

Patapsco Friend Meeting – Spiritual State of the Meeting Report 2023 Version 3

“How well is PFM acting as a conduit of the Light?” one of our members posed this query.

Acting as a Conduit of Light

A conduit is a means for moving energy like electricity from one place to another. Our Meeting is doing everything it can to move the Light we produce inside our Meeting House out to our families, communities, and the greater world.

Holding that awareness, the light can wax and wane in vocal ministry. Sometimes Spirit speaks through the person and sometimes not. Great conscious conduit of the Light! Some have experienced, when the welcome message is read, a heightened level of vocal ministry that deepens our worship.

For a small, growing Meeting, many of us wear multiple hats. We work very hard to bring Light and Love to all who enter. We can always improve and recognize that every year during our Nomination Calls. We humbly ask questions and request feedback about our Friends experience at PFM. These queries and interviews become another litmus of the flow of Spirit in our Meeting.

Fruits of those intentional conversations have led to several new opportunities for deepening spiritual connection while building knowledge about Quakerism.

Faith & Practice small study groups, and 1:1 Spiritual Friendships are programs that not only build connections between members and attenders, but also foster deeper intimacy. These programs grew out of our Nominating Committee yearly conversations with Friends. Our members and attenders express a desire to be more intimate, and better supported in their faith journey.

Holding second hour sessions have been a way to extend Light outside of our community. What we learn, we can share.

One Friend feels loved and fed when we wish each other the best. It feeds connection to the community and feels real. This year we brought back the potluck lunch! We sense a ministry of generosity that fosters a peaceful environment amongst Friends helping in the kitchen.

For a faith community that does not proselytize, it's hopeful to see young people, children and families coming. Fifteen people signed up for the email list in 2023—these are new people who want to stay in contact with us. What is God leading us to do? Is this a matter of bringing intention?

Staying Connected Virtually

Members share ways virtual connectivity enables them to walk their spiritual journeys –

One Friend said:

“I’ve been attending on zoom since the pandemic and have been so grateful to feel very much a part of the Meeting. It helps so much to keep me from being isolated. It's been a life saver. For me, Wednesday morning worship is a safe environment. I can open my heart to speak what's in my heart. I brought up the New York Times front page article *DEI to Abolish Diversity*. There are not many places I can share my heart so honestly.”

Several Friends who have been attending via Zoom since COVID are grateful to be part of the Meeting, to participate in the Wednesday morning worship, Pendle Hill morning worship, and weekly Meeting for Worship. They feel safe participating in authentic conversations about Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion. Their comfort lies in their relationships within the Meeting.

Some members work on multiple committees and lovingly support the heartbeat of PFM which is possible due to “ZOOM”. They can participate due to the availability and acceptance of remote worship and committee meetings.

Our tech team has worked incredibly hard on fine tuning our hybrid model. Other Meetings have worshipped with us to see how it can be done and use the tech team’s efforts as a model of what works.

Diversity and Racism

“The Light shines on all the different factions, and things we need to work on like a spotlight. We've had conflict arise. It's important not to shy away from it and find ways to talk about it because it's so tender. Not all Quakers are conflict averse,” said one Friend.

Another Friend responded to the third query, “Does our meeting suffer the arrogance of certainty? I'd be shocked if we didn't. I can't remember the last time I told a story where I looked bad. We don't tell stories where we are wrong- where we didn't act heroically. There's a need for vigilance. We judge, see differences. We need reflection.”

The phrase “work-in-progress” fits our meeting! There are a variety of presentations and book studies offered by the Change Group that allow us to open ourselves to issues created by racism.

One member has been surprised at what a bubble we still live in. “My parents brought us up to see social justice issues. I hear “woke,” and yet still note that we have apartheid. I thank the Change Group for moving me to open my eyes.”

Early Friends believed that the Light illuminates both the loving and unloving in each person. Having difficult conversations about racism shows how much we care for each other and value our community and equality.

Practicing the Peace Testimony

There is a sense of peace in the Meeting. Spirit is present, and at times worship feels unified and gathered. Patapsco Friend's Meeting hasn't lost sight of the orientation there is that of God in each one of us. We attempt to interact in a peaceful way and demonstrate this by listening deeply and respecting the opinions of others. If/when interpersonal conflicts arise, M&C reaches out to listen to all concerns, attempting to keep us in right relationship with each other and with Spirit.

Our involvement in community organizations, such as working with refugees and the disadvantaged, serving in the soup kitchen, prison reform,

and supporting those who struggle through PATH, are examples of how we live the peace testimony.

The PFM community works together to ensure our members/attenders are not isolated, which creates a sense of peace and community. There are many at PFM who quietly promote peace in their daily life.

PFM's Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business

We acknowledge that it is very difficult to be clerks, so everyone tries to remain positive, encouraging, and supportive of each other. Much organization takes place with the sharing of previous month's minutes and the Clerk requesting agenda items and committee reports ahead of the meeting.

How are we as a community being a conduit of the Light? We need to remind ourselves that it is a Meeting for Worship, with a Concern for Business. At times we can become fixated on the agenda. While we open Meeting for Business with queries and reflections, we need to ask ourselves, "What is God leading us to do together as a community in this moment?" If we keep that broader lens our work will be infused with attention and intention.

Meeting for Business is where we live out our faith as a community. Could our queries and quotes at the beginning of Meeting for Business be more meaningful, richer? Can we offer the clerk guidance and resources?

Accolades from within -- Given all the challenges over the past few years, seeing what the Clerks and Assistant Clerks have accomplished is incredible. Someone who rarely attends Meeting for Business stated how grateful they were for the level of detail that is in the minutes that are taken for these meetings, and the Spirit that comes through every time. Another member wanted to thank the committee for preparing the Spiritual State of the Meeting report stating that it is a "time consuming and awesome responsibility."

At times, we have had difficulty finding unity, for example, when making decisions about donations to outside organizations. We have had situations where an individual refuses to approve a decision that everyone else

favors, asserting a right to "stand in the way." This can leave those strongly favoring such a decision hurt and even offended, feeling that their concerns have been dismissed. Some have reminded us that there's no veto in Quaker process and ask, "So how can 'standing in the way' be part of Quaker process?" We are collectively tasked to let Spirit guide us to where the gathered body can find unity. That requires us to faithfully share our Spirit-led concerns and just as faithfully release them, trusting that the gathered body has heard them and will follow Spirit's leading to address them. We don't have a shared understanding of good Quaker process when we encounter such situations. Still, we manage to find work-arounds that may leave some dissatisfaction but that allow us to move forward.

In closing, we value this conscious intention to be a conduit of the Light. Many find this to be the essence of our spiritual journey. The opportunity to write the Spiritual State of the Meeting Report allowed us to hold our Meeting in the Light and consider our strengths and weaknesses.