

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report, 2007

On March 10, Patapsco Friends Meeting received the Spiritual State of the Meeting report from the South Mountain Friends Fellowship, which meets at Maryland Correctional Institute-Hagerstown under the care of our meeting. The report indicated that the Fellowship was celebrating its second anniversary, with nine MCI attenders who are joined each Saturday by some of the nine members from PFM who support the Fellowship. The report included the query:

“How does a man in the dark prison environment follow his leadings, adhere to the foundations of his faith and live in the Light? . . . The men at South Mountain Friends Fellowship are grateful for the path that has remained lit for us, and for others to follow.”

The first wedding under the care of Patapsco Friends was held in good order on March 17 at Sandy Spring Friends Meeting House. Jamie Moloney and Carolyn Boylan were wed before a gathering of more than 100 friends and family. This was a profound opportunity for us to learn the ways of Quaker practice, and it was an emotional and spiritual introduction to Quakerism for the many guests and attenders at that meeting.

In April, PFM held its spring retreat at Sandy Spring Community House featuring a “Leadings Workshop” presented by Pat Schenck from Annapolis Meeting to help explore paths that our lives may take. We had opportunity at that gathering to get to know each other better in worship sharing, in playing games, and in attempting yogic postures.

Interest in writing, be it poetry or prose, grew out of this workshop. A Friend was led to begin a “Writing as Worship” group in the hopes we would be led spiritually deeper in our writing, as well as to explore the intersection of writing and spirituality.

Led by the spiritual rewards many garnered from meditative walking, two Friends completed a 50’ diameter model of the Santa Rosa Labyrinth, constructed of clothesline and nails, on the lawn adjacent to our Meeting at Mt. Hebron House. Not only was this a gift to Patapsco Friends, but served to make a connection between the Presbyterians and ourselves on a common project.

With the assistance of our Religious Education Committee, our young Friends have requested individual clearness committees focusing on the beginning of their life’s journey as Quakers. Each committee consists of a combination of young and older PFM participants, and the young Friends are given a copy of our Faith and Practice as a suggested guide.

Following on the theme of supporting the youth in meetings, we hosted Chesapeake Quarterly Meeting in September. Adult and youth members from several meetings in CQM participated in the afternoon session entitled “Nurturing Young Quaker Lights—Beyond Religious Education.” Participants were encouraged to address four queries: How do children and youth fit into Friends Meetings? What activities do our Meetings provide for our youth outside First Day School? How do we integrate them into the full life of the Meeting? How do we prepare young people to move out into the world as Friends and become part of the larger Quaker community?

In September PFM held a day of silent meditation, prayer and fasting for peace and social justice at Mt. Hebron House. This is a time of spiritual significance and renewal for many traditions, marked by Yom Kippur, Ramadan and the United Nations International Day of Peace. While attendance was limited, Friends who were able to come had occasion for deep centering.

Under the care of the meeting, a Friend's leading called "Cooking for Peace" combined the essential ingredients of vegetarian/vegan cooking instruction and fund raising for causes centered on global peace. These workshops have provided a focus for work that feels both meaningful and valuable to others. Cooking for Peace has been a way to acknowledge that none of us can do it alone, but by working together we can make a difference.

The Quaker Crafts Group grew out of a successful prayer shawl ministry class. Those few who participate find it to be a warm, friendly environment to work on projects and visit with Friends.

Encouraged by our Peace and Social Justice Committee we considered major world issues. The topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict revealed divisions and cleavages within the meeting which require deep spiritual searching for resolution and healing. That process continues.

Patapsco Friends Meeting's Bible Study, initiated in 2003 with Friends in Christ, meets twice a month at a member's home. The group studies a parallel text version of the three synoptic gospels, and using *Approaching the Gospels Together* by Mary Morrison as a guide, Biblical commentary and additional translations bring Light to Jesus' life and words. Numbering about six members, the group has become cohesive and caring, with discussions that range far and go deep.

On the second and fourth Sundays after Simple Meal several Friends gathered to read and ponder John Woolman's Journal. This is truly a spiritual journey into the mind of a Quaker saint who challenges us to live in the Light.

In October and November Patapsco Friends met once a week for a discussion of the six Quaker Quest pamphlets on God, Worship, Pacifism, Evil, Simplicity, and Jesus. Each pamphlet collected the thoughts of twelve ordinary British Quakers. We spent an hour discussing the ideas presented in the pamphlets and a second hour in rich worship sharing reflecting on how our lives were touched by the messages in the pamphlets. Those in attendance at these sessions felt we began to 'know each other in that which is eternal'.

The Nominating Committee spoke to all members and attenders in the autumn to discern both how they felt they could serve the meeting best, and how the meeting is serving their spiritual needs. While there was heartfelt affirmation of the care of the meeting, some Friends wished for more. We anticipate that our Spring Retreat in 2008 will focus further on how the meeting can function as a spiritual community.