

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report – 2011

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?”

Attendance at Patapsco is about 25 to 30 each week, similar to that of the previous year. We have been blessed with the addition of two new members and welcomed another Friend who transferred membership to our meeting. We feel the spirit in the Meeting for Worship. Our vocal ministry seems spirit-oriented and we experience cohesiveness and a feeling of enjoyment in being with each other. The Meeting is becoming better known. There was an article about us in the local newspaper, complete with photograph. Patapsco is now on Facebook. In the wider community we are reaching out more to those in need. We are building ties with members of other religious groups in PATH, an organization in Howard County working to improve living conditions and management of the natural environment.

“What supports the growth of the Spirit in our lives?”

We have meditation and reading sessions that may lead to the Inner Light. Our clearness committee process is alive and well and provides opportunities for growth for all of us. The “Quaker Quest” spiritual development program was introduced at our annual retreat. We created a “Radical Quaker” series of discussions about matching our behavior with the Quaker testimonies. We get together for simple meals after each meeting, giving opportunity for better understanding of each other.

The Meeting took under its care the spiritual marriages of two couples. Our Meeting chooses not to perform civil marriages for couples until gay and lesbian Friends can be legally married as well. Both weddings were moving celebrations which heightened our experience of being a loving, caring community.

There are dedicated teachers for First Day classes, which include Bible stories, discussions, and crafts. A “joyful noise” is made by some of us in a singing session held each month.

“How is the presence of the spirit manifested individually and as a Meeting community?”

Many significant leadings were pursued. Each Saturday morning one person from our Meeting travels to the Maryland Correctional Institution at Hagerstown to worship with a group of inmates. The group chose the name, South Mountain Friends Fellowship, and our members have been meeting with them for eight years.

Reports of individual leadings were given in “Enhanced Spiritual” sessions held throughout the year. A young man visiting the Meeting described his work in the West Bank with impoverished farmers and his encounters with others of differing beliefs. One member of our Meeting, who works as a pastoral counselor, shared her thoughts about hospice care. Another member, who consults with companies in the United States and Canada, shared with us the sociocratic way of organizing, which has Quaker roots.

There were many other individual leadings. Some involved participation at the quarterly, yearly, and national levels. One member did intervisitation with other Meetings. Another member currently serves as the Recording Clerk for the Baltimore Yearly Meeting at the annual business sessions. Another has contributed greatly towards revision of the “Faith and Practice” manual and has arranged

for the posting of Quaker pamphlets on the Internet. He is also on the board of the Friends Journal. Many of us write articles for our meeting periodical, "The Quaker Heron." A librarian has provided valuable reading resources for our group. Our clerk and a former clerk serve on the board of Friends House in Sandy Spring, Maryland. Another member continues to share her leading of "Cooking for Peace," eating fresh, vegan meals that are environmentally responsible and that show compassion for all beings. Several of us have visited Old Town Friends Fellowship in Baltimore. One Friend feels "there is a mission for Friends in downtown Baltimore."

The Meeting's spirit was extended through the involvement of a Friend on the BYM Camping Program Committee and a Young Friend who serves on the Executive Committee of Young Friends, acting as webmaster. Patapsco had the joy of hosting the Young Friends Executive Committee for a weekend planning retreat.

Among other leadings were giving aid to homeless shelters in the county and contributing to the NAMI organization promoting mental health. A member is on the board of the Howard County NAMI Chapter and also on the Citizens Advisory Board of the Springfield State Hospital Center. Another member has worked with Springfield patients in gardening projects.

"How have we recognized and addressed or failed to address issues that have caused difficulties among us?"

1. A major change occurred in one family within the Meeting. As a result, connections with some members of the family were lost, while others remained.
2. We continue to struggle with religious education, as we have very few children. This makes it difficult to pursue a consistent curriculum.
3. We have supported each other in losses and serious illnesses. It is a challenge to continue to address long-term needs and "looking out" for people having a hard time.
4. We work to encourage attenders to return. One member regularly sends follow-up postcards to everyone who signs the guest book.
5. It is a challenge to get many people to participate in after-meeting sessions. When we have these opportunities, they are often rich, but many do not stay. We need to do more personal encouragement of individuals. We wonder if we have too many such opportunities.
6. Over the last 2-3 years we have been struggling with the question of how best to advertise our Meeting and how to reach out to those who do not have Internet access. In the fall we held a threshing session on these queries. We listened deeply to each other and agreed that we are all seeking to be visible, accessible, and welcoming. Identifying a common, overreaching goal has helped us to see the way forward and to move beyond less significant differences.