

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report, 2001

The year that is passing has brought much growth and new spiritual directions. The new directions and responsibilities are apparent, as our Meeting has risen to several challenges and events. These have brought us closer and deeper into our spiritual community. With each step, we find we are functioning more as a whole Meeting, independent, self-guiding, and growing.

Meetings for worship are held with the Inner Light guiding the gathered through the spirit. The spoken messages are met with the silence in a balanced response. We have time for thought and time to face and try to understand the voices of the world. As the members gather, many find peace in the light and have responded as they have felt the need. Even the children are finding the Meeting a settling place and are growing with the silence.

This year has seen an average of 30 people in Meeting for Worship on any given Sunday. We hosted the quarterly meeting in June and provided the attenders our newsletter, the Quaker Heron, full of insightful articles. The meeting was well attended from around the quarter. And with it we saw some new faces that continued meeting with us for the summer.

We are constantly finding new faces in Meeting, and as the year progressed, we have seen three attenders join the Society of Friends. We have welcomed Jim Rose, Nicole Manzanera and Robert Rhudy as members of the Society of Friends. A spiritual baby shower was held for Phyllis Keenan and Scott Wilhelm to welcome their son, Henry Wilhelm, into the world. We look forward to welcoming more of our attenders into the Meeting.

Friends began the process to find clearness to become a Monthly Meeting. It was suggested that Patapsco could be a Monthly Meeting in one month if we could agree that fast. But alas we are Quakers and have much soul searching to do before we can come to such a sense of the meeting in that time frame. The members are looking at what being a Monthly Meeting means, determining if we should take this step and considering if we may already be, in effect, a Monthly Meeting. There are threshing sessions being planned and adult classes to happen in the New Year. As we are finding our way to guide and grow as a meeting, we have a Personal Assistance Committee to be available to help members, attenders, and those who may need financial and other support.

The summer brought a wider exchange of members interacting with our children, as different teachers shared their talents with them in First Day School. Many new attenders and some we had not seen for a while came to Meeting over the summer. But with the summer, we said goodbye to the Wilhelm/Keenans and wished them good luck in their move to New England.

The summer R.E. picnic was held at the home of the D. family and was enjoyed by all who came. A fresh blackberry ice from our clerk's gardens was the highlight of the meal. The community of children put on a play, William Penn and the Indians, and participated in classes in the study of Quaker ideals and Old Testament. There is a deeper journey that the older kids have started. A Bible study group was formed at the home of Sophie Reynolds where members of the older children's class have been gathering once a month to read and discuss the Bible. This class was started by Sophie and has been welcomed by the other classmates. An ongoing plan is being developed to plan activities for the children to keep them interested in Quakerism. Balancing the care of the children and the need of the Meeting for silence is an ongoing concern.

The fall has brought us to the realization that we need to express our testimonies and understand our history. A workshop was presented on James Naylor: A Skeleton in Our Closet, with Ria Hawkins

leading our retreat. Even in the face of the attacks of September 11th those who gathered learned more about our Quaker heritage. After September 11th our lives were shaken by the tragedy that occurred and the actions of our country through the end of the year. The Meeting responded with letters and a weekly silent peace vigil to show our support for the victims of the attacks in the U.S. and Afghanistan. The vigil has continued as a weekly meeting with signs and growing numbers of people joining us at the corner of Little Patuxent and Broken Land Parkways. In rain, wind and even after a pellet gun incident, the clerk and others are there to stand in silent remembrance of the many victims of the war and to show protest to the actions of our government in this matter. The Peace and Social Justice Committee has held letter writing days for those who wished to express their views to Congress and the President in this and other matters of conscience. The committee provided wording, addresses, letter paper, stamps, etc. Cooking a monthly meal for 12 homeless men and the Bread of Life Food Pantry are ongoing concerns and the children are included in these activities to acquaint them with the value of giving. We have also held a threshing session on whether the Meeting should make financial contributions to peace and social justice organizations. This committee is planning a threshing session on the Peace Testimony in the coming year.

The Meeting has moved into the electronic age and renamed its web site, www.patapscofriends.com, to make it easier to remember. This has been kept up to date with the current happenings of the Meeting and contains current links to a special Peace Testimony page and responses to September 11. We give special thanks to Elizabeth Saria for her enhancements.

The Advancement and Outreach Committee has been working to keep us together and Friendly. The Friendly Bunches were a big hit again as we met in small family groups for fun and social times away from the Meeting. A Quaker 101 class was also given by old and new members to help explain our faith. The Meeting has its own listing in the phone book and advertising is being placed in the local papers. We have a newcomer packet to help first time attenders feel welcome, and displays of literature hang on the doors and stairs. There is a "Quaker in the corner" to answer questions about the Quaker faith and we also send cards to the new attenders to let them know we appreciate their presence. There are guidelines for greeters to help any visitor feel welcome. In the coming year we will continue these activities and are considering other outreach activities for the 12-24 age group, the greater Quaker community, and the non-Quaker community who may be interested in Friendly topics.

As we begin a New Year, there is much to grow and much to do: giving our members a better understanding of our spiritual roots and testimonies; holding classes and threshing sessions; looking toward becoming independent; acting as part of the community of Howard County in our actions, peace vigils, and presence; and providing intergenerational and fun activities for our young people to grow into our community. We will continue the constant search for truth and guidance in our lives and with regard to the actions of our government. We shall go forward in the light.