

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report, 1999

For the Calendar Year 1999

The Patapsco Preparative Meeting, under the care of the Sandy Spring Friends Meeting, concluded its third year of worship in November, 1999. This year, the official status of the group changed from worship group to a preparative meeting, an important milestone. The Meeting continues to meet at Mt. Hebron House in Ellicott City with a usual attendance of about 20 adults in Meeting for Worship and from 5 to 15 children, as well as 3 to 6 teachers in the First Day School.

Over the past year, we have noted a growing and deepening sense of community within our meeting. Since the Meeting is small, connections between people are very possible and very important. We are aware of each other's situations to some extent, and we try to hold each other in the light in times of sorrow or gladness. We struggle to learn how to give appropriate help and support to each other. Many members feel drawn to attend Meeting for Worship each Sunday and feel that their spiritual growth is positively affected by the life of the Meeting. Others feel less spiritually connected to the group. Some attend our Meeting for a few times and then don't return and we wonder how to make more of a connection with such attenders. At the end of 1999, as the nominating committee considered nominations for the coming year, several members noted the many positions which have been filled and felt this to be a sign of the Meeting's healthy development.

There were some changes in our membership, this year. At the beginning of the year, the Meeting said good bye to the Alison Picher/Chris Allan family who moved to Colorado. During the year 1999, two of the Meeting's attenders died. One was Harry Brown who died on May 12, 1999 and whose memorial service was held under the care of the Patapsco Meeting on May 30th. This was the first memorial service held under our care and it was a labor of love as well as being a gathered Meeting for Worship for many. Later in the year, one of our founding members, Martin Lennig, died June 27, 1999.. His optimistic outlook, friendly manner, and familiar presence at Meeting for Worship are greatly missed. The Meeting gained several new regular attenders as well as two who officially joined the Meeting at the end of the year: Elena, and Elizabeth. We are mindful that each person who attends the Meeting, either for one Sunday, or regularly, is part of the spiritual life of the Meeting. We attempt to treasure each person's unique opportunity to share the light as it is manifested through him or her.

The First Day School classes have continued to thrive. We particularly appreciate the great gift that the First Day School teachers offer to the children and to the Meeting as a whole. There is a nursery class, a class for 4 year olds and kindergarten age, a class for 1st and 2nd graders, and a class for those who are 8 and up. The children in the First Day School seem to enjoy their class work as well as getting to know each other. Following another Meeting tradition, the children participated in a play which was given for the adults at the end of Meeting one Sunday near Thanksgiving. This year, the play was: "Elizabeth Fry Visits Newgate Prison." It has been pointed out that there are really two Meetings for Worship meeting simultaneously. There is the Meeting for Worship downstairs, and there is the group of parents, teachers and children upstairs who, in between the pieces of the First Day School lesson, share the triumphs and tribulations of their week with each other. The two groups connect at the simple meal which is brought by people in turn and which is served at the rise of Meeting. Children who are older than the age groupings in the First Day School participate in the Meeting for Worship. Providing an appropriate program for middle school students and teens has not been achieved by the Meeting, as yet, and is one of the challenges we face.

The Meeting held a number of events this year. On April 24, 1999, there was a workshop on committee development with guest presenter, Katherine Smith from the Maury River Meeting in Virginia. We held our annual mid-summer Meeting picnic on August 18th in Patapsco State Park. The

Meeting held its first weekend retreat in September at the New Windsor Retreat Center in New Windsor, Maryland. Led by our own Susan Rose and by George Sinnot from the Sandy Spring Meeting, the retreat allowed us to know each other more deeply and to focus on our goals for the Meeting. The children heartily enjoyed two days of crafts, games, stories and snacks, supervised by several youth counselors, including Nathan Harrington, from the Sandy Spring Meeting.

The Meeting has engaged in ongoing activities, in addition to the Meeting for Worship. The Friendly Bunches Groups began in early 1999; met for a time, and now the groups, reassigned by Elizabeth Saria, are in their second incarnation. The Meeting for Healing on the third Sunday of each month has continued, as has the book discussion group which meets on the second Sunday of each month. In addition, a group embarked on a four pamphlet discussion series this year, on the general topic of being spiritually centered. Some of the adults have volunteered to be "Special Friends" for the individual children of the Meeting, which allows for a more in depth relationship between each child and an adult in the Meeting. There is a Bible study group which is currently focusing on the Book of James and meets two Sundays per month. There are also two or three small spiritual friendship groups which have sprung up somewhat spontaneously. One interesting indicator of the vitality of the Meeting is that on any particular Sunday morning, it is not unusual to find people meeting in small groups (spiritual friendships, clearness committees, Bible study, conversation) in many of the rooms of Mt. Hebron House prior to the Meeting for Worship.

Since the Meeting is small, a number of people feel a strong responsibility for making sure that the housekeeping details are completed, such as opening the building, setting up and taking down the chairs, cleaning up after Meeting, or signing up for simple meal. The focus may, at times, be ministering to the Meeting rather than focusing on the inner spiritual lives of individuals.

As we begin our fourth year together, we are mindful of the need for balance: balance between worship and other planned activities; development of self versus development of the group; and nurturing the Meeting community versus reaching out in social action. Social action and community outreach are areas we will be addressing with more attention, due to two committees. One is the newly formed ad hoc peace and social justice committee. The other is our expanded advancement and outreach committee. In addition, an ad hoc school committee has begun tentatively exploring educational issues and possibilities.

Even as we struggle with these and the other challenges before us, we note that our very awareness of areas which are lacking is a measure of the level of community which has been achieved, and which we now expect. We will be holding our Meeting community and our efforts to the light in the coming year.