

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report – 2010

Patapsco Friends Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report For the Year 2010

The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.
(Psalm 121)

How does the Spirit prosper among us?

In the words of the Psalmist, Patapsco Friends Meeting experienced much “going out and coming in” throughout the year 2010. Rather than being diminished by this ebb and flow, the Spirit of our Meeting seems to have grown healthier because of these tidal riches. Several of our members have “gone out” to participate in the wider Quaker community. Two Friends traveled to Mombasa, Kenya with travel minutes from Patapsco Meeting tucked away in their luggage. They took part in the Triennial of the United Society of Friends Women International and brought back vivid tales of their deeply moving experiences there.

One frail elderly couple – long-time members of our Meeting – recently moved into assisted living at Friends House near Sandy Springs Friends Meeting. Our Meeting is challenged to find ways to keep this couple feeling supported as they go through this transition. Other Patapsco Friends have undergone a variety of life changes – new relationships, new jobs, new homes. On some First Days they choose to attend Meeting for Worship here in Ellicott City with Patapsco Friends. On other First Days these Friends attend Meeting for Worship elsewhere. When they come back to us we welcome them with open arms. Whenever possible, we keep them working on committees and special projects.

Our open arms are also extended to newcomers. People come into our Meeting for the first time and seem to be touched by the warmth they are shown. One couple moved to another state because of a job change. The following is an excerpt from a letter they wrote to our clerk after they sampled Meetings near their new home.

“We have attended activities at two separate local Friends Meetings. ... In our opinion folks at the Patapsco Meeting probably (and perhaps hopefully) don’t have any idea how wonderful the Patapsco Friends Meeting is. Granted, it’s just our first impressions of the Meetings; but at Patapsco we had a sense of warmth, community and worship from the moment we walked in the door.”

Patapsco Friends have taken these words as a reminder that we must continue to pay attention to our actions so that the spirit of warmth, community, and worship will remain with us no matter how we grow and change.

What supports the life of the Spirit in our meeting community? What challenges are we facing?

A Meditation Circle meets once a month before Meeting for Worship at Patapsco Friends. Our annual day of Silent Retreat for Peace took place in the fall. Third Sunday Spiritual Enrichment Sessions, open to adults and teens, have become a tradition among Patapsco Friends. In 2010 the range of topics was broad and their reach was far. We studied Quaker history and Pendle Hill pamphlets such as, “Members One of Another.” Patapsco Friends shared their experiences in the wider community. Friends who work for People Acting Together in Howard (PATH) described their efforts to go door-to-door in our county to spread the news about the Healthy Howard initiative. The travelers to Mombasa

spoke inspiringly about the Kenyan women they met – women who cope with “their lives of struggle, scarcity and social conflict” with a spirit of “faith, joy, hope, gratitude, courage and love.”

In the fall, our Spiritual Enrichment Sessions focused on the core Quaker Testimonies: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community and Equality. The format of these sessions was relaxed and quite interactive. We gathered around a table with lunch and tried to discover ways that the Testimonies can become a visible part of our daily lives. Friends left with a richer understanding of the words, “Let Your Lives Speak.”

Our First Day School was faced with challenges in 2010. We relied on two dedicated volunteers to teach most of the year and student numbers went up and down unpredictably. There was just one class, with students ranging in age from kindergarten to high school. We wondered, “Are we over-taxing those who volunteer?” Despite the difficulty in finding teachers, we observed positive growth and active spirits in our young people. The First Day School curriculum included parables from the Bible and universal stories, such as “The Blind Men and the Elephant.” When our Meeting hosted the Chesapeake Quarterly Meeting, the older children acted in a play that highlighted Quaker advocacy for mental health reform. The students depicted reformers such as Dorothea Dix, Moses Sheppard and Margaret Hope Bacon. It was all part of an interest session designed by our Mental Health ministry. After the students’ play, Patapsco Friends presented a panel discussion on care and advocacy for people with mental illness.

As the year ended, Patapsco’s First Day School began to see an increase in the number of elementary school children and their families. We tried to “think outside the box” and decided to experiment with a different teaching model for the winter session in 2011. In the coming year, each volunteer teacher will be responsible for just one month of teaching. The following month, a new set of volunteers will take over. When the semester ends, we will review how this new model impacts our educators and our students.

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

A community that gathers to prepare and share food with others is a joyful, spirit-filled community – even if its members have aching feet at the end of the day. That is one of the lessons that Patapsco Friends learned more than once in the year 2010.

In March, we hosted the Interim Meeting of Baltimore Yearly Meeting. Rooms for committees were arranged, Business Meeting went off without a hitch, and we served lunch to 150 Friends! In September, we hosted Chesapeake Quarterly Meeting, again putting our organizational and food-preparation skills to the test. The Patapsco Friends who took part in hosting those two major meetings felt a sense of camaraderie with their fellow volunteers. We also learned more about the wider Quaker community. Baltimore Yearly Meeting and Chesapeake Quarterly Meeting became more than just names in a book. They became the people who shared their stories and their energies with us. Our Spring Retreat also gave us opportunities to learn how Quakers live their faith in the greater world. Gary Gillespie of the American Friends Service Committee and Marion Ballard of Friends Committee on National Legislation generously spent the day with us. They led the discussions about their organizations and helped us examine our Meeting’s future path.

Reaching out to the community, we collected food for the Maryland Food Bank and shoes for the Springfield State Mental Hospital. Every Saturday morning, Friends visited [South Mountain Friends Fellowship](#) at Maryland Correctional Institution-Hagerstown (MCI-H). This marked the sixth year of

worship at MCI-H. As each year passes, South Mountain Friends — and the Patapsco Friends who worship with them — seem to grow deeper in their spirituality.

We gathered in a Friend's kitchen to prepare dinner for the homeless and hungry at the Elkridge Food Pantry. Friends contributed money for ingredients and volunteered their time in front of the stove. The project was spurred on by one of our members who followed her leading and created "Cooking for Peace." Flavorings from that leading have been seasoning the life of our Meeting for several years. Newcomers hear about us through "Cooking for Peace." And we have learned that cooking together helps us form bonds and creates a rich sense of community. Will we continue to share kitchen time in the coming year? The answer to that question is undoubtedly, "Yes."

In other areas, the answers are not so clear. Will we remain connected to Friends who seem to have slipped away and need our care? Email messages work for some, but not everyone communicates electronically — especially the older generation. When a Friend is sick or recovering from an operation will we always offer to hold a Meeting for Worship at the individual's home? Will we continue the practice of sending postcards to first-time attenders, welcoming them to Patapsco Friends and encouraging them to come again? Will Friends continue to pay attention to each other's needs and to the needs of the wider community? Those are among the questions Patapsco Friends Meeting will be asking in the year 2011 and beyond.