

## Spiritual State of the Meeting Report, 2002

During the past six years, we have been growing closer and deeper as a spiritual community, both inwardly amongst ourselves and outwardly as we connect with other local groups and groups in the wider Quaker community. This year, after weighing the responsibilities and implications of becoming a monthly meeting, we became recognized and embraced as a monthly meeting under the care of Baltimore Yearly Meeting. The Ad Hoc Monthly Meeting committee guided us through the process. They facilitated a question and answer session about the practical matters of becoming a monthly meeting, and led a separate threshing session for spiritual discernment to inform our decision. In August, the Baltimore Yearly Meeting approved our request to be recognized as a monthly meeting. The clerk, Sherri Morgan, led our first business meeting as the new Patapsco Monthly Meeting in August. We welcomed 26 friends as members of our newly formed monthly meeting; 20 of these were transfers from other meetings. We are deeply grateful to Sandy Spring Friends Meeting for encouraging us to start our meeting and for nurturing and supporting us as we have grown.

In September, we celebrated our new meeting status with a potluck lunch and welcome cookies. A reporter and photographer from the Baltimore Sun covered the event. We designed a certificate, displaying our Minute on Becoming a Monthly Meeting, and invited everyone present at the time of our transition to sign the certificate. Meetings for worship have averaged 30-35 people each Sunday. Some meetings are held in silence but many have two or three messages. Messages sometimes build on other messages and people feel they have had a spiritual dialogue in a community. Six attenders requested membership in our meeting and were welcomed as new members in August. The new adult members are Johanna D., Ken, John and the new associate members are Philip, Elvin D. and Elena D..

We attract a steady stream of visitors, both from other Quaker meetings and newcomers from our local community. Whenever there are visitors, we invite them to stay for Simple Meal and usually a member of the A&O Committee will identify themselves in case the visitors would like to ask more questions about our faith. Several of our local newcomers have become regular attenders.

Almost every Saturday this year, in good weather and bad, and during periods when some questioned whether it was still a worthwhile activity, the meeting has sponsored a peace vigil to remember the victims of September 11, to encourage non-violent responses and to question the government's build up for a war against Iraq.

In January, the Peace and Social Justice Committee led a threshing session on the query "Should the Meeting Contribute Financially to other Peace and Social Justice Groups, either Locally, Nationally, or Internationally, and if so, How?" In March the Committee led a threshing session on the Peace Testimony. The Committee has continued to prepare and deliver a meal for men at a local homeless shelter one Sunday a month. They have also sponsored letter-writing campaigns at the rise of meeting to encourage us to write to our political leaders about issues identified by FCNL. Members of our meeting also participated in a peace action, sponsored by Women in Black, on September 11, 2002, in Baltimore to create a peace path that stretched 12 miles, from the Inner Harbor to the Beltway along Charles Street.

The Peace and Social Justice Committee, along with the Advancement and Outreach Committee, presented a screening of the film, "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It," along with a discussion of the topic of conscientious objection at Howard County Central Library. Three World War II conscientious objectors were on hand to discuss the film and answer questions. The film is a

one-hour documentary on the little-known story of the 40,000 Americans who went against the tide and refused to fight in World War II.

Our Religious Education program for children continues to grow. This year there were 3 classes (4th grade and up, 2nd and 3rd grade, 1st grade and kindergarten) plus the nursery. A Youth Worship Sharing group was formed in April and has been meeting regularly throughout the year in the Reynolds home. It is for youth in the fourth grade and higher grades. They have done Bible Study and worship sharing.

Since September, Joe has been leading a Junior Meeting one Sunday a month for fourth graders and up. This Christmas they collected money and donations for a local family.

Three adults and several children (third graders and above) went on a one-night camping trip this May to Patapsco State Park. Two of our children attended and enjoyed Quaker camps this past summer in Virginia. Bob hosted the annual end-of-the-school-year RE picnic. We struggled to provide child care during meeting for business, but at year's end a child care coordinator for meeting for business was found.

Our meeting expressed concerns about the local public school system's plans to commemorate September 11 and about alternatives for students who do not wish to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Sherri and Jean discussed our concerns with the Howard County Public Schools' Superintendent in April. In the fall Diane and her daughter, Sophie, met again with school staff and members of community groups representing African-Americans and Muslims to voice alternative ways to commemorate September 11.

The Ministry and Oversight and the Advancement and Outreach Committees jointly sponsored a 6-session series Quakerism 101 classes held in February and March. Topics included Quaker history, core values, the testimony of integrity and journaling. The Advancement & Outreach Committee offered a 7-session series of classes on prayer this summer. Sessions focused on different styles of prayer and gave participants an opportunity to practice that prayer style and share their experiences in a worship-sharing format. Guest leaders from meetings in the Washington-Baltimore area led many of the sessions.

The A&O Committee initiated a sit-down simple meal one Sunday a month, beginning in May. Everyone brings a dish and we can more leisurely talk and dine together. We have been experimenting with ways to use our space to best host the meal.

The Ministry and Oversight Committee sponsored our fall retreat on September 28 at Mt. Hebron House: The theme was "Witnessing for Peace." A representative from each of the three traditional peace churches (Quakers, Brethren and Mennonites) spoke. Susan Rose and Ramona Buck led intergenerational Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP) exercises in the afternoon. Two teen-age students from Sandy Spring Friends School led activities with the children. Some of us ended the day by attending the peace vigil in downtown Columbia.

Four people from our meeting are participating in the BYM's Spiritual Formation program this year. As part of the program, they attend an opening retreat in September, and a closing retreat in May. In between, they meet twice a month to share their spiritual journeys and disciplines.

The M&O Committee provided guidance to several clearness committees, including one for a member who is facilitating a new web site for Quakers Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality.

We said goodbye to Elizabeth and Nancy. Elizabeth left for a new job and home in upstate New York. Nancy moved on to graduate school. We hosted a farewell for them with giant cookies and milk. We received a letter of introduction for Dr. David from Byberry Friends Meeting in Philadelphia. David, his wife Jodi and their two children are attending our meeting while temporarily living in our area.