made a sustained effort to acquaint newer attenders with Quaker beliefs and practices using lessons and meaningful discussions about silent worship, vocal ministry and the guidance of the Testimonies. We attempt to gently lead those attenders toward membership as they serve on committees and participate in special events at the Meeting House.

The Meeting is paying special attention to the art of centering down using traditional strategies as well as personal revelations. Friends frequently share in vocal ministry and we are educating ourselves in recognizing valid expressions of faith. We have been fortunate to experience gathered meetings from time to time.

Meetings with a Regard for Business, continue to be congenial and an effective means to air our concerns. Meetings follow an agenda on a range of topics, including financial concerns, the work of committees, and outreach. The Meeting has held several successful fund raisers, including the annual Blueberry Festival, which serves as both a fundraiser and community outreach. We are proud to have made charitable contributions, locally and internationally, amounting to one third of our income.

As a small Meeting, we continue to struggle with retaining active committees and leadership. In particular, Peace and Social Justice, and Unity with Nature have not had success retaining actively engaged members. In an effort to educate our members and attenders about the various committees, M&O has developed a plan that explains the functions and goals of each committee.

Ministry and Oversight will also make a more robust response to those whose attendance has lapsed with a tactfully worded letter to members who are not currently attending or contributing.

A program, Nature Journaling, which integrates journal entries with drawing and contemplation, is a series of lessons that has proven enormously popular and inspiring. An article being submitted to The Interchange will describe the program and the inspirational effect it has had on those who attend.

There is a spirit of dedication to and love for Deer Creek Meeting that is palpable and genuine and alive with The Spirit.

DUNNINGS CREEK FRIENDS MEETING

As we sat and thought about how our little Meeting has fared over the past year, we heard from a new couple who has moved from a much larger Meeting close to Philadelphia and who are now attending Dunnings Creek. The sentiment was, “Dunnings Creek is so tiny that we must be ‘hardcore’. It speaks loudly of our commitment.”

Living in a very rural, very conservative county, the opportunity for racial diversity in our Meeting is not very probable. Our African American friends here in our county are very committed to their own church in town. We do get together from time to time, but these times are rare.

Politically we have some diversity in our Meeting. Some friends ask to leave our politics at the door. Others ask if this is a way of avoiding tension by not discussing differing points of view? Does this keep us from growing spiritually and as a community? One Friend asked, “Can we accept the idea that ‘It’s all God – There are no separations?’” We must look for the gentleness of Way Open. Can we learn to tell the difference of when it is the time to discuss sensitive issues? Another Friend asked, “If we are doing our personal and Meeting spiritual work, do we see that it’s all God? Can we leave the rancor of today’s issues behind?” Another Friends said, “This is ‘essential’. We must get rid ourselves of what is keeping us from growing spiritually.”

We discussed the concept of being Community Weavers: bringing together and building community – weaving the fabric of our society. We found that we have done this by working on social issues including working with the Bedford County Indivisible Upstanders workshops for the public, tenderly taking care of the Peace Tree by the courthouse in our county seat, offering our meetinghouse for the weekly AA meetings (which by the way, often have more attenders than we do on Sunday mornings. Our Meeting House offers comfort and peace.)

Having the Fishertown Quaker Museum has helped with education and history. We were delighted when folks from the community came to tell us of their experiences as children with the Meeting House and the tiny town of Fishertown. We plan to ask folks to come and tell their stories and have them recorded sometime this summer.

As always, our Christmas Eve Meeting gives many folks a place to come for Christmas Eve – a place of quiet reflection and fellowship – not to mention lovely gifts of music and poetry. It is a regular event for some who only come to our little Meeting on that one night, but is most important for them.

We were able to bring the community together when John Lozier and his two young Colombian harpist friends came to totally mesmerize us and many friends from the outside community with their lovely and enchanting presence on a very, very hot summer evening.

One friend took it upon herself to take on the task of creating a pamphlet for our Meeting and then getting it printed and out into the public via the county visitors bureau. This was a project that lingered for a long, long time.

Friends attended an ecumenical “Tree of Life” memorial service in a nearby city.

We are fortunate to have a dedicated friend who gives much consideration to our First Day discussions so that we have a focus and continuity from week to week. We have learned about our Quaker leaders and activists of the past, studied books on “Uprooting Racism”, and “Non-Violent Communications”.

We are growing and realizing our diversity limits, new Friends’ insights and our unconscious prejudices.

May we seek the gentleness of Way Open and know where our path leads us. May we have the wisdom and courage to follow that path.

EASTLAND PREPARATIVE MEETING

We continue to meet in numbers small, to seek the Spirit that connects us all.

Our first day school begins gathering at 10am and we settle into discussions about messages from the Bible until our

11am Meeting for Worship. We gather with our friends from Penn Hill monthly and join with our friends from Oxford quarterly. We are enriched by the camaraderie and spirit of other friends.

This year we have been saddened by the absences of our children and miss their presence. It was good to see them again at our Thanksgiving celebration. We remain hopeful that our First Day School for children will resume. Friends at Eastland continued to contribute to help resolve outstanding debts of the George Fox Friends School and also helped provide laptops for Belize Friends School. Our Quaker Sewing Ladies group continued to gather and produce lap quilts for nursing home residents. We began making plans for needed repairs to our physical space that will make it more welcoming and accessible.

Our Yearly Meeting has asked us to consider diversity and division in the world around us and amongst ourselves, and to reflect on what we do to promote the Spirit in our meetings and strengthen our Quaker roots.

Many of us find that the discussions of biblical messages and the teachings of Jesus in first day school strengthen us and help promote the work of the Spirit within ourselves. In reviewing these events from long ago we are reminded that though time and circumstances may be very different, human nature and our desire to connect with something greater than ourselves remains the same.

We are a diverse community of people with different backgrounds and education. We try to create an environment that is welcoming to everyone. We recognize that diversity can sometimes become divisive and this year we have labored with our friends from Penn Hill to reduce conflict and promote tolerance and understanding. We have been reminded to let go and let God, to be encouraging of the good and to trust in the Lord.

FAUQUIER FRIENDS WORSHIP GROUP

The experience of Fauquier Friends Worship Group is trust, warmth and care, and these are among the greatest gifts in this group. We reach out to others about our group and keep in contact with attenders. Meeting has been a source of support in that what is heard can be taken at face value.

We embrace the power of our small size in which all of our attenders participate. Currently, we all share in vocal ministry in Meeting for Worship and discussions before and after worship. Though still holding the main Meeting for Worship only once a month in the Bealeton Depot, we also meet in a member's home in Warrenton on the second First Day of each month. We carry the deep spirituality of our group into our communities between these meetings. Our small Quaker meeting is like a newborn infant, dependent on each of us to help it survive. There is this special opportunity, a stronger feeling in a small group that if you don't bring it, it might not be there. The "it" that is brought might be thought of as service, love, spirit, sharing, nurturance or prayer. Or it might just be open, receptive attention. We've discerned that what makes this group powerful is how we each share our own light, often in a way that doesn't require words and doesn't require more than a small number of attenders.

The quote, "Because the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life", indicates how essential Spirit is to a Quaker Meeting. We feel it in this group although the "how to" or method is not specifically taught. Perhaps it spreads by osmosis from Friends who already know how to connect with and share the Spirit in silent worship. This process requires both a receiver and those able to share their discovery of how to feel and hear the spirit. Routine everyday tasks can also be part of a spiritual practice if one is open to the larger "still small voice". This energy is contagious. What's important is what we gather from Meeting for Worship that illuminates us.

Our way of gathering in and of relating outward to the world, like Tai Chi, reminds us that there is no need to fear, tense up, resist or grab hold. We recognize that it may be of no use to discuss political matters with some. A better path perhaps is to just stay open, be present, minister with a generous spirit, and keep listening with sensitivity. The joy and love we seek to create in the world are already embedded in this kind of listening practice.

As a community we aspire to attract young people and to have a regular First Day School program. At present, we are seeking how to best use our resources rather than focusing on growth. We believe growth will come naturally from creating a base where individuals come to discover, to feel nurtured and healed. The answers, resilience, and creativity we seek is in our spirituality. People need to find where they are in order to find where they need to go. What attracts others to us is more likely to be the way we live our lives rather than what we ask others to value or believe.

Continued attention to the Spirit and being present before, during and beyond the Worship time is a way for each of us to turn our lives and the Fauquier Friends Worship Group into a continuing prayer of the spirit.

FLOYD FRIENDS MEETING

The queries offered by Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Pastoral Care Committee did not speak strongly to Floyd Friends Meeting. Perhaps they would have about 2017, as we were coming to terms with tremendous changes in the political climate and the presidency. Our approach at that time was to avoid being drawn into opposition for its own sake, but to consider what we could do individually to make the world in which we live a better place. While Floyd Friends has always had some of its members active with one or more issues, the number doing so has increased in the past two years.

It is significant to note that most of the activism and service work has been done individually rather than as a Meeting. This comes from two sources: our small size, which makes it difficult for us to undertake projects of any significant scale, and the fact that we are individualistic rather than group-oriented as a Meeting. We have had to learn—and periodically relearn—that we need to be careful about committing to too much as a Meeting, as this generally ends in frustration and disappointment with each other. Our most recent revisiting of this challenge led us to distinguish between endorsing an activity one of our members/attenders is pursuing, and sponsoring an activity, which involves a commitment to participate actively.

Even with its small size, our Meeting has a range of involvement by its members and attenders. These run from consistently being at Meeting for Worship, Meeting for Business, work days, adult education programs, and teaching in First Day School; to participating in some but not all activities; to rarely or never appearing in person but reading emails to stay informed while contributing financially. We appreciate what each person brings and welcome them to take what they need from being part of Floyd Friends Meeting.

One of our recent priorities, and especially in the past year, has been to get to know each other better, both at a personal and a spiritual level. Friendly Eights, monthly worship-sharing, and adult education programs all contribute to this. Some members make a practice of meeting regularly with others for the greater depth of sharing which is possible with one-on-one encounters.

On the whole, our spiritual condition appears to be solid, although there is a tension between recognizing that we need to allow individuals to participate to the extent that they are led, and the sense that we could have a stronger spiritual community if more people were more deeply committed. This disappointment may be what is behind the relatively new development of intentional one-on-one relationships.

We believe that this calls for a continuing slow-paced gentle discussion of our hopes, feelings, joys, and disappointments.

FREDERICK FRIENDS MEETING

In the path of the Spirit, way opens.

Way opens for Frederick Friends when we center in the Spirit, and out of that Spirit find our direction.

Way opens for children to feel they have found an extended family together in Meeting. Way opens for them to conduct science experiments in the guidance of loving First Day School teachers who support the harmony of science and religion and artfully weave bible parables about yeast, treasure, and seeds into Sunday lessons. Way opens for children associated with FFM to receive scholarships to attend life-transforming BYM camps.

Way opens for us to see that we are less diverse (other than theologically) than we would like to be. Many newcomers attest that we are welcoming. Some have sensed that we are not comfortable with change. Way opens for us to acknowledge our differences, yet travel along the same path. Our sense of community can be fragile, and we are reluctant to jeopardize it. As with many Quaker groups, we are conflict-averse. We have personal resources and communication tools to manage disagreements, but do not always handle them well. Although transitions can be difficult, we affirm the joy we often find in each others' presence. Way opens for us to sit with discomfort, recognize the ways we have fallen short of the integrity we strive for, and challenge ourselves to work together to find a way forward.

Way opens for our fellow pilgrims' leadings to work toward mutual understanding—beyond “both sides” thinking. Highlights of these involvements include membership in the Frederick Area Ministerial Association (FAMA), involvement with Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), outreach through Martin Luther King, Jr. “Beloved Community” dinner, July 4th picnic, work with Multifaith Climate Stewards, Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, and soup kitchen. We feel a continuing need to avoid assumptions that we are unified in political thought. Our attention to the Spirit is strengthened largely through social expectations that we will not be consumed by the discord and expressions of hate that surround us.

Way opens for FFM to offer opportunities for us to grow as a spiritual community. Community-building events, time for joy and fellowship, prophetic witness, book study group, third Sunday singing, worship sharing during Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, and care of the Meetinghouse. Way opens for us to continue to offer, in the words of a newcomer, “a quiet place among thoughtful, caring people.” Spirit, as we feel it when we gather for worship, binds us together and fortifies us to face what we encounter throughout our journey.

FRIENDS MEETING OF WASHINGTON

This report is based on a series of Worship Sharing(s) held in February and early March at FMW. This year, we used these queries from Baltimore Yearly Meeting as our framework for discussion.

- With fierce winds of political discord and violent expressions of hate swirling in the world around us, what does your community do to strengthen our attention to the Spirit in Meeting for Worship?
- What do you do to strengthen the Quaker “roots” of your community?
- We recognize we can be a shining light and healing presence in troubled times, while on the other hand, we value our individual Meeting Community so much we can be unwelcoming to change or discordant voices. What is your Meeting’s experience of this? Do you sense a tendency to avoid tension by not discussing differing points of view? Is your Meeting a diverse community: racially, philosophically/politically, theologically? How is that expressed? In what ways?

What follows is a summary of our Worship Sharing conversations. Ministry & Worship Committee can provide those interested with full notes from these meetings.

The spiritual state of Friends Meeting of Washington is becoming more gathered and inclusive, according to many respondents to this year’s Spiritual State of the Meeting Survey.

Discussion with attenders at the large 10:30 Meeting for Worship spoke of experiencing a deepened silent worship. Notes from the midweek meeting and the 9 o’clock meeting spoke of a greater sense of community.

It was agreed that care was needed to protect these green shoots.

There was also an acknowledgement that our Meeting needed to focus on making Friends, visitors and attenders feel more a part of our community, regardless of their ethnicity, and political or religious beliefs. One Friend spoke powerfully about a young attender who was not comfortable saying she worked at a conservative think-tank.

It was agreed that the Light covers us all. Where we stand in the Light was seen as an individual matter and we should welcome everyone “where they are.” We must celebrate the diversity of views at our urban Meeting, and allow people to express their views and find strength from it. It was not enough simply to be tolerant. We should find ways to celebrate our unique Meeting and all those who gather for worship here.

Many spoke of a need for the Meeting to find ways to connect with the city and increase the diversity of the Meeting.

Going forward, it was felt by participants in the discussions that we should find ways to strengthen our Monthly Meeting for Business, so that everyone would feel more a part of our community.

It was seen as the right and responsibility of Friends and attenders from all our various Meetings for Worship to attend Meeting for Business so that we can get to know each other better. It was felt that care and attention should be given to find new ways to help increase ownership of our Meeting.

GETTYSBURG MONTHLY MEETING

Gettysburg Monthly Meeting is a welcoming community, helping all of us in our spiritual journey. Because we are a small group, we are more like extended family. We are supportive of Friends in need as well as others in our larger community of Gettysburg and beyond.

We try to nourish and support efforts individually and collectively to live our Quaker values – especially equality, fairness for the “least of these”, environment, social and racial justice, peace, and simplicity. We strive for integrity and truth in our world of turmoil. We meet in a lovely small building on Gettysburg College campus. Since we don’t have a building to take our time and financial resources, we are more free to support local, national, and international organizations which share our values. We have been especially supportive of the locally-conceived Abolitionists Day effort.

Our Meetings for Worship are primarily silent with very few spoken messages but the silence is a powerful shared experience. The time to meditate, reflect, and read relevant material is valuable. More spoken ministry would be appreciated. We tend to end worship with a sense of peace and rejuvenation.

Our experiment with a second Sunday spiritual discussion has worked well and participants have been very willing to share their views. We look forward to ever-deeper exploration of our faith.

It would be nice to be a larger group. We struggle with finding ways to advertise our Meeting and message in the community and at Gettysburg College. We have occasional visitors but haven’t been very successful at retaining them.

We could be more involved in the wider Quaker world.

GOOSE CREEK FRIENDS MEETING

Living the lives to which we aspire as Quakers often seems to be in conflict with modern life. In these troubled times, it can be difficult to believe that we can make a difference in the world. Nonetheless, Goose Creek Friends are mindful of the need to be both patient and steadfast. Trying to be patient, we find help in the words of Martin Luther King: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Seeking to be steadfast, we have turned to the passage from Ecclesiastes quoted by Jimmy Carter in his book *Sources of Strength*:

He who observes the wind will not sow;
and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

–Ecclesiastes 11:4-6

We strive to see the Light in darkness, and then to discern what it is that we are meant to do in order to walk in that Light. Goose Creek Friends seek ways of bringing healing to the world, and we seek to support one another’s healing work. Individually or collectively, we have worked in prison ministry; found practical ways to help avoid gun violence; collaborated with local and state groups as well as the Friends Committee on National Legislation to address issues of homelessness, racism, climate change, and poverty; and cherished the work of two of our members in Africa and in Haiti. We also realize that it is our responsibility as Friends simply to be awake in our daily lives to opportunities for sharing the Light as we see it.

We feel the profound link between acting in the world and worshiping together as Friends. Goose Creek Friends Meeting continues to grow in spiritual strength and intention. Small groups within Meeting such as a spiritual formation group and a Wednesday evening discussion group deepen our individual and collective spiritual lives and strengthen our intentions with respect to Meeting. Friends gather after Meetings for Worship once a month or so for presentations and discussions such as a series based on Douglas Gwyn’s *A Sustainable Life* and a more recent series, begun in December, on Quakers and the Bible. These various groups, as well as our thriving First Day School program, create a synergism within Meeting that helps to keep us spiritually alive and also knit together as a community.

For we are a loving community. We recognize that Quaker politeness can cause Friends to avoid discussing important subjects on which they might not agree. We are not immune to this. However, Goose Creek Friends do hold a widely divergent range of political, philosophical, and theological views. This is one of our great strengths as a Meeting: We regard one another with honor and respect. Respect and affection are present not only in handshakes and hugs at the rise of Meeting, but in the way we welcome diverse messages during Meetings for Worship and in Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business. We believe that we have much to learn from one another.

Many of our Meetings for Worship remain silent. In others, Friends are opened by others' messages and find the spirit working in them to witness also. Our mutual trust helps to deepen our faith and our sense of worship as a body of seekers.

We acknowledge the lack of significant racial and economic diversity in our Meeting community. However, our Quaker language and beliefs help us nurture a diverse outward community. We strive to forge and to keep relationships with the various communities around us. Goose Creek Meeting has been blessed with bequests from which we are able to offer a large number of scholarships every year that result in relationships with a very diverse group of students. Goose Creek Friends have supported NAACP events and continue to work with interfaith groups within Loudoun County, including Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Baha'i and Muslim representatives, to foster interfaith community and help disadvantaged groups of all kinds. SPICES, Goose Creek's traveling peace troupe, provides a joyful, creative, and fun way to share our faith with the larger community.

We love Goose Creek Meeting, but are not so attached to it that we do not recognize the dangers of losing humility or of becoming a closed circle. Over the past few years we have worked hard to welcome newcomers, and we believe that we have improved in this regard. We are grateful for the ideas and experiences that new attenders bring us. In addition, through the work of our committees we have increased our outreach to the greater community, providing opportunities to share our faith with others. We understand that humility is essential as we work to keep our hearts open to one another and to the world, striving always to keep to the paths that will lead us in the Light.

GUNPOWDER FRIENDS MEETING

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 and 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.

HERNDON FRIENDS MEETING

On the third of February, 2019, Friends and attenders gathered in worship to consider the spiritual state of Herndon Friends Meeting.

At the start of Meeting for Worship the clerk of the Ministry and Oversight Committee read the following queries along with worship sharing guidelines: "What is it about our Quaker faith and practice that gives us a common identity?" and "What do we do to encourage or inhibit diversity in our Meeting Community?"

Herndon Friends Meeting has been considering issues of outreach, diversity, and how to encourage the full participation in “beloved community” in a number of ways throughout the year. We hosted a First Hour panel discussion on diversity and barriers to bringing one’s whole self to the community, which was deeply provocative and moving for many attendees. Two of us are participating in the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Change Team training. We created a Communication and Outreach Committee, both to coordinate our communication and messaging and to develop innovative strategies for reaching out to others in our community. Small groups from Herndon Friends visited and worshipped with an historic African-American congregation celebrating their 150th anniversary and with the pentacostal Latino church across the street from us.

During our worship sharing on the two queries, we considered the ways by which a faith community rooted in the unprogrammed Friends tradition reconciles the development of a common identity with the simultaneous promotion of diversity and inclusiveness. The spoken messages went straight to the heart of what it means to be a Quaker, illuminating the strength and depth of our Meeting’s spiritual character.

Several Friends spoke to the seemingly contradictory notion that the Meeting’s common identity is, in fact, its diversity. The membership of Herndon Friends encompasses a range of differences: in our original faith traditions; our political views; ethnicity; sexuality and gender identification; age and health; abilities; education and socioeconomic status; and perhaps most fundamentally, where we are on our spiritual journey.

“It’s almost paradoxical that something giving us a common identity is our sense of openness in Quaker Meeting,” expressed one friend, “a belief in individual expression, even contrary thoughts and beliefs.”

“Being true to our Quaker roots means being kind and respectful of everyone regardless of their background and perspective,” spoke another. A third person observed, “Here is a place that encourages you to embrace your own journey.” And another commented, “You are welcome to be a skeptic.”

What is it about Quaker Meeting that people from diverse backgrounds find welcoming? Some spoke to the unprogrammed way we worship: “Our common identity is the silence in our meeting,” said one Friend. Acknowledging the diversity of countries of origin among Herndon Friends, another observed, “We often speak in metaphors and symbolic terms that non-native speakers may not fully understand. Worshipping in silence may be one of the most inclusive things we can do.”

It can be easy to overlook some of the obvious ways we celebrate diversity. For example, many of our regular attenders are children. Herndon Friends Meeting takes pride in the quality of its longstanding infant care and First Day School programs. Voicing support for some of our youngest members and attenders, one Friend observed, “When people of different ages and generations get together we have diversity. We need to talk about the tiniest members of our community, as well as the oldest who need end of life care.”

The installation of a listening assistance system this year made vocal ministry accessible to several members and attenders who had been feeling cut off in worship. The organization and dedication of our Meeting’s Care Coordinating Committee offers another example of how community and identity grow from serving the diverse needs of those who suffer or who bring differing abilities and capacities to our community.

Quaker testimonies, or values, and the related queries that expose the dimensions of these values, are central to understanding Quaker faith. For several Friends, exploring the meaning of these values as a community ties our common identity with diversity. “We need to recognize that testimonies are common goals that guide people to become better persons,” spoke one Friend. “They are not terms of exclusion – they help make us a more diverse community when we recognize that people strive toward these goals in different ways.”

Another message echoed this thought, “One of the things that makes Meeting unique compared to other places of worship I have attended is I feel like this is a faith that is descriptive instead of prescriptive.”

Without a directed service and recited prayers, Quakers rely on the potential for inner growth arising from the richness of a shared Meeting for Worship. Speaking to this point, one friend observed, “Looking for that sacred space within

ourselves, that's what so important, and to me so rewarding." Engaging in this endeavor as a community is, according to another longtime friend, precisely what binds us together: "To the extent there is a common identity," he said, "it has to do with gathering together once a week in worship to help each of us become a better person."

But the way forward is not always clear. Disagreements may be part of the growing process, particularly in a faith community that strives to translate its values into concrete social action. As one Friend pointed out, maintaining community and furthering diversity may require creative thinking, like showing support for Friends United Meeting by supporting one of their flagship overseas projects, the Ramallah Friends School. "The fact that we continue to struggle with diversity is a strength not a weakness," voiced one Friend.

In 2019, Herndon Friends members and Meeting participants are united that community and diversity are compatible goals. We recognize that, when pursued together in a discerning and understanding spirit, these values deepen our faith, further our personal growth and provide us the emotional and spiritual foundation to "Walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone."

HOMEWOOD FRIENDS MEETING

Meetings for Worship at Homewood are the center of our life as a spiritual community. They are deeply grounded in silent worship that is enriched by spirit-led vocal ministry. Our opening statement, read at the beginning of each Meeting serves to remind Friends about what meeting for worship is all about. "In worship we enter into stillness of body and mind in order to feel that (radically loving) spirit within us and among us, to give ourselves over to it and to discern what it would have us do." Attendance at meeting for worship has continued to grow this past year, with about 45 present for worship on any given First Day. A simple lunch following worship is a vitally important opportunity for fostering fellowship afterwards.

This year we were delighted to welcome Ellyn Ross and Janet Abrams, who transferred their memberships to Homewood. At a memorial meeting, we celebrated the life of Noelle Zeltzman, a beloved Homewood member of over 50 years. Her legacy at Homewood was one of nurturing many generations of children, always engaging them with the arts. We also held a memorial meeting for Grayson Fell, a nephew of one of our attenders, who died as a newborn.

Young adult friends now constitute a significant and growing percentage of our attendance at meeting. They host a well-attended monthly pot-luck. We celebrate the many young adults coming to Homewood who are finding sustenance in our worship. We marvel that Homewood is becoming a place to meet other young adults!

In the past year Homewood offered various opportunities to deepen our faith. The most significant was a 1.5 day spiritual retreat facilitated by Christopher Sammond of Poplar Ridge Monthly Meeting (New York) that was attended by 28 individuals, many of whom were relative newcomers. Through the retreat, participants engaged in activities to deepen their worship and their connection with the Spirit. Six Homewood Friends participated in the BYM Spiritual Formation program and formed a small Homewood worship group that continues to meet. Our monthly Quaker Book Club continued with a small group of regular participants, discussing texts regarding aspects of Quaker faith. Once a month before meeting for worship, Homewood offers the opportunity to participate in a guided meditation, Experiment with Light, which is thought to evoke the worship experience of early Friends. Hymn singing, also offered once a month before worship, is thoroughly enjoyed by a small group that participates.

Homewood offered an engaging children's curriculum that included plays and puppet shows; trips to Adelphi Friends Meeting and Catoctin Quaker Camp; service projects preparing food and making care kits for people experiencing homelessness and trash pick-up, and guidance in mindfulness through "singing bowl" activities. About 6 to 8 children of varying ages attend on any given First Day out of the 14 children who regularly attend Homewood. We are grateful to the dedicated group of adults in our meeting who faithfully serve our children.

For many, worship and engagement at Homewood includes concerns for social justice. Friday evening vigils in front of the meetinghouse have continued and serve to witness to the community our belief that "Black Lives Matter" and "We Are All One People." The response by those driving by is often enthusiastic and thankful. Our Peace and Social Justice committee sponsored well-attended videos (*13th* and *Voices from the Holy Land*), with discussion afterwards. The committee supported work in Baltimore City related to Unified Efforts (a youth program that focuses on anti-bullying and peace building efforts), the dedication of the Harriet Tubman Garden, and Baltimore Ceasefire 365 (a movement to end

murder in Baltimore). Homewood Friends participate weekly in court watch where they track aspects of criminal justice proceedings that contribute to inequity in incarceration. Once a month, a group of Friends gathers at Homewood to hold in the light people in Baltimore City who have been affected by violence.

Others have been led to witness and work for earth care. Our Green Organizing Action Team (GOAT) wrote and received a \$5000 grant from Chesapeake Bay Trust to remove sod and plant a pollinator friendly garden on the south side of the meetinghouse, and to install water collection cisterns, and a \$1000 grant from One Water Partnership for environmental outreach and education. The meetinghouse was part of a tour for the One Water Partnership featuring our solar panels. The committee has organized a recycling program for small electronics. GOAT has also been very active in legislative advocacy, particularly for the Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Act.

In last year's Spiritual State of the Meeting report, we articulated a desire for "*greater diversity within our worship community, more opportunities for connection with each other and more effective ways of communicating our faith to newcomers.*" We have experienced some progress this past year in meeting this goal.

An ad hoc Outreach Committee began meeting this past year and initiated several activities to both better communicate our faith and attract a more diverse community. Several sessions were held weekday evenings which featured Friends General Conference "Quaker Speak" videos and discussion about Quakerism. During the Pride parade this past summer, about 40 Homewood members and attenders marched or stood on the front steps in solidarity. Pamphlets on Quakerism for visitors were reviewed and reorganized, and welcoming signage outside was added. The Outreach Committee sponsored a Friendly Eights potluck program, where new and longstanding members and attenders joined together in homes to become more deeply acquainted. Homewood's Working Group for the Arts sponsored several events—film showings and art exhibits, which attracted individuals from the wider community to visit Homewood. Homewood welcomed those in addiction recovery by sponsoring regular support meetings.

We still have plenty of room to grow and enrich our Meeting. We continue to long for the racially and ethnically diverse community we envision. In this regard we seek greater light, discernment, unity, resolve, and action. Despite our efforts to provide a well-rounded First Day School program for children, we have yet to attract more families with children. We also recognize the need to be more inclusive for persons with different abilities. Another significant challenge for us is to find ways to incorporate the many new attenders at Homewood into the fabric of our community.

In the past year, Homewood Friends Meeting has been a vibrant faith community characterized by deep worship, communication of our beliefs to others, and active witness about social and environmental concerns. The growth of attenders, particularly the many young adults, is truly exciting--a vision realized. As we continue our intentional efforts to deepen our faith and broaden our community, we hope to engage more people in the multi-faceted, spiritual work of sustaining, supporting, and growing Homewood Friends Meeting and our work in the world.

HOPEWELL CENTRE MONTHLY MEETING

No report received.

LANGLEY HILL FRIENDS MEETING

Langley Hill Meeting is dedicated to being an inclusive and Spirit-led community. Members and attenders affirm a strong sense of community and commitment to the Meeting. Spiritual growth is at the center of this dedication, as both members and attenders attest.

Meeting for Worship is central to our experience. There we often hear heartfelt and Spirit-led messages. One Friend remarked that "Meeting for Worship is the most important thing the Meeting offers to develop my spirit. It's why I come." The Spiritual Formation group also contributes largely to the spiritual growth of those who participate in it, as do the "drop-in" discussions before Meeting for Worship on First Days. A Meeting retreat held in the spring was valued as an opportunity for those attending to be together for an extended time of both fellowship and deep spiritual sharing.

We are a Meeting that welcomes diversity, including diversity of ethnicities and gender expressions. A Friend remarked that the diversity of our collective experience is one of our strengths. Another Friend noted that relationships with others in the Meeting nurture our spiritual lives because they are based on humility, kindness, and love. The Meeting continues to recover from the loss of Friends through death or moving away. These losses continue to impact our Meeting.

As the Meeting changes and evolves over time, we face the need to reconsider our standing committees' function and size. The Nominating Committee took this into consideration in 2018 and suggested changes, some of which were accepted by the Meeting. This action was the result of Nominating Committee struggling to fully fill the committees as we had in the past. The dedication and energy of committee members continues to support and carry the Meeting forward. Several committee members expressed joy in being on committees and paid tribute to their colleagues' dedication. Yet some committees are facing burnout as members feel over-extended.

The Meeting has been working to make children (and their parents) feel welcome in Meeting for Worship, believing this is a central experience at the Meeting. A young Friend commented that "as a young person, feeling welcome in Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business is really important."

In 2018, the Meeting again hosted about 35 new 9th grade students from Sidwell Friends School. The visitors spent the morning at Langley Hill where our volunteers presented them with some background on historical and current Quakers/Quakerism, our values, beliefs, and our unique Quaker mode of worship. A brief Meeting for Worship was followed by a lively Q & A and a reception.

Religious Education continues to be a strength of the Meeting experience for families with children, yet the labor to support this program rests on too few people. Teachers have worked well with children who have special needs, creating meaningful learning experiences.

The Ministry and Worship Committee continued its Quakerism Revealed series with an exploration in 2018 of the traditional Friends testimonies of Peace and Simplicity. Ministry and Worship proposed a program for Young Friends, called Meeting Life, to integrate them into Meeting activities and responsibilities (Meeting for Business, Quakerism Revealed, Greeter and Riser roles, committee membership, etc.), which Religious Education adopted.

Evidence of our spiritual health can also be seen in the financial contributions that enabled us to meet our budget in 2018, and in the fact that the number of donors held steady over the budget year. The Meeting is nearing completion of payments on the mortgage that financed renovation of the Meeting House.

Among potential activities that Friends suggest the Meeting might undertake are the following: opening the Meeting-house regularly to our neighbors as a place of refreshment and hospitality; hosting a humor night to help us laugh and have a good time together; resuscitating Friendly Eights and the book group, and perhaps reconsidering the outreach portion of the Quaker Quest program. A Friend suggested reviving the lunches at a local restaurant following Meeting. As a Meeting with a strong sense of community, there is a desire for still more community.

Young Friends of Langley Hill Spiritual State of the Meeting 2018

As 2019 progresses, Young Friends come together to reflect on the calendar year 2018. It was a full year, with a large group, interesting religious education classes, and many events and activities.

Young Friends this past year enjoyed running fundraisers as a way to connect and support local and global charities whose missions we felt aligned with our values. Our first project of the year replaced our tradition of making Power Packs as our spring activity. With the help of the meeting, we instead made 100 bags of trail mix to donate to a local homeless shelter, Martha's Table. Through the funds allocated to us by the Peace and International Outreach committee, we were able to donate \$100 each to the Fairfax County Peace Awards, Well-o-water, and the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. Young Friends are grateful for our ability to support these projects all over the world which promote values of peace and equality. In November, we ran a bake sale to support Casa Rosa, a center which supports LGBTQ+ youth.

One of the Young Friend's most important roles at Langley Hill is to host and participate in community events that bring Friends of different generations together, such as the Easter celebration and Christmas Service. Our most successful event this year by far was our annual Halloween party, which had greater attendance than ever before. We find that this party is a great way to let the kids encourage the adults of the Meeting to let loose a little bit with fun activities like bobbing for apples and pumpkin decorating. Our fall bake sale also included baking cookies with the Junior Young Friends - a wonderful way to get the younger kids involved with our fundraiser. We also invited adults from the Meet-

ing to help us with the assembly portion of our trail mix project, which we plan on doing again this year. We feel that as teenagers at the Meeting, we have a responsibility to help bridge the gap between the adult Friends and the younger Friends by hosting events that bring the Meeting together.

The classes of 2018 were unusual, as compared to years previous. We started with the Meeting Life program, which attempted to weave the teens into the adult life of the meeting by attending second hours (including Meeting for Business) and talking to adult members about how Quakerism has shaped their lives. In the winter semester we began intervisitation, where we went to a Baha'i temple and attempted to visit the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In the spring, we began 21st Century Fox, a twitter account that we ran, making posts by translating parts of the journal of George Fox. In the fall, we began a course based on African American Quakers, their contributions to Quaker history, and their comparative invisibility.

Next year, four of us will be graduating from the Young Friends program, including all the current co-clerks and the treasurer of the Young Friends. As such, these four are working to guide the remaining Young Friends in a way that they will be able to lead the soon to be smaller group when the fall comes around once more. The new group of Young Friends will have a lot on their plate, but we have faith that they will be able to do much good when they take the reins.

LITTLE BRITAIN MONTHLY MEETING

Little Britain Monthly Meeting is comprised of two Preparative Meetings. Each Preparative Meeting meets weekly at their respective Meeting Houses and join together Monthly for Business of the Meeting.

The Monthly Meeting enjoyed another successful fundraiser and yard sale to raise funds for Right Sharing of World Resources and George Fox Friends School. We are delighted that George Fox Board has been able to meet their final debt payments and will be completing final filings in the near future. As part of Quarterly meeting we hosted presentations on climate change and the experience of Quaker friends serving as Friends in residence in New Zealand. Several visitors attended these presentations following advertising in the local paper. We continue to support the good works of FUM, FGC, BYM and other organizations through our financial contributions.

Please see the attached reports from Penn Hill and Eastland Preparative Meetings. (included under each Meeting's name)

LITTLE FALLS MEETING OF FRIENDS

As we write the 2019 Spiritual State of the Meeting Report we find Little Falls and its members discovering a renewed sense of energy.

The Meeting was given the Spiritual State of the Meeting queries offered by Baltimore Yearly Meeting during the week prior to our full discussion to give everyone time for individual contemplation. In an effort to have a vibrant, constructive conversation with multiple points of view, we formed five groups to discuss the Meeting's strengths, its room for improvement and our goals for the upcoming year. Following these small group discussions, we shared our thoughts as a full Meeting.

The Meeting has many strengths. We draw strength from our beautiful historic buildings and grounds. These wonderful surroundings provide energy and enhance our sense of spirituality and inner peace. The Meeting has a great appreciation for its Adult First Day Programs. We recently ended a series of wonderful talks about famous Quakers. There is a desire to renew the Spiritual Journey presentations that many members and attenders have shared over the years. There is a great sense of community that manifests itself most visibly in projects such as the Edgewood Elementary School book project we undertake each holiday season, the Valentine's Day cards we make and send each year, the upkeep of our property and our annual summer concert on the lawn. We also embrace the visitation of newcomers to our Meeting. We are looking ahead optimistically with a younger group of leaders. We were also inspired by the Spiritual Formal Program and plan to grow the program within our Meeting.

In addition to our strengths, there are areas of concern and opportunities for improvement. Our conversation about these issues was a testament to the health of the Meeting, as we collectively juxtaposed our concerns with our goals.

There is a financial concern, as two of our major donors passed away in the last year. The Meeting agreed that further outreach, a donation letter, and an updated website with online giving are necessary. We would like to increase our sense of community by having more occasions for fellowship and discussion, such as the monthly potlucks we are holding this year. We also want to reach out more to our local community in general, about Quakerism and about the history of Little Falls. There were concerns voiced about sparse attendance; an older population of consistent attenders and members; a desire for more social activism within the Meeting; how political discussions within the Meeting can become divisive; and the challenges posed by splitting the Meeting into two smaller groups on the Sundays that we have Intergenerational Meeting for Worship (with some people in the schoolhouse and some people in the Meeting House).

Although our attendance is not large in numbers, it is abundant in spirit. We will continue to nourish and tend to this wonderful place.

LYNCHBURG INDULGED MEETING

Report included in report of Roanoke Friends Meeting.

MATTAPONI FRIENDS MEETING

1. What do we do to strengthen attention to Spirit in Meeting for Worship?

o Members frequently bring to meeting concerns regarding current national issues and unrest and through the collective spirit of the meeting seek guidance for our personal and social response. We strive not to avoid the most contentious issues to “keep peace”, and to try and understand the perspective of others who see things differently, believing there is that of God in those with whom we strongly disagree. We understand that context is important and attempt to avoid extreme negative reactions that stifle debate. Our experience in worship helps us to respond to friends and family who differ from us dramatically in their political and social views. Our goal is to strive to be peacemakers without compromising our own voice and values.

2. How do you strengthen the Quaker roots of your community?

o Our study and engagement with our Quaker heritage and the future of Friends in the world takes multiple forms. In the past year during second hour, a member shared a personal family diary of a Quaker ancestor who migrated from the Atlantic coast to Ohio in the early 19th century. We look to Scripture that speaks to us of the origins of our Quaker practice and belief. Weekly singing from the Quaker hymnal connects us to older protestant Christian tradition as well as newer vocal expressions of Friends activism and peace building. Plans for this year’s second hour programs include discussion of Brent Bill’s Life Lessons from a Bad Quaker, and discussion of how Quaker beliefs and practice diverge from or help us reconcile new theories and discoveries in quantum and particle physics.

3. How does your meeting handle discordant points of view in your community? How are you welcoming to strangers?

o We are very conscious that our most active group of members and attenders are homogenous as to age and values. We strive to be open to other perspectives on our place in the world. This year traveling Friends brought a message regarding the moral implications of factory farming and the production and consumption of animals as a dietary protein source. Several members and attenders of our meeting come from agricultural backgrounds or are actively engaged in sustainable agriculture as their livelihood. Lively discussion resulted regarding the complexity and delicate balance involved in responsible stewardship and husbandry of our natural world, our responsibility to avoid cruelty and waste in our management of animals and plants used as food sources, the right sharing of resources, and accepting our personal role and responsibility for the industrialization of agriculture. There were areas of agreement and disagreement, but the message was heard in an open and loving manner and all Friends were grateful for the chance to hear another perspective and to reexamine our own behavior and beliefs.

4. Are you a diverse community racially, politically, and theologically? How is that expressed?

o As a small, rural meeting we struggle with the reality that we are racially and politically homogenous. However, none of our most active attenders are birthright Friends, and all bring a wide range of theological background and beliefs. Several Friends were raised as Catholics with others coming from a broad spectrum of Protestant background, including an attender who is an ordained Minister in the United Church of Christ.

MAURY RIVER FRIENDS MEETING

No report received.

MENALLAN MONTHLY MEETING

No report received.

MIDLOTHIAN FRIENDS MEETING

During these times of political discord, Midlothian Friends Meeting (MFM) provides a quiet place for spiritual nurture and respite from the challenges and distractions of the world at large.

Midlothian Friends strive to respond to discordant political views and hate speech in a spirit of love and light. The meeting has embraced the FCNL campaign, "Love Thy Neighbor (No Exceptions)," as a way of life for the meeting and as individuals. We have used our thrift store, The Thrifty Quaker, to spread this message to the public by distributing two hundred yard signs and the same number of bumper stickers to customers.

Our Peace and Social Action Committee (PSAC) and Sanctuary Study Group approach social justice action from a place of love, compassion, and forgiveness rather than from a place of political confrontation. Their examples have moved MFM Friends to do the same in their individual lives.

In 2018 and the first two months of 2019, Midlothian Friends Meeting provided support for undocumented and documented immigrants with grants to 501(c)3 organizations that advocate for them. Additionally, ten of our members participated in activities supporting immigrants.

Unrelated to immigrants, Midlothian Friends Meeting during 2018 was able to provide grants to non-Quakers who had emergency financial needs and to charities that provide general social justice efforts locally, regionally, and internationally.

Our roots in Quaker tradition and worship are strengthened by remembering there is "that of God" in everyone and by experiencing a direct relationship with the divine. Also, by using the queries offered in BYM's Faith and Practice, we experience fellowship with other meetings within our regional community, knowing that we are all led and supported by these same queries.

Our monthly discernment time together is a worshipful experience that allows the unified Spirit to prevail rather than our individual egos. We have introduced changes that reduce the "business feel" of this time together so that more silent worship and spiritual discernment can occur. In the interest of simplicity and informality, we have moved away from using committees where practical and, instead, bring discernment to the entire meeting during our monthly time for discernment. In the past year, we changed the name of this discernment time from "Meeting for Business" to "Meeting for Discernment" to emphasize our improved focus.

MFM is very egalitarian. We listen rather than respond defensively. If we don't listen, we know we will alienate and possibly lose people. By listening carefully and digging deeper, we can better understand others' viewpoints and alleviate tensions. We strive to act in love rather than indulge in potentially divisive (e.g. political) issues. We understand that if we are unable to give and receive forgiveness within MFM, we will certainly be unable to do so in the larger community.

Rather than avoiding tension due to differing points of view, MFM confronts it head-on. MFM is our highest and best place to "stay in the game." Our worship and coming together silently in a calm place help us to be open-hearted and loving. This has deepened our meeting and spiritual process and helped us to stop judging ourselves and others. Mutual shepherding is offered freely among MFM Friends and is well-received, since our loving atmosphere promotes gentleness, kindness, and open hearts.

We also recognize that there are healthy tensions that help us grow. The 2017 rally in Charlottesville reminded us of white privilege and how that might affect our perspective. The tension resulting from this realization helps us to recognize our faults and negativity. It is much healthier for us to acknowledge this tension and understand its causes.

Some of our most effective voices to the community are the Thrifty Quaker and the charities we assist through its sales. They have proven to be an effective way to embrace the community and demonstrate our Quaker values and process during interactions with customers.

Midlothian Friends Meeting (MFM) hungers for diversity and actively seeks differing opinions and approaches. We know we will learn and grow spiritually from those of differing racial, ethnic, sexual, political and social communities, as they will from us. Nevertheless, there is a feeling among some of us that we are too homogeneous in certain ways. For instance, Friends continue to be concerned by our lack of diversity in age. While we realize we have a younger population than many Quaker meetings, we desire more families with young children and wonder how we might attract them.

MFM has increasingly received visits from people of color, some choosing to visit multiple times or even become part of our meeting. These Friends have helped improve our understanding of the pain caused by white privilege. As a result, we talk about this problem frequently. We have also spent time and finances to make our extensive meeting library more representative of the contributions people of color and women have made to Quakerism and the world. Yet, we are eager to find more ways to reach out to people of color.

Over the past decade, the meeting has grown more theologically diverse. While we have certainly retained our appreciation for universal mysticism, we also experience many Friends with Christ-oriented or other influences in their approach to spirituality. This widening of the meeting's spirituality has brought strength and joy to our worship community. Our adult discussion hour each Sunday, "Circle of Friends," includes a smorgasbord of spiritual topics. It is an enriching spiritual experience that brings Friends back each Sunday.

Political diversity also seems to have broadened at MFM over the years. However, this is difficult to assess since we have long had a culture of not bringing politics to our meeting. Friends are careful to maintain this cultural norm by reminding each other when needed.

At MFM, we appreciate slowing down and listening to leadings. "We run with the Spirit not ahead of the Spirit." Our deep desire is that we help each other move forward together in love.

MONONGALIA FRIENDS MEETING

The members and attenders of Monongalia Friends Meeting continue to be drawn together by the Spirit. We are a small meeting with average attendance in 2018 of seven with a small child present about one third of the time. At the close of Meeting for Worship and before leaving, we share our concerns of a spiritual nature that do not rise to being shared during worship.

Past members and attenders, often associated with West Virginia University (WVU), stop in when in town for reunions or visiting family or friends. Friends of African and Asian ancestry attended occasionally for support. Persons who are LGBTQ have been and are a part of our Meeting and have held positions in our Meeting. Philosophically and theologically we have persons who believe in the Divine and those who are non-theists, those who are Christian and those who are Universalists. In general members and attenders are open to finding the Quaker way.

We are aware of the expression of hate and violence and seek to be involved in working on issues through our FCNL Advocacy Team. Members and attenders are involved locally in prisoner visitation, human rights, diversity, equality, and climate/environmental concerns as well as state and national issues that affect the lives of Appalachians. In 2018 we did one community-based program looking at issues regarding refugees in the community with an attendance of thirty+ folks.

Our meetinghouse was well used this last year. Four community groups continued to use the meetinghouse to hold meetings and workshops. We also hosted several overnight guests. We congregated for a light lunch after every Meeting for Worship and had one organized potluck each month. Periodic workdays brought volunteers together to keep the building and grounds clean and functional.

Through worship, fellowship, and activism, Monongalia Friends will continue to shine Light in the dark corners of the world.

NORFOLK PREPARATIVE MEETING

In the four reports we received from our group, all reflected much of the same sense of the Meeting. We are a tiny group, no doubt, but we "move a lot of water" for our size. It is impossible to sit back and not participate when a Meeting is very small, and we have all risen to the challenge.

In this past year we have gained a new member, a Quaker from Texas, who is in the area for two years. He has been a wonderful addition. Our efforts at outreach have resulted in approximately 8 new people attending our Meeting at one point or another. Our area is highly transient, so the coming and going of people is a constant issue, but it is good to know our banner, our yard sign, our Facebook page, and our flyers inside the Muse where we meet, have all contributed to newcomers checking us out.

Because of our commitment to being regularly present for newcomers, we have not been able to maintain our former visitation schedule to our Williamsburg parent Meeting, and we feel that loss quite a bit. We are still trying to figure out how we might be able to integrate that back into our Quaker life.

We are particularly happy that our newcomers feel very welcome, that our Meeting is strong despite its size. We meet every week without fail, we carry out service projects with Catholic Worker four times a year, and participate in book

giveaways and other Muse events at least twice a year. For a four person Meeting, we believe that is rather extraordinary.

NOTTINGHAM MONTHLY MEETING

The third and fourth queries spoke to us in our discussions.

- There seem to be dueling forces among Friends. We recognize we can be a shining light and healing presence in troubled times, while on the other hand, we value our individual Meeting Community so much we can be unwelcoming to change or discordant voice. What is our meeting's experience of this? Do you sense a tendency to avoid tension by not discussing differing points of view?
- Is your Meeting a diverse community: racially, philosophically, politically, or theologically? How is that expressed? In what ways?

We feel the Spirit prospering in the sense that we feel drawn to worship as a community of fellow seekers open to expanding our views and learning from one another. Our diversification lies in that many of us do not live in the same political district or state. While we do not discuss politics in Meeting, many of us are actively engaged in our political districts.

We come to Meeting for peace and tranquility and a respite from the controversies of the world. We find the divisions of the world adverse to our beliefs of equality, justice and 'that of God in each person'. How can we draw people together and build sustainability?

Over the past year, we've seen our numbers drop. Some due to illness, Friends moving away and revised work schedules. Those of us who continue to attend do so because we know experientially that Spirit prospers in our lives when we do. "If I miss Meeting, the rest of the week just doesn't go as well. Things are harder; the path forward does not seem as clear."

We reflect on the people who came before us, and honor their work and dedication in building our community. The ladies who displayed baby quilts and sweaters they made for AFSC; the artwork drawn by the children; the men who dug out our basement by hand to create a kitchen and fellowship room. We are grateful to the Friends who worked, this past year, to correct the water problem in the basement and refinish the concrete floor.

We are thankful for those who participated in our 'Friendly Treasures Sale' and also cleaned out their closets to send 2,000 pounds of clothing to charity. Friends worked diligently for three years to raise funds for the final debts from George Fox Friends School, thank you.

We meet together to try to nurture the values and faithfulness we want to make integral to our lives. One person carries the lesson from his grandmother that the most important word in the 23rd psalm is "through". Worshipping together affirms our faith that we are supported in our path, in our way through. We learn to recognize that, while we may not always like the answers we get to our prayers, they are the answers we need to receive. As a gathered people, however small the gathering, we rejoice in all that we receive.

PATAPSCO FRIENDS MEETING

Introduction:

Patapsco Friends met following a worship sharing format. After settling into silence, Friends were invited to consider eight queries. Their voices and direct quotes frame this report.

What are our greatest joys?

"We create community in worship and celebrate together during Simple Meal." "We trust each other. You don't always find that in the world." Others expressed they feel safe at PFM, enjoy the humor, and appreciate the intimacy earned in small groups and committee meetings. "I can share and feel like I can get help." "...I feel like I belong."

These central thoughts created a web for the many responses given. There is an element of trust in our Meeting which permeates the feelings we have towards one another as well as the possibility and, often reality, of real sharing and caring for each other. People like the way "we support one another."

One Friend said, “I am so appreciative of the feeling of family at PFM. It is an unquestioned value that we have each other’s backs. I feel lifted up so often by what people share here. I feel lifted up in people’s caring connection.” Finally, one young Friend said, “I love being downstream from the Elders.”

What does our community do to strengthen our attention to Spirit with the political discord and expression of hate swirling in the world around us?

We have a variety of interest groups that provide on-going spiritual nourishment. Beyond our Meeting for Worship, to name a few: Friends can participate in our Meeting’s committees, a pamphlet reading group, a Meditation group, MAJR (Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform), a Course in Miracles Study Group, Support Groups, two Spiritual Formation Groups, a Faithfulness Group, Our Daily Bread (serving food), book discussions, and various adult education topics, a Bible study group and PFM volunteers to PATH. (People Acting Together in Howard) It is during these small groups, that often Friends become spiritual friends as well as finding support, direction, and discernment.

On May 10th and 11th of this year, we had a retreat with Christopher Sammond and Rebecca Mays. The theme was on deepening into the heart of worship. We had an average of 25 people present and reveled in the depth of our connection and understandings enhanced by Christopher and Rebecca. Many of the people present during our Spiritual State of the Meeting Listening Session commented on the value of the Meeting having these grounding and deepening retreats and small groups. One person said, “When we reinforce worship, we strengthen the community...without that center, everything else becomes much more difficult.”

Another said, “Small groups and retreats allow us to develop deep personal relationships with each other...so when we do disagree, we don’t broad brush each other.” “The deep listening primes us to be able to be less divisive ourselves.”

Finally, it was mentioned we have very few political messages in MfW. Our Meeting is a refuge from the hate and political discord; however, a good majority of us are keenly interested in the world around us and engage in whatever ways we can—given our diversity of age and commitments—to creating a healthier, socially just environment.

Present and Future Challenges and Troubles

Our Meeting has two or three children that attend. We would enjoy more children, AND young people. There hasn’t been an organized conversation as to how to bring more youth into our Meeting. These observations led into the comment that many of our population are older. One Friend was led to say, “What will the average age of our Meeting attenders be in 20 years? It is important to keep that in our awareness. What do we do about it?”

A young Friend said, “I feel incredibly welcome here as a young person. I know a lot of young people...I know how valuable the Meeting is to me.”

Another Friend commented, “All religious congregations are facing the same challenge. You can listen to services on the internet, on TV. Our culture has also become more secular.”

On a positive note, one person said, “We’re actually growing, not shrinking!”

Another primary thread was regarding those members and attenders who are not “in the room...Having this conversation is always incomplete because some of the people are not here.” There was the sentiment that we need to be aware of the challenges that people are facing. “Each of us is called to notice and reach out.” It is also incumbent upon us to be cognizant of the conflicts in the room as well. These, too, need to be addressed.

Several suggestions were tendered; for examples, the Lancaster Friends Meeting has a Comfort and Assistance Committee. It is their job to reach out and notice who is missing or having problems. “Sometimes in the depth of your suffering, you don’t have the energy to reach out.” “At the Plainsfield Friends Meeting in the 1960’s, there was a sub-committee on counseling. At that time there was an understanding that sometimes a Friend might not wish to share problems with someone in their own Meeting. Friends might feel more comfortable talking with someone from another Meeting. This was done individually, not arranged by the Meeting and was always done confidentially.”

One wise Friend commented, “It’s important to remember we cannot be all things to all peoples.”

Strengthening Our Quaker Roots

During the past year, we have had a monthly Luminaries discussion. The Luminaries are famous Quakers, both current and past, who have left a lasting legacy to subsequent Quakers, and others, who follow or read about them! These sessions are well attended and enjoyed by all.

We also have a monthly pamphlet group. This group gets together to discuss Pendle Hill pamphlets of all types. The group varies as does the leadership and the discussion. People find it bonding, and informative.

Our library has much about the history of Quakers and our roots.

Messages during MfW will, at times, contain historical references, which “little by little helps me with my understanding of Quakerism.”

One person commented she would be interested in learning more about the role of the Elder in Meetings. We had the opportunity to see Rebecca Mays act as our Elder during our recent retreat. Many of us were inspired by her example and would enjoy learning more about the role.

Do we avoid tension by not discussing differing points of view?

A Friend, who has been part of the Meeting for 20 years, remarked that when the Meeting began it was understood that “people don’t talk about each other... We can disagree in a loving way.”

A second person remarked, “I am impressed with our ability to face contrary points of view, that are not our own. We don’t exhibit intolerance for others points of view.”

On a different note, another Friend noted, “I am not sure that we’ve really been challenged in this community with discordant views.” Further she said there are no climate change deniers or passionate anti-immigrant views. “Other Meetings have had to go to these hard places...for instance, [discussions about] Palestine and Israel. We haven’t had to go there in recent years.”

All agreed that it is our intention to be a welcoming place for differing points of view. “But, how can we make it clear to people that it is important to voice concerns about differing points of view. People have a tendency to just walk away. It could be political, but not necessarily. If they won’t share their point of view...we might never know why they disengaged,” offered another Friend.

A beautiful summary of this query is as follows: “A lot of what we do here is about holding. We hold in the light, in our listening, we are held by the Spirit...The ability to hold allows us to hold the tensions in life and living together. I see a capacity to hold a great deal of tension. We are all called to be holders of tension whether we like it or not!”

What are our leadings?

This query led to many immediate responses: We have leadings to enjoy learning; for more and more deep worship; to pursue Social Concerns; to help the Syrian family; for Unity with Nature; to feed the hungry, serving at Our Daily Bread monthly; to enjoy each other; and a leading to care. “There is generous love and letting other people know you [in our Meeting].

“Speak as if you understand from the very beginning that you can’t take it back...People here are careful about their words. We come forward to care for each other.”

Is the Meeting less than what we would wish and if so, in what ways?

For the most part, many of the Friends’ comments were positive rather than critical. For examples, “Bewildered by how good what we have here is.” “Our Meeting is sooo full and rich and beautiful. Why would I wish for anything to be different?”

In contrast, there was more yearning for more young people.

Finally, one Friend commented that “we tend not to draft a minute that goes on and up through Quarterly Meeting and beyond. In a sense we are a private Meeting not a public Meeting.”

This invited the response, “If you sense we need to do this...you can teach us how!

Is your Meeting diverse?

We have diversity of thought... We have “microtheologies.” Diversity of thought and philosophy. [Credit for the concept of “microtheologies” goes to Christopher Sammond]

One Friend said that striving for diversity made him uncomfortable. “We are Friends of Truth. Not Friends of a diverse truth. We try to teach a Quaker way. Bound up by listening. It would be a diversity if someone felt listening were not worthwhile. But I would not strive for that!”

Our Meeting has a degree of what is generally considered the markers of diversity: ages, race, and, as mentioned above, micro-theologies. We are hoping to attract more young people and people of color.

During the past few months, many of us have participated in a series of Courageous Conversations. It is a movement in the Howard County community to talk in small groups about enhancing our community’s ability to talk across racial and religious differences. As a consequence of these conversations, we hope to continue the conversations and activities with community members in a variety of ways, both large and small.

We also are moving toward creating a Change Group within Patapsco Friends Meeting. This specifically deals with the issue of racism and all of its manifestations, and what we can do as a group to build a strong foundation of social justice as manifested in both our PFM community and the greater community.

Conclusion:

There is much that can be and has been said about the loving nature of our Meeting. We care for one another and are careful of one another’s feelings and beliefs. We have noble aspirations and also very down-to-earth ones. We want our Meeting to grow, become more diverse, act on our values, and to continue to follow our considerable leadings. Ours is a Meeting that tries our very best to meet the needs and challenges of those who enter our doors. We are steeped in Spirit and understand that it is Spirit that undergirds all of our actions and interactions. We are grateful but never complacent! As one Friend said, “Our potential for growth is endless.”

PATUXENT FRIENDS MEETING

No report received.

PENN HILL PREPARATIVE MEETING

We are remembering that William Penn settled Pennsylvania, stating “Let us see what Love can do.” The Love sculpture in Philadelphia reminds us that great things happened. It is no accident that the US started there, as it was the most advanced city in the late 18th Century. Much of our Constitution is taken from Penn’s ideas. There was no militia in the colony until the French/Indian War forced a majority of Quakers to resign, since they opposed war.

Penn Hill has had a difficult year. We have tried to use Quaker Process, not always successfully. Recently, the trustees have been having separate meetings, which had not been the case for the last few years. We are happy that a longtime member who had not been attending for several years has rejoined us and has been very helpful in seeking and providing clarity on decisions. We now have a plan in process for wise investment of our funds, with a longtime management company.

We have reached out to the community with successful yard sales to raise money for Right Sharing of World Resources and the George Fox Friends School. Some have shown interest in Friends and we have had good discussions, but as yet we have not attracted new worshippers.

PIPE CREEK FRIENDS MEETING

No report received.

RICHMOND FRIENDS MEETING

With “fierce winds of political discord and violent expressions of hate swirling in the world around us,” our meeting is a place of comfort and safety. We strengthen the Spirit in meeting by attentively protecting the worship environment. Richmond Friends Meeting holds two meetings each first day, one at 9:30 and a later one at 11:00. The early meeting typically is smaller and described as the “deepest possible silence.” We broadened our policy for coming into meeting after 11:00. Folks are welcome at any time but in a manner that does not unduly interrupt ongoing worship. The Ministry & Worship Committee provides guidance on vocal ministry both individually and collectively. While messages often contain concerns of the day, we are careful not to mention overtly partisan issues either in messages or announcements. Ministry & Worship in collaboration with the Adult Spiritual Education Committee provided William Taber’s “The Four Doors to Meeting for Worship” pamphlets to people who wanted to attend a two-series session on deepening worship. Participants explored entering the spirit of communion during worship and throughout the week.

The quality of our worship has been diminished for those among us with hearing impairments who cannot hear all or part of the spoken messages. This has led to feelings of isolation. Ministry & Worship, Building & Grounds, Care and Counsel and Financial Stewardship Committees have worked together to upgrade our hearing system. Plans will be completed in 2019. We look forward to deeper worship when everyone will be able to fully participate.

One Friend observed that strengthening Spirit is not something we “do.” Rather it is what happens when we “show up to meeting in a spirit of generosity.” Some members and attenders feel strengthened in the Spirit in their connections with others in the meeting. Newcomers have mentioned the importance of the warm welcome to meeting. Programs such as the Care and Counsel Committee’s Friendly 8’s, forums held by Adult Spiritual Education and Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s Spiritual Formation program all provide ways for us to deepen our relationships with one another. Our coffee hour at the rise of meeting has continued to be very popular. The informal “take a break for coffee” at a local coffee house once a month offers another opportunity for friendships to deepen. A shared meal is offered twice a month. Some have found that discernment on issues such as Sanctuary and the climate have been Spirit-led. Sharing the experiences of both the joys and sorrows of our lives enriches us all.

The bedrock of operating our Meeting is the committee structure. Committees are led in a spirit-filled way. The end of year committee reports show a care and intentionality about how our business is conducted. It is an important way in which friendships are formed and our spirituality is deepened.

In examining the query of how our Meeting strengthens its roots, one friend recalled the Richmond Friends Meeting retreat on The Hidden Life of Trees. Trees create an ecosystem which protects the living community and allows them to withstand the effects of severe climate changes. Our meeting works in much the same way. The Spirit-led way in which we conduct our business, marriages, and other celebrations of life connects us to our rich history. Further considering our roots, we deeply feel the loss of four dear Friends in 2018, Tom Washburn, Bob Rugg, Donna Knicely, and Bill Hughes-McIntyre. Each has been a loving presence in Meeting for many years. Additionally, Friends appreciate the use of our 1988 Faith and Practice and the v.2013 Resource for Faith and Practice.

Adult Spiritual Education forums were well attended. Our roots are fed by our connections to the wider world of Quakers. We offer financial support to families with children attending camps as well as support to attend BYM and FGC functions. We have members serving on BYM committees and other Quaker organizations such as Quaker House. We are enriched by their participation in the wider world of Quakers.

We addressed queries regarding our experience with the expression of differing points of view, despite the possibility of resulting tension. Do we welcome discordant voices? What are we doing to encourage diversity in its varying aspects?

In our Meeting, dealing with discord will sometimes get “messy.” We strive to remember that the ability to openly express strong feelings is a mark of a healthy meeting as it indicates that Friends feel safe here. If we pay attention to the Light, we establish a bridge of trust strong enough to bear the weight of discord. The challenge for us is to listen deeply in order to more fully understand each other. Almost forty of us had a chance to practice this skill at our fall retreat. BYM members Joan and Rich Liversedge led us in the workshop, “Debate into Dialogue, Speaking our Truth so that others can hear.” A Friend expressed appreciation for those who have helped us address “messiness” and said that when it is affecting the community we need to be made aware of it. Unaddressed tensions affect our spirituality in all of its aspects.

We have come to realize that Friends in our Meeting hold a diversity of religious beliefs. We are gratified that Friends with differing spiritual perspectives accept and value each other, adding depth to our spiritual experience. Our form of worship is strong enough to embrace different points of view.

Our Meeting is aging, demographically. A decline in the number of younger individuals and families in our Meeting has resulted in a sharp decline in the number of children attending Meeting. The Religious Education Committee continues to love and care for the children who come and to think deeply about what experiences to provide so they feel part of a loving community. We are delighted that grandparents have started bringing their grandchildren to Meeting.

The aging of Meeting is also impacting our retreat center. The Clearing enjoys a good rate of use and a good income. In general, the facilities are in good condition. However, we would love to see more members and attenders making use of this uniquely beautiful facility. The aging demographic of our Meeting community is having an impact on The Clearing both in usage and in maintaining the facilities.

We recognize that we are predominantly white, liberal, and middle-class. Quaker silent worship—which goes to the heart of who we are as a community—may not have broad appeal to many folks with strong religious traditions of their own. Even so, we need to pay attention to the work of FGC on systemic racism and consider using the steps they are taking as a model for us. It is not unusual for us to have several visitors each first day. We want to ensure that they feel welcome, whether or not the potential exists for long-term attendance. As mentioned earlier, we have continued to make changes in this direction. We emphasize greeting new people at the rise of meeting. Each committee has been asked to think about ways to incorporate welcoming into its work. The coffees after meeting continue to be popular. We constructed a brochure container at the sidewalk outside.

We also need to take advantage of opportunities to connect with other faith communities. If we pay attention to the Light and live our lives accordingly, our actions will have ripple effects into the wider community. Coming to meeting is only the beginning. For example, the Work Camp Committee builds community relations by planting shrubs and flowers with first time homeowners identified by HOME (Housing Opportunities Made Equal). The Visibility Coordinators represented us (RFM) at several events and organized our presence at demonstrations, displaying our Quaker banner. We offer the Meeting House to like-minded groups, who use it every day of the week. The Clearing provides an affordable retreat setting for a variety of individuals and groups.

A working group of Friends is staffing the Unitarian Universalist Church two days per week to provide sanctuary to an undocumented Honduran mother. Several Friends are providing transportation to immigrants to bi-weekly check-ins in Richmond and to appointments with Arlington, VA, Immigration Court. The Peace and Social Concerns Committee holds monthly lunches to raise funds for various organizations working for a more just society.

We also need to open ourselves to being challenged in new ways. For example, we could consider establishing a worship group in a different place and time attuned to the lives of young people. We move forward, looking for opportunities to carry our Quaker Light into the world while tending the spiritual and personal relationships that anchor our community.

ROANOKE FRIENDS MEETING

Roanoke and Lynchburg Friends, like Friends everywhere, are not immune to the turbulence of these troubled and painful times. Especially now, we seek the gifts and challenges of Quakerism through this contemporary lens. Many of us find the Meeting for Worship to be a refuge from the turbulence. One mentioned she takes a conscious sabbatical from the news on First Days: “When I get to Meeting, I am thankful that the messages don’t involve politics. Sometimes they are sad—because of the tragedy of what’s in the news, but that’s a different feeling—it’s not political.” Another finds the Meeting community to be a refuge of strength and gentleness, saying, “No matter how stressed the times are, this nourishes me. People reach out to one another in quiet practical ways.”

Yet while grateful for refuge, Roanoke and Lynchburg Friends seek more than shelter from the storm. We echo the desire to heal the world’s pain expressed during a different troubled era by London Yearly Meeting in 1938:

We have longed that in this time of world crisis the Society of Friends everywhere may be faithful in its witness of truth, as truth has been and is being revealed to us. Peace and righteousness are inseparable. Outward peace maintained by the conscious surrender of truth and justice can never be lasting.

Friends are grateful to find strength and tools useful in the struggle to walk the fine line of resistance without rancor, without vilifying or dismissing those who have views we find abhorrent, while seeking to respond with love. Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business give Friends a unique opportunity to learn and practice the tools we need in this struggle. As one Friend pointed out: “In Meeting for Business, we learn to speak from our heart without subjective emotional attachments. We cultivate a practice of speaking in a way that is authentic and honest and then let it go.” One Friend finds such tools within the Meeting community: “I keep learning about compassion and forgiveness in our Meeting. I feel that here I am learning how to take it beyond the Meeting. Sometimes, it is difficult to practice compassion and forgiveness. I feel the Meeting supports me in that and I keep learning.”

We are encouraged to reach out to those beyond and within our community. Outreach and “inreach” help us strengthen our attention to Spirit. We support the witness of various members of our Meeting in their peace work, efforts on behalf of social justice, resistance to the pipeline, FCNL lobbying, NAACP involvement, and intensive involvement in the School of the Spirit. These are some of the ways our community challenges us to put our gifts to service, to ask what more can we do to translate our faith into practice. Regular chanting and allowing a small church to use our facilities are other ways for us to reach out to the community.

Our “inreach” includes welcoming newcomers. Several of those new to the Meeting say they felt welcomed upon arrival, but more can be done. Roanoke is considering creating a hospitality committee with the emphasis on greeting visitors, offering opportunities to learn about Quakerism and meet members of the Meeting. Potlucks and other social gatherings, a mid-week Meeting for Worship, and a monthly opportunity for spirit-journey sharing offers members old and new a deeper opportunity for community connection. We search for a way to welcome and retain families with children to enrich the life of the Meeting. Inreach also is important for continuing members, especially those in need. Ministry and Counsel Committee continues to support elderly or sick members and attenders, to give short-term financial assistance to those in immediate need and to facilitate Clearness Committees for those struggling with difficult decisions.

One Friend points out that, “For me, the challenge is the comfort. It’s comforting to be in the company of like-minded and like-hearted people, but if we had more diversity of views, it would challenge me more, especially in Business Meeting. If people held strongly divergent views, we would be challenged. There is a challenge in being too much among like-minded people.” Another points out, “We are mostly older, white, middle-class people. As a person from a working-class background, I’m sensitive to this. I’ve heard Quakers say classist things. Blacks who are involved with Friends tend to be middle class.” Both Roanoke and Lynchburg have had Republican or Trump-supporting attenders who no longer attend. The difference between those comfortable with Christocentric viewpoints and language and those who find these painful can also create discomfort.

In these turbulent times, we struggle to walk the fine line of resistance without rancor. We also walk the fine line between comfort and challenge. The comfort provides the Spirit-filled community that nurtures us. The challenge requires us to develop outside our personal comfort zones. A searching Light that discomforts, an embracing Light that warms are both at the heart of Roanoke and Lynchburg Quaker Meetings for worship.

SANDY SPRING FRIENDS MEETING

No report received.

SHEPHERDSTOWN FRIENDS MEETING

No report received.

STATE COLLEGE FRIENDS MEETING

The State College Friends Meeting could actually claim to have been born in the Highlands, at 423 South Pugh Street, where, from 1913 to 1920, Hanna Maule invited Quaker students into her home for worship. For a few years, meetings were held in Friends Union on College Avenue, built primarily to house young Quaker men during their college years. The first Friends Meetinghouse in State College was built in 1927—just across Atherton Street from the present-day Highlands. However, Quakers had been in the Centre Region since the early 19th century, with meetinghouses in Halfmoon and Bald Eagle valleys, and in Bellefonte.

Thanks to the foresight of Quaker John Ferguson, the Meeting purchased a 1.5-acre plot in the 600 block of East Prospect Avenue in 1961. Friends discussed building there over the next seventeen years, without coming to unity. In 1978, we made the decision to do so. The Meeting was blessed that contractor Ralph Way, whose Quaker family had a long lineage in Halfmoon Valley (think Way Fruit Farm!) was available, and by 1980 our new home was ready. We sold our Atherton Street building to the Mennonites, and moved to Prospect Avenue. We were finally permanent Highlanders!

When construction of the Meetinghouse was complete, a small group of members and parents launched the State College Friends School in its basement. Highlands neighbors might remember the Fun Fair, the annual springtime fundraiser, that was held in the parking lot of the Meetinghouse until the School’s move. Classes continued at the Meetinghouse for nearly two decades until 1999 when the School moved to its own building, adjacent to Foxdale Continuing-Care Retirement Village on University Drive. Foxdale had been planned by members of the Meeting in the late 1980s and was built by Ralph and Kamilla Way, opening in 1990.

The Cooperative Playschool, founded in 1947 by Meeting members and others for 3- to 6-year olds, also moved to the Prospect Avenue site in 1980. It closed in 2014 and was replaced by the Friends School “School House” for the same age group. The School House later moved to the main Friends School building. The Meetinghouse education wing is now the home of Child Space, for 2- to 6-year-olds.

Thanks to a financial pledge by Quaker Mae Rigby, most of the 1.5-acre Prospect Avenue property remains open green space, including the “Friendly Woods” play area, a community garden, a broad lawn and sledding hill.

Today, the Meeting has nearly 300 adult members and many non-member attenders. We share a strong spiritual life where the “light” shines in every person and the community itself is a source for nurturing the spirit. Worship is silent, there is no clergy, allowing the worshipers to be drawn together both in unspoken ways and in ways that inspire spiritual messages. This practice may sound mystical, and in many ways it is, but at the same time, Friends are very practical people and are committed to helping solve the problems of our time.

As problem-solvers, Friends engage in a variety of peace and social justice efforts locally and farther afield:

- Meeting members are currently exploring the roots of racism and white privilege through book discussions.
- Historically, Quakers supported anti-slavery efforts and the underground railroad; members and local historians have traced the routes of escaping slaves through Bellefonte homes that were “stations.”
- Prison reform and support for inmates in their struggle for better treatment are longstanding goals for several Meeting members who visit Rockview and the Centre County Correctional Institution.
- In line with Friends’ well-known opposition to war and violence, members provide training to groups seeking alternative ways of resolving conflict.
- Several years ago, the Meeting installed solar panels; and our pollinator garden—planted by Sunday School students and blooming profusely throughout the warm seasons—represents another commitment to the environment.
- Beginning in the 1980s, the Meeting began to labor with the issue of welcoming lesbians and gays, and providing same-gender marriage. In 1995 we resolved that same-gender couples would be married in the Meeting on the same basis as any other couple. Today, members are committed to the rights of all LGBTQ people.
- The Meeting regularly holds fundraising dinners in support of local agencies such as Out of the Cold, Inter-faith Human Services, 3rd Way Collective, Pennsylvania Prison Society, and others.

We are very pleased to have been part of the Highlands for nearly 40 years, and we invite our neighbors to visit on Sunday mornings at 11:00.

TAKOMA PARK PREPARATIVE MEETING

No report received.

VALLEY FRIENDS MEETING

As we reflect on the past year, many Friends express a deep gratitude for Meeting. Perhaps the strongest affirmation is of Meeting as a community. Friends feel welcomed, safe and accepted for who they are. Though we express our spirituality in a variety of ways and may hold differing beliefs, these ways are honored within a larger undergirding experience and a core of shared values. Friends speak to the meaning they find in weekly worship and of a strong sense of encircling community that allows us to listen for Spirit. We need silence for deepening in Spirit and sometimes simply as a respite from work. The spoken messages and the silence nurture us.

Many Friends follow spiritual weekday practices and express an interest in nourishing these. Second hour presentations, social gatherings and book group discussions help bring us together along with some new monthly activities. Though we have welcomed some new faces in the past year, some Friends call us to be more intentional in inviting others to join us. We feel the loss of Friends who have moved away.

We are grateful for the presence of our children. They express their appreciation of the space to be themselves, to reflect on values and to have fun.

Our committees contribute greatly to the work of our Meeting community and have been rewarding for those involved. Some committees struggle with too few active participants, leaving much responsibility with a few Friends. At the same time, we affirm the choice of Friends who feel called to step back from active committee work. We honor their deep and rich contributions.

Our commitment to reduce our carbon output led us to replace our old oil furnace with a heat pump and to install solar panels, the culmination of many years of work. We look forward to carrying on this commitment in new directions.

Our annual project of making 1000 origami cranes is a gratifying way of being together and of deepening our public peace witness as we hand them out during a local festival. Our local community involvement includes meeting with other faith groups for meals and fellowship and participating in Faith in Action, an organization that focuses on justice and the local correctional system. We are enriched by exchanges with our scholarship recipient to the Summer Peace Building Institute at Eastern Mennonite University. Some among us continue to be active in the wider world of Friends, particularly the BYM Camping program.

We are grateful for this shared life and look forward to another year together.

WARRINGTON MONTHLY MEETING

No report received.

WEST BRANCH FRIENDS MEETING

No report received.

WILLIAMSBURG FRIENDS MEETING

No report received.

YORK FRIENDS MEETING

We gathered on three mornings to discern our Spiritual State for 2018. From this time together arose several insights: a concern for a more present ministry to our members' and attenders' needs, a longing for greater inclusion, a call for more attention to conflict transformation, and, above all, a loving recognition of our community's spiritual assets. Those assets, too many to name, are what confirm our devotion to the Quaker way, a path of integrity, humility and peace.

But no gift arose in our sessions more apparently than the gift of silence. That which unfolds in silence is the very substance of what turns our hearts toward the Spirit. Corporate silence is what strengthens our attention to Spirit in Meeting for Worship. It gives respite, brings renewal, and reveals direction in divided times. We are blessed by this silence.

And we are blessed by how Way has opened for us in 2018, with a special affirmation of the Witness our Meeting has in the city and county of York. We are blessed by continued interest in our historical and spiritual significance from local schools, organizations and faith leaders, and we are blessed to advance that Witness through Spirit-led outreach. We have been sought out as a people of peace and a people of action in moments of tragedy, and our Meetinghouse is known as a refuge for environmental and social justice. And we are so dearly blessed to be a community with many gifts and many kind-hearted, committed Friends who are willing and able to reach out.

We are also aware that a reflective spirit is a gift to a Meeting. There were times when we could have embraced reflection and sought a "third way," but instead we lingered over our own interpretations. When our Testimonies generously offered us clearness, there may have instead been a tendency to hold on to our own perceptions and ideas. We know that letting go and fostering tenderness are the keys to breaking old relational patterns and transforming into something new, something that Spirit seeks to show us. The Quaker way encourages us to turn in, to allow ourselves to be led out of discord and into a harmonious Beloved Community.

We are in Unity that cultivating this beautiful community is worth our work. It is worth growing. It is worth making whole. We feel the charge of a powerful Witness that has historically spoken and is still speaking, and we long to enrich that Witness by creating additional space for children and families. We seek wisdom in how Way will open for this prophetic call to growth. And as in all things, we aspire to do so with love for one another, hope that something better is possible, and faith that continuing revelation will be known in our midst.

WARRINGTON QUARTERLY MEETING

The Meetings that make up Warrington Quarterly Meeting mostly are below the average size of Meetings in Baltimore Yearly Meeting. Some are quite small. And yet the range and scale of activities we are involved in continue to belie our size: from hosting homeless people overnight, helping stock local food pantries with homegrown produce, presenting workshops and cultural events in the communities we serve, to keeping alive historic Friends Meeting Houses and cemeteries.

Warrington Quarterly Meeting itself has had a vigorous and rewarding year fulfilling our role of nurturing our constituent Meetings. Meetings for Business have been held in good order. We have taken on a more proactive and deliberate approach to our programs, which has led to hosting work-shops by Dyresha Harris on racism and by Steve Davidson, author of the Pendle Hill Pamphlet “The Gathered Meeting”—which, in fact, were opened to and attended by Friends from Baltimore Yearly Meeting at large and not just our Meetings. We have also engaged in rewarding discussions about Meeting for Worship and devoted one of our gatherings to addressing a concern brought from one of our Meetings about how to run a Meeting without a Clerk.

As it is with our constituent Meetings, these rich and rewarding experiences remain the product of mostly the same small group of Friends. The friendships between us in some cases go back not just years but, by now, decades: The love and respect between us is palpable. However, while this is a strength, it also is a cause for concern, for who will come forward to replace us in the future?

While one can understand, in the case of our smaller Meetings, why a larger representation is difficult—if more people come, who will be left at the Meeting House?—it is also the case that the larger Meetings do not have a larger representation. (We do, admittedly, have more attenders from a Meeting when our quarterly gathering is held there).

Does this beg the question whether Friends now see Quarterly (and perhaps even Yearly) Meeting more as outside resources upon which we can draw, than organizations which we, ourselves, constitute?

Is our identification now not so much with the Religious Society of Friends per se, but rather with our individual Meetings—if, in fact, we even look to our Meetings not to bring us into a more in-tense experience of Friends’ belief and practice, but rather to endorse the individual spiritual jour-neys on which we are already embarked?

Do our lives still enable us to fulfill our responsibilities to the Yearly Meeting/Quarterly Meeting/Monthly Meeting structure of the Religious Society of Friends?

For those who take part in Warrington Quarterly Meeting, the experience remains rich and invigorating. Even as the questions above, so far, remain unanswered.

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