

Spiritual State of the Meeting - 2015

Be patterns be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you. – George Fox, 1656

Nurturing the Spiritual Life... The Light is shining brightly at Patapsco Friends Meeting. It is guiding and challenging and instructing us to more faithfully be the 'patterns' that George Fox encouraged us to be. We continually support each other in a variety of ways and patiently, with love, search for resolutions to issues within our community which trouble us.

Our weekly meetings for worship are deep, often moving and well attended. Sometimes a Friend will share a love for music and bring a musical message in song during meeting for worship. Visitors to our meeting are welcomed almost every week. Our monthly Meetings for Worship With a Concern for Business always reflect our love for each other through our listening and mindfulness of the Light. We are consciously aware of the Spirit among us.

Religious Education is always a challenge and we are continuously seeking new ways to respond to young friends who come to meeting. In addition to weekly First Day School, we offered opportunities to our young friends to meet socially at two teen and pre-teen events.

After meeting for worship Friends regularly have the opportunity to continue the exploration of our spiritual paths through study of A Course in Miracles, how we seek to let our Testimonies inform and spiritually form us (Real SPICES), or just to continue meeting for worship with other friends after the community worship period has ended. The 'Real SPICES' discussions were followed by a spiritually deepening worship sharing focused on the Quaker Quest pamphlets, "Twelve Quakers and..."

We each have an opportunity to exercise our writing skills by submitting articles for publication in our occasional newsletter, The Quaker Heron. Topics recently covered: Quakerism and Other Faiths and Growth and Change.

A small group meets regularly for meditation and to explore the practice of meditation. Another group meets to support others in our community who are caregivers. How can we be more responsive and helpful to each other?

Additionally, Patapsco Friends were very enriched to host the Interim Meeting of Baltimore Yearly Meeting. Another way we participated in the greater Quaker community of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting was to hold several meeting-wide conversations reviewing specific sections of the 2013 Revision of Faith and Practice.

We have other small groups which meet regularly. One group is on-going and devoted to reading, discussing and exploring Quaker pamphlets. A men's group meets monthly and Friendly Bunches have been re-started where Friends can enjoy each other's company over food. All these groups, large and small, serve the community to better understand what George Fox meant when he said '*Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was*' (1698)'

Patapsco Friends have long supported a ministry of visitation. A friend regularly takes a traveling minute as an introduction to monthly meetings visited and reports periodically to Ministry and Care Committee. Friends feel supported by an active program of community outreach and each of us is encouraged to participate as we feel led. We can help serve meals to those who are hungry at Our Daily Bread in Baltimore. We can engage in political and social justice outreach through our membership in People Acting Together in Howard (PATH). We can connect with our incarcerated Friends through weekly meetings for worship at Maryland Correctional Institution, Hagerstown (MCI-H), or at regularly scheduled semi-annual or annual celebrations at the prison. Additionally, several of our members participate in a reading discussion group focusing on racial issues. Others focus on issues

centering on prison reform and justice for returning citizens through their work with Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR).

Patapsco Friends is very active in the wider Quaker community, serving as leaders and board members of Quaker organization, locally, nationally and internationally.

We continue to minister to Friends who are unable to attend Meeting for Worship. Each month Friends gather for worship at a local retirement community.

We were very enriched during our Annual Retreat when we participated in a day long Workshop on Forgiveness. We were able to explore forgiveness through small group discussions and exercises. We recognize the central importance of the need to practice forgiveness and it is a frequent topic of conversation and discussion.

Patapsco Friends were active participants in the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Spiritual Formation Program. We formed small groups focused on prayer, art and following the spiritual path. Several Friends attended the weekend retreats that opened and ended the year long program.

Several women in our meeting once again were greatly enriched through their participation in the Annual Women's Retreat.

A disappointment for Patapsco Friends has been our inability to award our Emma and Tom Byrne Peace Award to honor a deserving local student for significant contributions to peace, justice and service. To date, we have not received any applications. Our efforts to establish this award continue.

Our meeting was especially enriched through a Meeting for Worship With a Concern for Marriage when we experienced a joyful blending of Quaker and Jewish traditions as two of our friends were married.

In short, the Spirit is thriving at Patapsco Friends Meeting, illuminating, leading and healing us.

