

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report, 2006

We are ten years old!

In November of this year we celebrated our tenth anniversary, remembering our path from a Worship Group, to a Preparative Meeting, and finally to an approved Monthly Meeting for Worship in the year 2002. Friends joyfully gathered to reminisce about our beginnings, telling stories and sharing memories about the early days. While we're not sure that our Joyful Noise with drums and rattles had great spiritual beginnings, it sure was a lot of fun!

Over the ten years we have seen the meeting grow, both in numbers and in spiritual witness. Many of our activities have arisen as a result of our spiritual leadings, many of our gatherings exhibit the spirit of sharing and tender community that we started out with as a small Worship Group.

Our anniversary issue of The Quaker Heron, our occasional journal, collected key articles and stories from previous issues. This edition has become a wonderful recollection of the depth of our individual journeys and a reflection of the meaning of a Quaker Meeting for many of us.

Throughout the year we have welcomed new faces to our Meeting, inquirers and seekers from other religions as well as Friends moving to the region from elsewhere. We arranged a five-week Quakerism 101 on the origins and practice of Quakerism which was well attended. Friends appreciated more fully the spiritual depth of worship sharing.

Consonant with our concerns with building a safe community we held a threshing session on Child Safety in the spring. This threshing session was an opportunity for us to listen deeply to each other and understand each other's concerns and perspectives.

A Spiritual Knitting group was initiated in the spring and interest has been strong in gathering to develop a closer community. Over the months the knitting group has evolved and now meets as a Quaker Craft Group at Vantage House, a retirement community in Columbia.

Following a leading, one Friend led us in a silent spiritual retreat at Bon Secours Spiritual Center, fasting and praying for peace. Beginning at dawn and continuing until dusk, Friends joined when they could, and kept the spirit of the meeting. We are hoping to make this an annual event, inviting Friends throughout the region to join us.

A one-day workshop on journaling was held at Mt. Hebron House based on the pamphlet "Live The Questions: Write Into The Answers" by Barbara Parsons. New and old Friends were given blank journals and invited to begin or continue their spiritual journeys, recording their thoughts and emotions they found on their spiritual path.

Now in its fourth year, our regular Bible Study group has become an important source of spiritual nurture and mutual support for its members. We note both the commitment of steady attenders as well as the growth in attendance at that meeting. Friends are actively engaged in studying the Gospels in parallel, worshipfully examining the texts of each.

In the Spring Patapsco Friends Meeting reinstated a silent vigil for peace and social justice in Columbia, gathering Friends and friends for an hour at the 'Quaker Corner' near the Mall in central Columbia. This vigil was once again laid down in the Autumn.

Our interest in peace and social justice extended to our participation in PATH (People Acting Together in Howard County). The work of that organization bore fruit this year with the official creation of PATH and setting an agenda addressing needs relating to affordable housing, transportation, and youth. PATH has provided our Meeting with a valuable opportunity to build relationships with a wide spectrum of the religious communities in our County.

Our Spring retreat this year focused on “Creating Peace in our Personal and Public Lives” included qi gong to music, a “peace assessment” exercise, making of peace/prayer beads, a workshop on the personal journeys of peace activists Tom Fox and Max Obuszewski, attending a peace vigil in Columbia and an evening documentary on war tax resisters.

Planning and implementing a program for First Day School is done ‘in the Spirit’, and our teachers are in many ways our Spiritual leaders. Most importantly for growing our maturing Meeting, our High School young people are continuing to help teach the younger children in First Day School. Children and families joined together this year for the Annual Easter Egg hunt, for our annual First Day School picnic, and several young Friends joined the overnight camping trip at Catoctin Camps. Patapsco Meeting continues to support young Friends to attend Quaker camps in the summer. Our support is part of our wider effort to provide opportunities for all to expand their own understanding of Quakerism and engage with their spiritual leadings.

Dedicated prison visitors continued our meeting’s second year of support for South Mountain Friends Fellowship at Maryland Correctional Institute at Hagerstown (MCI-H). Each Saturday morning, two visitors join with inmates for an hour and a half of silent worship and worship sharing. Some of our visitors have participated at MCI-H in an annual four-hour Walk-a-thon sponsored by the inmates’ Junior Chamber of Commerce and as guests of an annual awards dinner for the men who participate in the Prisoners Against Teen Tragedy program (PATT). Our presence is deeply appreciated by these men and being present with them enriches our lives.

We are called to be tender to those in our meeting who are struggling with the diminishment of aging, who are being tested by the needs of children, aging parents and friends, who themselves suffer with physical or mental illness or care for afflicted loved ones. As we support Friends in these difficult times we ask, “How can we better prepare ourselves to meet these challenges in our own lives and to support others who face these challenges?”

What promised to be a small and quiet gathering on Christmas Eve, turned out to be a welcoming event with over 45 Friends and friends attending our short meeting for worship. As we enter our second decade we are excited about welcoming new faces and enjoy a fulsome sharing of adventures with our familiar Friends. We remain convinced that the light of worshipful sharing and spiritually grounded action will serve us as well in the future as it has in the past.