

Patapsco Friends Meeting - Spiritual State of the Meeting 2021

We appreciate the opportunity to write about the Spiritual State of our Meeting. On March 13, 2022, we met and began to share with one another what our Meeting means to us. The overall background is we had yet another year of the pandemic. Our introduction to Zoom was well worn and we were deeply grateful for the seamless manner in which our Tech Team initially created the Zoom Meetings and then moved onto creating hybrid Meetings for Worship. The hybrid meetings seemed relatively simple but, we were very aware of the work that went into creating them. It was, also, a measure of our wanting to work together that Friends agreed that despite the obvious preference for in-person gatherings, we appreciated/tolerated using technology so that we could maintain the integrity and spirituality of our Meeting.

The Meetings for Worship are the centerpiece of our life as a spiritual community. It is because of them that we have grown during the pandemic. Our Meeting for Worship is a place for solace, kindness, and the invitation to speak from Spirit about what is moving our hearts. We gather to worship, either at the Hebron House or at home, and our committees and small groups reinforce an enriched and Spirit-led Meeting. One Friend said, “if meeting had stopped it would have shattered my world.” Another said, “I don’t want to know what life would be like without our Meeting.” Meeting for Worship went on uninterrupted and for a sustained time we had an outdoor meeting which was treasured by those who attended. We, also, have Second Hours most First Days; these are often informative and clarifying as well as Spirit-enriching.

An obvious benefit of the hybrid meeting is that those who live at a distance can be part of our Meeting for Worship and can serve on our committees, etc. Due to moves and hardships, those who could not attend the in-person meetings could continue to be part of our community and to worship with us.

Reaching inward, we have a variety of small groups which sustain our Meeting and create bonding, intimacy and spiritual development. For examples, we have two Spiritual Formation groups, a Wednesday Worship with Friends, a Meditation group, a Pamphlet Reading Group, a Friendly 8’s group, a Course in Miracles group, Support Groups, Clearness Committees, and Hiking Together gatherings, etc.

We, also, have Care Partners. Ministry and Care (M&C) as well as some volunteers, divided up the names of the PFM Attenders and Members and became the Care Partner of each of the individuals on their lists. Being a Care Partner ensures that no one has been forgotten or that Friends, when ill or distraught, have someone to whom they can talk. This reaching outward ensures, we hope, that those whom we have not seen since the pandemic began know that we are hoping to see them again.

Another form of reaching out is our involvement with Returning Citizens--those who were incarcerated and who are now reintegrating into the greater community. The Returning Citizens are former members of the South Mountain Fellowship, which was located in one of the prisons in Western Maryland. PFM sponsored this fellowship and was/is committed to assisting the returning citizens in their reintegration into society at large. Also, there are still three prisoners behind bars with whom we are in touch. We, also, have members who are actively working with the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, an organization which supports effective alternatives to incarceration, while addressing inequities and allowing for the returning citizens to lead productive lives. And, finally, we have a Friend in our Meeting who is an active Board Member of the Prisoner Visitation and Support organization.

Finally, a Friend in our Meeting reaches out to other Meetings with a calling to traveling ministry. In the loving care of a support committee, he has maintained this work through the pandemic, visiting online four yearly meetings, countless local meetings and gatherings across the US and abroad.

Our Meeting, as is true of any organization of individuals, also, has faced challenges and differences. For example, Religious Education never faltered, but continued on, adjusting to a Zoom format; although, it was difficult for the children to become as engaged as when they were in-person. Fortunately, there were opportunities for outdoor activities that were most appreciated by parents and children, and with a lot of creativity some of our dedicated and imaginative teachers engaged the children while on Zoom. Currently, the children are meeting in-person.

A tender subject that we have broached in the past is to explore racism and the impact on the community. One Friend stated, "We have had long pauses and yet the interest and concern continues. We may have let it rest, but we never let it go!" During the past year, we have fruitfully created a Change Group to address racism. In doing so, we found it imperative to address where people are, not where we think they should be. One Friend commented she hoped that we can "always move forward in gentleness in listening to people. Especially when they have ideas and beliefs that are different from our own."

Another Friend mentioned that this past year has been personally turbulent. While there was conflict with some Friends, the meeting never quite let them go. This has made a huge difference even during times when they have been unable to acknowledge it. The Meeting provided a support committee that was very helpful and they know they can always go back to those Friends. They are not always the person they want to be but they know they are welcome and this is valuable in their life.

In further examples of outreach, there are PFM Friends who are involved in Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM is the larger community of Quakers that contains approximately 40 Meetings of all sizes).

PFM Friends are serving on a variety of BYM committees and have given workshops at the BYM Annual Session. A Friend noted that our commitment to the community, and to the larger community, trickles down to us and us to them.

What wisdom and tools might we share with other Meetings? We feel we have something to offer and invite anyone who wishes to attend our Meeting to do so. We struggle with immediate, concrete ways that we can help. But we are here and we are willing to share and be part of the larger community in this manner.

The Friend who wondered what life would be like without this Meeting...further questioned, “Would I even have a spiritual life? I’m amazed by people who focus on the needs of the world. I want to continue to be amazed. I thank Friends for being here with me.”

This Friend speaks my mind...as well as many others’. In this age of wars, pandemics, and serious threats to our planet, we are humbled by the richness that we can find in our blessed community, the larger community of Quakers, and fellow Seekers everywhere. Thank you, dear Spirit...

The Ministry and Care Committee
Patapsco Friends Meeting

Clerk of Patapsco Friends Meeting
Susannah Rose