

## Spiritual State of the Meeting Report – 2008

Two new Friends were welcomed into membership at Patapsco Friends Meeting during the year. Both long-time attenders, their applications for membership were brief but sincerely reflected a decision that was arrived at with much clarity. Both were welcomed with large cookies, and a great deal of love.

In the course of discussing differences among Quakers, we gathered in February to hear directly from Yearly Meeting Friends who have had experience with Friends United Meeting. The presentation was well attended and, while emotions were not hidden, a greater level of clarity and understanding was evident. In response to the concerns raised, Patapsco Friends later adopted a Minute recommending mediation between the two interests. It was felt that a process is needed to allow the various groups to have a meaningful conversation, which both respects each group's viewpoints and supports each group in listening and in considering the others' needs and interests. Using mediation does not guarantee a solution, but it does offer the opportunity to try to seek common ground and to resolve the issues in dispute.

The theme of Patapsco Friends' spring retreat for 2008 was "The Role of the Meeting in Nurturing Spirituality." The leader of the retreat was Jean-Marie Prestwidge-Barch, a member of the Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting. A major theme of our retreat was eldering each other. As a small, close group of Friends, we have tenderly wrestled with the best ways to respond to what some view as offensive behavior. We continue to work with finding ways to address these concerns and our own use of language to clarify and resolve interpersonal difficulties, when they arise. The daylong retreat combined learning, worship and fellowship in a way that was spiritually refreshing to all who participated.

In an effort to encourage Friends to deepen their spiritual search, the [Ministry and Care Committee](#) collected meditation and spiritual lessons on audio and videotape. Lessons and readings from Thich Nhat Hanh, David Freudberg, and others were selected to prompt Friends to continue their spiritual search. These tapes and CDs are now prominently displayed on the hall table, and Friends are encouraged to sign out the material for two-week periods.

The [Ministry and Care](#) Committee launched a series of "Spiritual Enrichment" sessions held on third Sundays. In October, Friends met for a worship sharing on the Quaker Quest pamphlet, "Twelve Quakers and Simplicity." The session was well attended not only by regular attenders but also by several new seekers.

On November 1, Patapsco Friends held "Sustainability Day," a full day of programs focusing on environmental concerns. The day began with a cooking workshop where we created lunch from locally grown, seasonal vegan foods. As we chopped veggies, we discussed the impact of our food choices on the planet. Following lunch, a Friend led us in Walking Meditation, a Buddhist practice which encourages each of us to make "peaceful steps upon the earth." Later in the afternoon, a session on composting, led by a Master Gardener, gave "hands-on", easy to follow tips for incorporating composting into our daily lives. Throughout the day we were called to consider our "carbon footprint" and initiate changes in our personal lives.

Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee encouraged us to provide food for the hungry by contributing to the Maryland Food Bank. Month-long food drives will now be held two times a year at Patapsco Friends Meeting. The Meeting also gathered holiday gifts for children of prison inmates through the Reindeer Project.

Patapsco Friends also completed a project that had been in the works for about ten years. Through the efforts of our Advancement and Outreach Committee, a permanent sign was purchased to direct people to our Meeting for Worship. The sign now stands on a busy thoroughfare, not far from our meeting place. When we pass by on our way to and from Meeting we are reminded of the grace that there is in waiting. In all things, each of us tries to walk in the path of the Spirit, putting one foot in front of the other with patience and awareness.

Eight Patapsco Friends and one Deer Creek Friend celebrated our fourth year of prison ministry at South Mountain Friends Fellowship, which meets at the Maryland Correctional Institute-Hagerstown. For the prisoners, it has been a year that included: long lock downs when gang wars broke out; random orders to move to a new cell with a new cellmate; and failures to have their sentences reduced, after months of preparing their pleas. Some do succeed. One is tutoring in the prison English as a Second Language program; one, a founding member of Prisoners Against Teen Tragedy, continues to tell his story to at-risk kids; and one was released to a residential drug treatment program. For us, meeting with them is a continuing revelation. No one teaches us better to wait patiently, to go to the Light within, to live life moment-to-moment in courage and hope. The following is an excerpt from a note written in a Christmas card we received from one of our attenders:

*“Dear Friends: I believe I can speak for every man at South Mountain Friends Fellowship. We really, really do appreciate your generous time, attentive ears and loving hearts. We thank each of you this year and in the coming years. Please take care and may God continue to bless you abundantly!”*

Using “Approaching the Gospels Together” as a guide, the Bible Study has been meeting two times a month for more than six years to study the records of the life of Jesus. As the seekers gather inspiration from the words of Christ, they have also formed a close bond of friendship. The group is now near the close of its study of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

In December Friends gathered for a workshop on journaling, using excerpts from the Pendle Hill pamphlet “Live the Questions: Write into the Answers” by Barbara Parsons. The meeting gifted those in attendance with journals, which we immediately used to write and share entries. In a lively discussion we considered the benefits of establishing journaling as a spiritual practice and explored what inspires us to write, and what holds us back. This workshop complements a regular monthly journaling gathering.

The Sunday before Christmas, children from the First Day School acted out an original skit at the rise of Meeting for Worship, delighting all in attendance. The joy and celebration of the season continued when Friends gathered on Christmas Eve, for worship followed by cookies and fellowship.