

# Spiritual State of the Meeting Report – 2009

## Patapsco Friends Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report For the Year 2009

*How does the Spirit prosper among us?*

Patapsco Friends Meeting has changed since its birth in 1996. What was once a small, fledgling group is now 13 years old and maturing in many ways. In the eyes of Baltimore Yearly Meeting we are no longer considered small but “medium-sized.” In 2009 we have consistently filled our meeting space with about 30 people each First Day. Individuals who attend our Meetings for Worship on a regular basis have sensed the spiritual depth of the Patapsco Friends community. The messages shared have been thoughtful, heartfelt, and spiritually uplifting.

For our Meeting, 2009 was also a year of significant loss. We said goodbye to Susan Rose, a much-loved founding member, who died on April 1. We nurtured each other in our grief, helping Susan’s family and each other by planning an outdoor memorial service. The service was conducted in the Quaker tradition.

We have celebrated this year the arrival of several energetic newcomers to our Meeting. They are young adults who have become active participants in worship and on committees. The newcomers and some long-time attenders voiced an interest in learning more about The Society of Friends. In response, we held eight sessions based on 13 chapters in the book by Marsha Holliday, “Exploring Quakerism.” Among the topics were: Unprogrammed Quaker Worship; Honoring the Spirit Within; Simplicity and Integrity; and Quaker Faith in Action. The participants celebrated the completion of the course with a festive shared meal.

In 2009, for the first time in the history of Patapsco Friends, we began having two people share the job of clerking the Meeting. Co-clerking made sense because of our size and because we have no paid staff. The co-clerks serve together for two years. The model has worked well and we would recommend it to other meetings of our size. It relieves the administrative burden that is often felt by a single clerk. It also opens the way for more members to accept the clerk position. One of the innovative ideas that came from our co-clerks this year was to make home visits to each one of our members and attenders. The visits are casual and usually include tea and cookies. They have enhanced our sense of community.

*What supports the growth of the Spirit in our lives?*

On a rainy day in October at Hebron House, Patapsco Friends conducted a silent retreat with optional fasting to receive spiritual guidance towards the goal of world peace. There was intense meditation and nonverbal communication among those present. They later described the day as a very positive and deeply felt experience.

The [Ministry and Care](#) Committee paired with the Peace and Social Concerns Committee to conduct monthly Spiritual Enrichment sessions after Meeting for Worship. Among the varied topics were: Lovingkindness Meditation; and the Quaker pamphlet, “A Tender Broken Meeting.” Patapsco Friends continued to have an active, spirit-focused First Day School, though the number of students has decreased since 2008. In the fall, we began having one class, with students ranging in age from nursery school to middle school. We have been sharing Bible stories from the “Faith and Play” and

“Godly Play” curricula. The stories have encouraged thoughtful questions and lively sharing among the students and teachers.

Adults and children at Patapsco Friends “make a joyful noise” as part of a singing group that has been meeting monthly before Meeting for Worship.

*How is the presence of Spirit manifested in our lives individually and as a meeting community?*

The Meeting continued its tradition of holding a daylong retreat in the spring. One of the primary focuses of the 2009 retreat was the concept of personal spiritual leadings. In the months since that retreat, a number of Patapsco Friends attenders have come forward with leadings that have inspired the entire Meeting. For example, a leading toward advocacy for the mentally ill led to the public showing of the educational film “Minds on the Edge.” In addition, the Peace and Social Justice committee formed an ad hoc committee to pursue advocacy and education concerning mental illness. One of our members was led to support a mission in Ethiopia that serves orphans and others in need. Her leading came to fruition in a fundraiser that took place at her home. Other members advocate for low-income housing and affordable health care in Howard County through participation in a group called People Acting Together in Howard. Still others work toward elimination of the death penalty in Maryland through letter writing and lobbying.

Patapsco Friends and one Deer Creek Friend celebrated another year of prison ministry at South Mountain Friends Fellowship, which meets at the Maryland Correctional Institution-Hagerstown. The prison ministry began about six years ago through a leading of Susan Rose. After Susan’s death, her family received many beautiful notes from prisoners expressing their sorrow at the loss of Susan. The writings of the inmates about their experiences with Susan and Quakerism were compiled into an issue of our newsletter, the Quaker Heron. Our Meeting arranged to give each of the South Mountain Friends a book of excerpts from John Woolman’s writings. The books were inscribed in memory of Susan Rose. The gifts joined two of Susan’s great passions: the prison ministry and the study of John Woolman.

In the past year, Patapsco Friends have tried to find caring ways to support individuals who reach out to us for help. Sometimes the solution has been clearly in front of us. When elderly members needed transportation to Meeting for Worship, volunteers stepped up to provide rides. At other times we struggled to find the way forward. When a local homeless woman turned to us for minimal help, Patapsco Friends felt pulled to fix all of her problems for her – something she did not want. Our challenge in the coming year is to keep our eyes and ears and hearts open to the ongoing needs within our Meeting and in our surrounding community. Most importantly we must sit in silent worship and rely on the Spirit to show us the way forward.