

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report – 2014

BYM queries for 2014:

- *What supports the life of the Spirit in your Meeting community? What challenges and troubles are you facing? In what ways is the Meeting less than you would wish it to be?*
- *How does your Meeting nurture the spiritual life of members and attenders? How does your Meeting help Friends live into right relationship, “a state of harmony and balance with ourselves and our families, our communities, our government, and the world that sustains us all.”*
- *Is your Meeting as diverse as you would like it to be? How do you prepare newcomers for full participation in the life of the Meeting? What do you do to actively encourage and support the ministry and community participation of Friends of all ages—from Young Adult Friends, to families and young children, to elder Friends?*
- *How do you reach beyond the boundaries of your Meeting to strengthen Meeting practices and share the wisdom your Meeting has to offer? Do you have relationships with other Monthly Meetings? A Quarterly Meeting? Do you reach out to BYM or other Monthly Meetings when facing a challenging situation?*

Supporting the Life of the Spirit

We continue our spiritual journey as a community. We find we are being spiritually drawn together to build an inclusive, welcoming, and safe community of Friends. As one person put it: “We laugh, cry, sing, dance, and pray here. It is all good.” Several groups meet before meeting, each an opportunity for inviting the Spirit. After our worship, which is often rich and deep, we share a simple meal, fellowship, and frequent programs that give us an opportunity to “know each other in that which is eternal.” A Friend said, “No matter what is going on in your life, you can share it here and be comforted.”

We are concerned at times that there is too much traffic into and out of the meeting room that interrupts Meeting for Worship, especially when someone is sharing a message. Too-frequent movement in the room breaks our focused attention on the Light Within. Some of us would prefer a more mindful transition from worship to greetings and announcements. In the coming year we will seek to grow in awareness of the need to enter the silence gently and be attentive at all times to the Voice that speaks to us, individually and as a body, in worship.

Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Members and Attenders

A brochure for Patapsco Friends was completed in 2014. We use the brochure to welcome visitors to Patapsco Friends Meeting, “a loving community for your spiritual journey.” In our brochure we reflect that, as a community, we “listen deeply to the Spirit and each other; seek divine Truth each in our own time and way; share our spiritual journeys in community with each other; explore and support spiritual practices; help one another live more fully in the Spirit; and nurture the spiritual growth of our children.”

Although we are a small Meeting, we have many active groups that foster our spiritual fellowship. One meets monthly to discuss pamphlets on the life of the Spirit, usually chosen from the extensive library of material available from Pendle Hill. Discussions are often deep and thoughtful, encouraging Friends to relate readings to their spiritual lives and share what they find to be true.

We have been more intentional in our approach to spiritual enrichment. A prayer group, formed as a spiritual formation group, continues to meet regularly, and several other spiritual formation groups are also active. A monthly meditation group is cherished at which participants share their approaches to meditation and practice meditation together. One member commented, “We feel blessed by our union of hearts, minds, and spirit.” The group has attracted some new community members to Patapsco. The meditation group offered an exploration of meditation practices at our meeting’s annual meeting retreat, featuring speakers from within and beyond the meeting. One Friend noted that the list of possible connections she has with groups that have been formed from PFM is astonishing for a meeting of this size.

To accommodate an older member of our community who can no longer attend weekly Meetings for Worship, we continue to hold a Monthly Meeting for Worship at Vantage House, a retirement community. This intimate gathering draws 4-8 people and is meaningful to those who attend. Clearness and support committees also offer deeply rewarding and intimate spiritual experiences for those who participate. Monthly singing before meetings also nurtures community. As one Friend observed, “When I sing, I feel connected to those singing with me.”

The deepening of spiritual relationships, the coming together in small groups or as a Meeting as a whole, deep listening, the ongoing support offered in love to members and attenders –these qualities are difficult to describe, but they capture the spirit of PFM.

Welcoming and Encouraging the Participation of Members and Attenders

Toward the end of 2014 the numbers attending Meeting for Worship increased and we began to run out of chairs. Newcomers, to our delight, included parents with young children. The Religious Education Committee has organized itself so that there are teachers assigned to meet for First Day School with the different age groups, whenever they are in attendance. This has meant that the RE Committee has had to be imaginative and flexible in the arrangements. We have started meeting with the teens/pre-teens in periodic pizza nights and are reaching out to them with quarterly correspondence as well.

Advancement and Outreach continues to send postcards to guests who leave their addresses in the guest book and now sends a welcoming email as well.

We have welcomed several young Friends in the past year. While their numbers are not large, they contribute to the life of the Meeting.

Several afternoon Quaker 101 discussions were planned and presented by the Advancement and Outreach committee. These discussions focused on sections of the proposed Faith and Practice of Baltimore Yearly Meeting. However, those who attend Quakerism 101 are not always the newer or less-seasoned members we would like to see there. We need to discuss ways to attract newcomers to attend.

Reaching Beyond Our Borders

Members of our community continue to worship with the South Mountain Friends Fellowship, a group of men incarcerated in Hagerstown Correctional Institution. (Their Spiritual State of the Meeting Report is attached.) Their experiences gave a heartfelt resonance to our reading of *The New Jim Crow*. Lively, thoughtful, and at times difficult conversations about the book, combined with the moving experiences and close relationships developed over the years of the PFM prison ministry, led

to a deep commitment among some members to join the coalition led by Annapolis Friends, the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform. Others continue to meet regularly to foster awareness of related issues.

Women from PFM joined the women of Annapolis Friends meeting as members of the coordinating committee for the 2014 Women's Winter Retreat. PFM women reported that the weekend was an incredible experience, despite the bitter cold and icy conditions. The opportunity to bond with other women of all ages from BYM– to laugh, worship, sing, and create together–was exhilarating. One PFM Friend reported that her “worship sharing group was fabulous. The women were generous in their sharing and compassion.”

This year, the Advancement and Outreach committee developed and offered the Emma & Tom Byrne Peace Award. Directed to Howard County students, this award is established to recognize students who have demonstrated their commitment to” promotion of peace and peaceful resolution of conflict “in their school, their community, or in an area of conflict. While our first year did not attract applicants, we hope to widen familiarity with the award in its second year.