

THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE YEARLY MEETING

REPORTED TO ANNUAL SESSION

8TH MONTH, 2021

It is difficult to find the words to truly capture the experiences of our meetings this year. While many meetings spoke of finding hidden strengths and new ways to care for each other during the pandemic, they also mentioned loss, worries, and struggles. A sense of woundedness co-existed with expressions of “making do” and pluckiness.

Maury River’s trepidation spoke for many. “Everything has changed for Maury River. Once the pandemic is less of a threat, we don’t know if we will be able to return to our pre-pandemic ways, or if our lives and Meeting will be very different.”

We find no Meeting was alone in its struggles and worries. Every Meeting seemed to have uncovered a deeper understanding of themselves.

Friends were often pleasantly surprised in unexpected ways. Gettysburg Friends told of how their outdoor, socially-distanced summer gatherings lasted much longer because no one had other activities to go to.

We all learned, as a Friend at Gunpowder said that encountering God or Spirit “is not about the steeple house, but it is about the community.”

As a Friend at Sandy Spring said: “We are experiencing the Light differently, but it is the same Light.”

Almost all of our Meetings’ reports took advantage of Zoom to create this “meetings without meeting houses” that was a practical necessity during the year. Many Friends welcomed the virtual meetings, enjoying seeing each other’s faces, pets, and homes.

Charlottesville: “What is the Meeting when we can’t meet? The sentiment that emerged from our examination of this question was this: The community is present. It needs us and we need it, and we’re maintaining and finding new ways to connect.”

At the same time, Meetings also reported many members did not find Zoom conducive to their worship.

Some Friends at the Annapolis Meeting created an early morning Meeting from home without using any technology.

All Meetings suffered from the lack of shared activity. First Day schools were hit hard.

There were no shortage of difficult days and conflict.

Langley Hill: “The cumulative trauma of the events of 2020 impacted each of us differently, but the meeting as a whole is still recovering and likely changed because of it. Healing is a slow process and can be incomplete leaving scars that will linger. We need to remain attentive to this trauma and lift it up together even though it may be uncomfortable so we can apply some spiritual treatments and medicines. This is the work of our committees as well as all of us.”

Charlottesville: "In the words of one present at Connections that day, 'If I were the Spirit of this Meeting, I would be looking for a doctor. I'm alive but not well'."

In the year of the pandemic, health and a wonderful sense of caring for each other pervaded the reports.

Annapolis: "We have seen each other through illness, personal loss, the movement to new locations even across the country, and Spirit has been evident in the unseen as well as the seen and very practical ways we have remained connected with one another. Meals, transportation, financial support, phone calls, shared at-distance walks."

Hopewell Center: "Spirit is bigger, better, and more present than ever. How has Spirit filtered through our Meeting in 2020? "When everything else is falling apart, we have our faith, and each other." Spirit gives us an affirmation to "send out as much Light as we can create."

Work to understand and eliminate systemic racism gained new urgency following the May 25th murder of George Floyd and served to strengthen the foundations of many meetings.

Sandy Spring Friends meeting reports: "The work is often uncomfortable; however the unguarded open discussions around race have allowed authentic relationships to develop."

Meetings also found good ways to build community:

Adephi: A Thanksgiving weekend online "coffee house" talent show, which demonstrated that humor can lift hearts even in turbulent times.

Herdon: Fortnight Friends, which are random one-to-one pairings for two weeks of connections.

Gunpowder started weekly friendship nights, while Richmond started Wednesday night worship sharing.

Friends Meeting of Washington organized Zimmers - dinners on Zoom.

Patapsco's Ministry and Care Committee sent out "care packages" to people as a symbol of caring.

Milestones were reached this year.

Buckhannon celebrated its first year as a full Meeting while Augusta Worship Group marked the 25th year of its formation.

Despite the pandemic, Friends continued their essential work in the wider community, from Midlothian's thrift store to Frederick's support for Palestinian farmers through the purchase of olive oil and soap.

We have a deep respect and appreciation for everyone who participated in preparing reports this year. We know the reports will be of historical value one day as Friends look back on our turbulent year.

The reports show ways we can build solid foundations in our Monthly Meetings for our work, in the words of the Epistle of the World Gathering of Young Friends in 1985 "to heed the voice of God and let it send us out in truth and power to rise to the immense challenge of our world today"

In the end, perhaps an old favorite hymn paraphrased by York Friends provides the best words for this year: "Twas Grace that brought us safe thus far, and Grace will lead us home."