

Lancaster Monthly Meeting, State of the Meeting Report 2005.

This past year, 2005, was a year of leadings for Lancaster Monthly Meeting.

As individuals, and as a group, we were deeply moved by the human and environmental tragedies resulting from the war in Iraq. As individuals, we responded with great energy and focus. And as a group, we responded with extraordinary unity.

Early in the year, the Peace and Social Concerns Committee began to explore the possibility of bringing the AFSC "Eyes Wide Open" exhibit to Lancaster. By early summer, the Meeting was presented with mounting financial and logistical challenges surrounding this proposed event. In an inspired Meeting for Business, Friends found a powerful consensus to continue with this project.

This leading resulted in a cooperative effort with The Lancaster Interchurch Peace Witness, Lancaster Coalition for Peace and Justice, Lancaster Theological Seminary, Women in Black and laity from mainline and historic peace churches, and Franklin and Marshall College to bring the exhibit here to the F&M campus for the three days of September 23-25th. The exhibit drew an estimated 2500 people to view rows of combat boots representing each of the American service men and women killed in Iraq up to that date, and to walk a labyrinth made up of Iraq shoes representing all of the Iraq men, women and children killed as the result of the war. This exhibit also received prominent coverage in the Lancaster paper, bringing the human cost of war to thousands of local readers.

This concern regarding the war in Iraq also led members of Meeting to continue to lead local peace demonstrations. This included weekly vigils on the courthouse steps and monthly vigils in downtown Penn Square.

As a Meeting, we continued to express our social and political concerns through letters and emails. We were grateful to those Friends who provided these opportunities and were a channel of information from PYM, AFSC and FCNL.

While we were acting on our social concerns, we were supported by a strong leading to deepen our spiritual seeking. Worship and Ministry nurtured this leading by creating and supporting opportunities for small group work. In the first half the year, about forty Friends were participating in the Spiritual Formation program, which concluded with a retreat on "Discerning Spiritual Gifts." In October, Friendly Eights groups were formed to meet monthly for a shared meal, for spiritual support and for a discussion of readings themed "Exploring the Quaker Way." About fifty people participated in seven of these groups. Friends also organized and participated in an annual retreat led by Marcelle Martin centered on "Experiment with Light". Subsequently, two "Light Groups" began to meet using the guided meditation material developed by Rex Ambler.

During this year of activism and spiritual work, we kept our balance by having some fun together.

We are especially grateful to our Social Committee who consistently encouraged us to lighten up. Through this committee, we have celebrated with grace and ease. These Friends organized community potlucks and pre-forum snack times, summer picnic and Halloween party, frugal

meal and Christmas candlelight dinner and our New Year's Eve party. All of these events were constant reminders of the rejuvenating power of having a good time.

We also relaxed and enjoyed some Friendly culture and fellowship with our monthly book club and our annual art show. We explored mutual interests and shared personal experiences at our Science and Spirituality monthly gatherings, where we hosted guest speakers and used the study guide from the movie "What the Bleep Do We Know." Our Healing Racism group wisely continued to combine serious business with a little fun through their monthly dinners.

While this was happening, Friends on all of our committees continued to work faithfully to address our cares and concerns.

Through the Peace and Social Concerns committee, the Meeting:

- Continued to support the Eisemans' school project in Lesotho, South Africa with books and school supplies and also provided six students with three-year scholarships.
- Gave financial support to the AFSC's Tsunami relief program.
- Began efforts to support a Meshketian Turkish refugee family.
- Funded Alternative to Violence, AVP training sessions at the Meeting house and sent two meeting members to the national conference

Through the Healing Racism group, the Meeting:

- Sponsored a 2-day event led by Carlton Ashby, Approximately 50 people, including local teachers, parents and Meeting members attended the Saturday workshop on successful strategies for educating African-American males.
- Looked closely at some business practices within our community.
- Created and financed national ads in an effort to recruit minority teachers for Lancaster schools.

Through Worship and Ministry, the Meeting:

- Sponsored six attenders to the Pendle Hill Inquirer's Weekend.
- Supported the weekly Spiritual Oasis group, in its second year.

Through the Environmental Concerns Committee, the Meeting:

- Sponsored an Earth Day forum on land preservation in Lancaster County.
- Sponsored a trip to Stargazer Winery to view a working solar energy system.
- Continued efforts at "greening" the Meeting house through our purchases of office and cleaning supplies, and energy saving light bulbs.

Through the Library Committee, the Meeting:

- Made available the materials used by Spiritual Formation and Friendly Eights groups.
- Gratefully received Jack Monger's book collection. Some books went to the Meeting library; some were sold to raise funds for new book purchases.

Through the Forum Committee, the Meeting reflected the leadings of committees and individuals, and scheduled a variety of forums, with an average attendance of 25 Friends.

- Some of the forums provided an opportunity to hear visitors and their concerns: Kerstin Helin (AFSC), Thom Jevons (PYM General Secretary), Dave Zarembka (African Great Lakes Initiative).
- Some forums supported our spiritual seeking for our adults and children: Celtic Spirituality, Individual Spiritual Journeys, Godly Play.
- Some forums reflected the wide reach of our social concerns and activism: AVP Work in Bosnia, Working Group on Conscience and War, The State of Hate in Pennsylvania.

Through the First Day School Committee, the Meeting:

- Continued a two-semester system with three core teachers who led the full year, providing continuity for the children. Overall, there were 15 core teachers and 37 other adults, working with anywhere from 12 to 35 children in attendance.
- Sponsored one Friend to become a certified teacher of the Godly Play method. Plans were made to test this curriculum with our preschoolers early next year.
- Established safety guidelines and instituted a process to screen childcare workers.
- Facilitated monthly worship sharing with the high school students.
- Assumed responsibility for arranging childcare for Meeting for Worship, forum times and other Meeting events. The FDS committee felt heavily burdened by this additional scheduling responsibility added to a long list of ongoing activities. They looked forward to additional help from the Meeting in 2006.

Camp Foxtales (not a part of FDS) successfully ran their weeklong summer day camp, focusing on peace and social justice issues.

Through the Property Committee and the Garden Committee, the Meeting:

- Organized spring and fall workdays.
- Supervised outside contractors for a portion of building cleaning and maintenance.
- Oversaw the weekly sharing of our building with a 12-step ACA group and The Disciples United Community Church.

A new committee, the Personnel Committee, was formed to follow up on Meeting concerns regarding policies and procedures for paid workers. The Meeting had no employees, but did have independent contractors for childcare and property maintenance.

Through the Scholarship and Loan Committee, the Meeting made loans of \$2,000 each to three students from the Meeting who were attending institutions of higher learning.

Guided by our Finance Committee, many Friends altered their donation schedule and made regular contributions during the year, rather than one contribution in December. This made it easier for us to meet all real expenses during the year.

During 2005, the Meeting continued to be blessed and supported by many members whose activities are not specifically mentioned here. Many of us have been the recipients of their generous care and we take this opportunity to express our gratitude for these unnamed but cherished Friends.

In reviewing our year, our members and attendees seem to be both reflective and active—grounded in our faith and practice and open to new possibilities or new leadings. At this time, we bring a thoughtful optimism to 2006, both for our Meeting and for the world.

Respectfully submitted February 2006: Amanda Anthony-Kemp, Kay Lahr, Judi Rettich