

## **State of Society 2019**

The timeframe for some Meetings to prepare the 2019 annual State of Society Report started just before and after the turning of the year, for some in December and others in January. For many they initiated their process prior to the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and completed their reports as its reality settled into our communities and Meetings. We are sad in particular the shutdown meant that we were not able to support our prison worship groups to complete and provide reports.

To read the documents, to discern what to lift up, what to highlight, and what to summarize felt daunting in the face of all that was swirling around us all day after day. A wise Friend invited us to consider that perhaps we might want to do something different which led to the format of this year's report.

What follows are statements and ideas that in some way capture a theme, a concern, a joy, a practice from different Meeting's reports grouped as the committee under headings reflecting relevant topics. These threads form a tapestry of wisdom and experience from across New York Yearly Meeting gathered together from 35 meetings. They each stand on their own and together weave a message of how Divine guidance continues to speak to and through us as we face conflict, grief, joy and the individual and collective witness and service we offer in the world.

You may also encounter some of these same threads woven into the framework of other documents and reports during the 2020 Summer Sessions. And we invite all Friends to take the opportunity to read through each of this year's State of the Meeting reports which will be made available in a folder on the NYYM website. You may be surprised, delighted, inspired or dismayed, yet in the end amazed at the power of Love made visible throughout each of them.

## **Worship and Ministry**

We are outgrowing our space, sometimes using all our chairs.

Our attendance at worship is higher and more consistent, we are able to provide a vibrant midweek worship and worship sharing meeting, and we maintain a much adored first day school program for our small group of children

Our meeting is growing into faithfulness.

With attendance so low, we felt the stress to our spirit had reached an acute level, and some action needed to be taken to provide relief....we decided to continue as a monthly Meeting at this time, rather than becoming a worship group, but we will limit what we try to do. Rather than have no one or a single person attend a scheduled meeting for worship, we now try to keep in better contact with one another and schedule worship sessions less often than weekly, announcing them to the community through our website. We have not held regular monthly business meetings, or Religious education meetings.

The importance of silent worship is a highlight for [our meeting]: settling in, feeling enveloped in the space. The corporate nature of expectant waiting blankets and enriches our spirits.

Online worship continues and there are people joining us from other states and even other countries.

We have powerful ministry, sometimes even when the meeting is silent.

We began reading and discussing the New Testament gospels, and found that rereading them helped in the search for the life of the spirit, as well as finding new meaning in the familiar.

Prison ministry is also vibrant in our meeting if not new. It is about relationship and ministry.

New attenders and new members come with change. Their addition to worship in all forms brings new experiences and new perspectives, so while our practices may generally remain the same, the life of the meeting remains fresh, shifting in response to who is present.

Our meeting has a diverse group of members and attenders, including folks who express a deep faith in the divine, those for whom activism is a guiding spirit, and those who come in order to care for and be with other members of the community.

Our Meetings for Worship have been consistently warm and graced by Divine Presence. We have been blessed with meaningful ministry and often gathered in deeper silence this year. Although we are fewer in number these days, we feel the Spirit moving among us and we are grateful.

Minute: We believe adult Quakers hold their faith by conviction. Obtaining conviction means that experimentation and discernment are necessary. We support young people in our meeting in developing their spiritual lives throughout their childhood. In our meeting, children were designated as members at a young age by their parents. When children grow into adulthood we encourage them to consider their continued membership in and commitment to our meeting and to our Religious Society as a whole. We welcome the fellowship of persons of all ages as they explore their spiritual identity and membership status.

A real strength is how we come together in Meeting for Worship; this is our basis and what “unites and sustains us.”

All have come with hearts and minds prepared, and Meeting is rejoicing in the fresh flow of Spirit that settles upon us in that readiness of heart.

We are reminded that our connection to the Spirit and to each other will allow us to face the troubled days ahead with love in our hearts and dedication to continue the work of the Spirit.

The Divine Spirit that guides us is unchangeable and we trust to that Presence among us and within each of us to lead us through the years to come with the certainty that our faith provides.

We conscientiously increased vocal ministry during worship.

Some wish for more vocal ministry, but we all realize that it is not quantity we need, but more ministry of a certain quality. As a Meeting, we intend to educate and encourage each other in this direction.

We are a relatively quiet meeting, but our messages are from the heart and people speak when they are led.

Using a form taught by a Seneca clan mother in her teaching circle, at rise of Meeting for Worship on March 17, 2019, each person present was asked to give one word that conveyed their experience of worship together. These were recorded in sequence, and immediately arranged in lines, giving us a picture of where our Meeting was, in that moment:

Surprise:

Centering, healing silence.

Unity

Warmth

gratitude.

Pruning compassion with truth.

Hope, willow;

caring thought.

The Meeting's meditation garden continues to invite members and attenders to sit or walk quietly in visible connection with the natural world.

Meeting provides space for "things to come up" -- the room is like a big hand that can hold all types of thoughts, reflections, and issues, and that there is more space than we might initially imagine.

[Ours] is a small meeting. We don't take on huge projects. We hope that simply by keeping the doors open we stand as a resource for spiritual light and solace to the community of Friends and to the broader public. We endeavor to carry a spirit of loving concern with us as we face the reality of everyday life.

### **Life of the Meeting – Inreach and Outreach**

"Inreach" — how to support and enhance life of the Meeting

Beginning in July, we welcomed New York Quarterly Meeting's proposal to observe a year of Jubilee as a time of intentional repose. With discussions and time, we came to embrace and give shape to our range of perspectives - whether and what to set aside, and what new opportunities to create.

It is important to remember that the Spirit is not absent from our Meeting. Could it be that we have been blocking ourselves from the light of the Spirit in our struggle to communicate and work through

difficult matters together?

Our social room and its table have come to have a sacred feeling this year because of our growing sense of community.

Our membership and attendance have stayed steady. We have recognized, more than ever, the importance of the meeting community.

Having each other in our lives is deeply meaningful. It feels good to have an intact community.

An effort has been made to develop smaller jobs that an attender can do and ways to contribute to the life of the meeting.

While our size remains tiny, participants speak of expanded opportunities.

Spirit has been most visible in our meeting this year as we have comforted and supported each other in a year of considerable loss.

[Creating]....deep opportunities for people to share their insights, fears and questions about race, white privilege and how Friends might respond.

The Manasquan member who maintains the meeting Face Book page created an Instagram page this past year. Both pages have elicited interest and response. Also, first- time attenders have remarked that they were drawn to the meeting by our well-managed website.

There is a need for history and an awareness of our history within our meetings.

In many ways, Meeting feels alive, partly because we remember those who have passed, whose lives gave testimony to their beliefs, and who trusted Meeting to be with them in their final and most intimate moments

Each of us, along with our words, is but one precious thread speaking its truth, while seeking to be woven into and serving to strengthen the fabric of our community.

New, younger attenders have given us the opportunity to practice and to demonstrate that it is safe to talk, even if you don't agree; that questions are more valuable than answers; that it is OK to acknowledge the things we just don't know or have a response to; and that community is based on relationships of equals.

Responding to a need to nurture new adult attenders, we are presented with the opportunity for all to discover more about Quakerism and to explore and deepen our spirituality.

Our Adult Education and Spiritual Nurture Committee alternates between Quakerism 101 one month and worship sharing about our experiences of that morning's meeting for worship the next. We continue (not without some struggle) to provide a vibrant Social Hour after meeting for worship that is a portal for new and old Friends to transit from worship to Fellowship.

How do our various and individual approaches to membership affect our integrity as a meeting?

We wish for greater diversity.

We are attempting to deal with disagreements on a profound level, and to learn how to remain a community even when individuals find themselves in discord. Our listening circles have provided us with an opportunity to work through these disagreements by speaking honestly and listening sincerely to one another.

As we attempt to meet the various needs within our own faith community, we have become aware that this requires openness, persistence, patience and letting go of the fear that each attempt may not unfold as hoped for.

As a meeting we were able to move beyond a seeming impasse and start working towards long needed conflict transformation.

In our monthly gathering of "Moving with Spirit," we dance together, soaring beyond our words. We also support each other in our artistic endeavors.

### **Business and Care of Space and Place**

The special care of our grounds is part of our meeting's ministry.

The cost and strain of maintaining our large property is a continuing concern as we labor to seek unity on what may be right stewardship of those abundant assets.

Importantly we have only three members who make significant, continued contributions to running the Meeting. We have managed to keep the nursery school running and maintain the building but it is difficult, when problems arise, to deal with them in a timely, professional, economical way.

Friends found Spirit at work in our discernment around replacing carpeting, repainting, and refreshing rooms in the meetinghouse, as we were encouraged to consider the environmental impact of replacing and ecologically disposing of old carpet, and replacing furniture with gently used rather than new pieces.

One of our goals in building our Meeting House was to provide a space for the community to participate in a variety of activities as well as to issue an invitation to join our community.

We have put in place a plan of how to respond to an emergency should it occur during our worship time.

[We as a meeting] recognize our challenge to know and act recognizing "that there is that of God in

everyone,” and George Fox’s teaching of consensus and that nobody’s will should be imposed on others.

As a small meeting, we function well as a “committee of the whole.” Members and attenders are generous in the ways they contribute to and participate in the life of the meeting, and it is believed that this comes from a spiritual force felt in worship that binds us.

The Life of the Spirit is visible in the increased desire for, and reinstatement of, a nominating committee and separate committees to help channel the latent energy and capabilities of our members and attenders.

Too often a meeting focuses on preservation of the institution instead of serving the community.

### **First Day School and Intergenerational Activities**

First Day School has been a welcoming space for the children to be heard, to hear from each other and from adults that are not their parents, and to play and connect with each other.

We welcome our kids and respect them.

We remain committed to encouraging intergenerational activities

The small moment when children come down to worship feels big, as there is something wondrous in their intermingling with adults, as they increasingly become an important part of the community.

### **Witness and Service**

Where is the spark that Quakers used to have?

Our experience more than ever in 2019 was that our witness work attracted new attenders to our worship and our community.

Young Peacemakers Week (YPW), held this past summer of 2019, our urban day camp, hosted 36 young people between grades 2 and 8, plus 4 delightful teenagers, for a week of bearing witness to our Quaker Peace Testimony.

We continue our monthly Meeting Peace Vigil in front of the State Capitol.

Our concerns have centered on Gun Violence in our society and culture.

We feel a sense of balance which comes from grounding our actions in “old” values, priorities, and ideas but updating how we address issues based on the “new” of what is going on in the world

now.

One Friend noted that she tries to support organizations that do good work, but it's essential that there be a call behind such activism. Though we recognize that many Friends are active in their professional lives and look forward to the Meeting for peace, if everyone comes as an escape and is not open to hearing a call, that presents a problem.

Our regular participation in a variety of local advocacy and justice groups shows an ongoing commitment to making the world a better place.

Several people from other faiths who attended our gun-control vigil stated that ours is the only house of worship in the community willing to confront controversial issues. These remarks were both a confirmation of our calling and a sobering challenge. If Quakers are not willing to step forward to offer space and opportunity for like-minded people to gather, then who will? Whether we seek to end violence against the earth or earth's inhabitants, we must be prepared to do what God requires of us.

Lofty thoughts on theory and policy manifest themselves on the ground with lobbying, letter writing, making phone calls, visiting representatives in Albany, and maintaining a relationship with the men in the worship group at the Woodbourne Correctional Facility. When we live the lives that we preach, we become both a mystical and practical religion.

Though our meeting occasionally experiences doubts about our long-term future, we are joyful that the continued existence of our witness demonstrates that the Spirit is present among us and works through us to help others in our world.

Meeting offers a place to worship together, as well as offers a way to communally make a positive impact on our world and the lives of others.