

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report, 2005

Now in its tenth year of existence, in its fourth year as a monthly meeting, the spirit of Patapsco Friends Meeting is gaining in breadth. Growth in our number of members and regular attenders has enabled us to stretch into new areas, yet maintain and deepen the spiritual activities we have had since our inception. The spirit of Patapsco Friends Meeting is reflected in our events and actions.

One theme we followed through the year was “follow your leadings.” Early in the year, a group of 7-10 people continued a 2004 exploration of spiritual leadings through readings, discussion and mutual support. Several individuals clarified steps on a personal or professional level they would like to take in their lives.

One leading to emerge from the group was a member’s decision to start a Friend’s meeting for inmates in MCI-Hagerstown. Visits began in January and have continued on a weekly basis through the year. Eight people rotated for Saturday morning visitations. The meetings included conversation, worship, and discussion of a written passage. The visits continue into 2006.

Several Patapsco Friends followed a leading and found significance in volunteering in the “Eyes Wide Open” exhibit in September. Several others of us attended as well.

Patapsco Friends supported Ken Stockbridge in his leading to visit and build connections and community among the wider circle of Friends, partly through Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s inter-visitation program to FUM meetings. At Ken’s request, we gathered a Clearness Committee and approved a traveling minute for his visits. Ken’s leading continues into the new year.

Another theme was concern for the environment. The Advancement and Outreach committee sponsored a meeting-wide weekend retreat at Catoctin Camp last May. Twenty Friends of all ages deepened their fellowship in hands-on workshops to encourage environmentally sustainable living, and by informal walks, meetings for worship, singing and conversing on the wooded grounds.

The theme of environmentally-responsible living continued with a community yard sale of Friends’ donated goods. Other activities of the A & O committee included the production of an email newsletter, “Visitor Highlights,” for visitors who are new to Quakers; outreach to local colleges in the form of advertisements in student newspapers; and outreach to the community via a booth in a Columbia neighborhood fair.

Three Friends have been representing PFM at organizational meetings of the interfaith community organizing group, Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). They valued getting to know people of other faiths and overcoming a sense of isolation from other religious communities. Howard County’s IAF fosters common ground by building relationships and empowering participants to explore local issues and find a common voice. In the fall of 2005, Patapsco Friends joined the Howard County IAF for the next two years.

Religious education manifested our growing spirit, as we watched our children—many toddlers ten years ago—become young women and men. The First Day School meets weekly with approximately 10 children in attendance. Our general plan is to teach Quaker history and life in the fall and Biblical themes, using FGC’s curriculum “Jesus: Who is He?” in the spring. On December 18, the entire school presented a Christmas play, “Three Wise Dudes,” to the delight of the Meeting.

Friends in middle and high school continued holding a Junior Monthly Meeting and continued to act as assistant First Day School instructors. Fellowship activities included a trip to a local rock climbing facility.

Adult education was particularly active this year. Informal education after simple lunch included two workshops on the Quaker organizations FWCC and FCNL and a workshop on Pendle Hill. Additional education on Quakerism took place at six worship sharing evenings on Roger Griswold's pamphlet, "Creeds and Quakerism" and a monthly worship sharing on the queries and advices.

Adult education reached into other areas of the spirit-led life. The Peace and Social Justice committee held an evening discussion of the pamphlet, "The Origin of the Palestine-Israel Conflict." Howard Zuses of Sandy Spring Meeting spoke on socially responsible investing. A series of four workshops on death and dying began with a worship sharing on end-of-life issues, prompted by Terri Schiavo's death in 2004 and the deaths of parents of several members. Workshop topics included legal issues, preparation for one's own death, and grieving. A group of 6-8 women explored knitting as a spiritual practice during a six-week program. Several of the women knitted a prayer shawl as a result.

In an attempt to meet the needs of Friends who are unable to attend meeting on First Day, a Mid-Week Meeting for Worship was started. After a six months' trial, it was laid down and mid-week meeting at Sandy Spring was suggested as an alternative.

While growing and maturing, Patapsco Friends also maintained treasured traditions with publication of its occasional journal, Quaker Heron; member participation in Howard County peace vigils; a parallel-text Bible study meeting twice a month; potlucks at the end of each month; and Friendly Bunches. Our Meeting for Worship continues to be at the heart of our maturation, driving it and being driven by it. We will see the deepening of the commitments begun in 2005 as Patapsco Friends continue to nurture the spirit of our Meeting.