

## Spiritual State of the Meeting Report – 2013

*“What is Quaker faith? It is not a tidy package of words which you can capture at any given time and then repeat weekly at a worship service. It is an experience of discovery which starts the discoverer on a journey which is life-long.”*

*—Elise Boulding*

During the past year, we have felt guided and supported in discovery, sharing our individual journeys and discerning our path as a community. Friends sense that we are being spiritually drawn together to build an inclusive, welcoming, and safe faith community. One Friend described what has taken place in PFM this past year as a “coming together”—an intangible synergy among our many expressions of community life.

### **What supports the life of the Spirit in our meeting community? How is the presence of Spirit apparent?**

Our spiritual community was nurtured in many ways throughout the year. Our sense of fellowship deepened through an overnight Spring Retreat in the woods at a Quaker camp. Several Friends offered workshops, but the highlight was a standing-room only workshop led by a middle school Young Friend. We are also engaged, at the suggestion of the Clerk, in home visits by the Clerk and members of Ministry and Care to members and attenders. The tender outreach by the Nominating Committee to every member and attender each year also deepens our sense of commitment to each other. Our practice of sharing a simple meal after meeting (with varying degrees of simplicity) also gives us time to share ourselves.

Often, we are offered second hours sponsored by committees or individuals. For example, the peace and social concerns committee led a second hour on human trafficking that was attended by other community members. We also teamed with Sandy Spring Friends meeting to highlight the work of Friendly Water for the World. The Peace Committee used the Pendle Hill pamphlet on “Waging Peace” to explore how we live the peace testimony.

We have many opportunities to come together in smaller groups. Many of us gather frequently to read and discuss a short pamphlet (often from Pendle Hill); topics have included spiritual friendships and “the practice of the love of God.” After a discernment process in which we shared our hunger for deeper community, we began several small spiritual formation groups where we hope to know each other more deeply and help each other grow in the Spirit. A monthly Meditation Circle that meets before meeting for worship offers a chance to explore a wide variety of topics and techniques, including Tibetan singing bowls, Himalayan Salt lamps, walking, music, and guided meditations. Active support and clearness committees also draw us together to seek and share the Light.

We are graced with one or more visitors most First Days. As new people come to Meeting for Worship, they are welcomed with warmth and greeted individually after rise of Meeting. The Ministry and Care Committee and the Advancement and Outreach Committee met together to explore how we may better serve the needs and concerns of those among us and reach out to newcomers. We are starting the new year with several new community members and an infusion of energy for which we are very grateful.

This year, our community lost and celebrated the lives of two beloved members: David Johnson, who was also a member of Annapolis Meeting, and Tom Byrne, who had moved to Friends House in Sandy Spring.

During the past year, our sense of community with other Quakers has been strengthened:

- We instituted a practice of holding monthly Meetings for Worship at a senior retirement community, Vantage House, to make us more accessible for members who live in the facility.
- Acknowledging and celebrating the aging process with passion and patience, women in PFM gather with other women over 50 years old in BYM to embrace their combined wisdom as crones and create a community to nurture and support each other.
- Women from PFM came together with women from Annapolis Monthly Meeting to plan and facilitate all aspects of the BYM Women's Retreat for January 2014. The experience of working together has been richly rewarding and we appreciate the vibrant new connections.
- PFM hosted the Chesapeake Quarterly Meeting in September, where we explored "Embracing the Interfaith Community" and shared experiences working with people of other faiths.

We have also deepened our awareness of issues related to justice and equality. This year, the reading group on racism completed reading and discussing *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*. We came away with a deeper understanding of Quaker history as it relates to race. In September we joined other monthly Meetings in BYM in reading *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. This book argues that the War on Drugs in the United States was not solely about crime control, but also about the creation of a racial undercaste.

As an outgrowth of reading group discussions, as well as our experience in prison ministry, members are considering actions we can take to reform policies in the criminal justice system in Maryland and across the nation. Patapsco Friends, now joined by Friends from Frederick meeting and Goose Creek meeting, worship each Saturday with members of the South Mountain Friends Fellowship who are incarcerated in Hagerstown, Maryland. Issues related to fairness in the prison system are especially alive to those of us who have listened first-hand to the experiences of these men. Their struggle to live as Quakers in an environment charged with unpredictability and violence has touched and taught us.

### **What challenges are we facing?**

The lack of a decision by the Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) about the adoption of the draft *Faith and Practice* document has led to some uncertainty and some pain among members. We are currently using the 2013 draft as the basis for an adult series on exploring the Quaker way.

Another challenge is that we continue to have more older people than younger people active in our faith community. As children in our monthly Meeting have grown up and moved on, it has been difficult to attract families with pre-school and school age children. The Religious Education Committee has been creative and flexible in offering individualized programs for Young Friends. Our middle school Young Friend, who is a serious student of Roman history, has been studying *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius with adult Quakers. While we do not have many Young Friends at any one time, we feel that our spiritual work is to be responsive to whoever comes. Much work and thought has been given to acquiring appropriate materials and organizing them so they are ready.

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