

2007 State of the Meeting Report

Lancaster Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

In 2007, the members and attenders of Lancaster Monthly Meeting (LMM) demonstrated commitment to both nurture of the body of the Meeting and care for the wider community through words, works, and worship. This commitment is reflected in the scrutiny to which the Meeting subjected itself in the Deepening and Strengthening retreats held toward the end of the year. The results of those retreats provided a powerful and united focus for the future of the Meeting, identifying major areas of concern to be discussed later in this report.

As a whole, the Meeting resembles a family, a group of people who take care of each other. At times, however, conflicts arise as they do in any family. Some appreciate the process that calls for sharing and listening to all points of view, allowing each individual to be heard and leaving an opportunity for other ways to open to the community. Others feel that the process can mask the conflict to the point where it is no longer seen as existing, or that the desire to not prolong the process keeps some individuals from speaking plainly.

Conflict resolution is not an issue of majority rule; at times, the minority voice or even the voice of an individual can hold the truth when considering an issue. While there are times when an individual may be holding on to a position out of ego, there are also times when the individual truly is right and the majority needs to change: for example, John Woolman's opposition to slavery.

The members and attenders of Lancaster Monthly Meeting are sensitive to the needs of others; at times, some said, this sensitivity prevents the true sense of an issue or conflict to be addressed. At the same time, many expressed appreciation for the gentle care they received, whether for a personal issue or a Meeting-wide concern. It was also noted that many within the Meeting are ready to offer assistance for any need that arises but are curiously reluctant to ask for help for their own needs or issues.

Participation in the "Knowing Our Self as a Meeting" program, through Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's (PYM) Center for Deepening and Strengthening Our Meetings led Lancaster Monthly Meeting's main activity in 2007.

The strength and scope of Lancaster Monthly Meeting is well-represented in the following committee activities.

Ninety-nine members and attenders submitted written answers to a questionnaire. A representative from the Center's led two Saturday morning retreats in late October. The first retreat focused on realistically assessing our strengths and challenges. The second explored areas of concern: welcoming newcomers, nurturing our children's spiritual life, nurturing the next generation of leaders, dealing constructively with differences and conflict, and providing pastoral care for all. In 2008, a Deepening and Strengthening Coordinating Committee will seek ways to keep these concerns before the Meeting in small groups and standing committees.

The coordinating committee has perceived two notable truths to name and honor. Many Friends treasure what a gift this Meeting community is for them. Yet, many also feel a hunger to go deeper, to build on our many strengths and resources and to give ourselves over more completely to the work of the Spirit.

The Peace and Social Concerns Committee's focus for the year was promoting informed military recruitment efforts in high schools by training student volunteers as facilitators.

The committee also supported Meeting members in providing Alternatives to Violence Project training in Palestine and Guatemala, collecting food for the homeless, helping a volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans and providing financial assistance to the high school Peace Essay Contest, led by the Lancaster Interfaith Peace Witness. The committee also purchased space on a flashing billboard for the month of January in a prime city location with the message, "War is Not the Answer," modified criteria for supporting outside organizations and educated the Meeting on local poverty.

This committee is one component of the Meeting's decentralized efforts to deal with peace and social issues. Other components include: a Healing Racism Working Group, Peaceful Families, Spiritual Oasis, Alternatives to Violence Project, Courthouse Steps Peace Vigil, FCNL Contact, support to several national Quaker peace organizations, PYM Peace and Concerns Standing Committee, Milner Grants and the Finance Committee grants to nonprofit organizations.

The Garden Committee maintained the Meetinghouse grounds. Committee members and volunteers weeded and maintained specific areas on their own. Meeting members and attenders tackled major weeding, pruning, and mulching during spring and fall workdays. 'Gardening' parties filled in the gaps. The committee also added a birdbath to the Memorial Garden, rearranged plants and added evergreen shrubs.

Care and Counsel continued to organize small groups for the support and clearness of Meeting members and provided clearness committees for membership. A revised member/attender list was developed under the care of this committee. The committee works to respond to needs of the community by personal contact, offers of support, and caring response to community members' joys and sorrows. A Comfort and Assistance Committee supports the Care and Counsel committee's work with notes, flowers, and meals. Care and Counsel led Meeting through reconsideration of a minute on committed relationships. A memorial service for Wilberta Hardy was held under the care of this committee.

Worship and Ministry's biggest accomplishment was to bring the Deepening and Strengthening Program to our Meeting. This work will continue to unfold over the next several years and benefit the growth of our Meeting. A major challenge this year has been concern with the impact of hot and humid weather on some of the Meeting members and attenders; the heat and humidity prohibits these individuals from attending Meeting for Worship. An ad hoc committee will address the issue.

The committee organized and supported a Friendly Eights program that involved 50 people from our Meeting. With the help of the Milner Fund, the committee sent 10 people to Inquirer's Weekends at Pendle Hill. A 9 a.m. Sunday Bible Study began with about 10 regular participants.

The committee also supported the intergenerational worships planned by First Day School, such as when a Spirituality and Science group made aspects of science accessible to attendees, ranging from pre-schoolers to grandparents, and constantly considered how to support depth in our Meetings for Worship. The committee especially appreciates those who arrive on time for Meeting for Worship and keep entrances and exits to a minimum.

The First Day School Committee diligently nurtured the spiritual lives of 41 of our children. The pre-school students explored their spirituality and nature while the primary and elementary students were enriched by the Godly Play method. The middle school students focused on service and Quaker history, and the high school youth have benefited from the input of various programs and committees. FDS continues to need the involvement by newer members/attenders of Meeting.

The Library Committee has made efforts to encourage all to borrow books from the Meeting library and to have people return books that they have borrowed. We are purchasing new books on Quakerism to be of interest to new attenders as well as members.

Forums help meet various needs of the LMM community, both individual and communal. They contribute to community building by bringing people together over common interests and providing a space for dealing with difficult issues. They are a place for information sharing on concerns and activism, for committees to engage with our community, and for individuals outside our meeting to speak to us. They enrich our spiritual life in various ways and allow individuals to share their creative life with the community.

Social Committee provides weekly coffee and snacks and monthly cooperative meals. Annual events include a picnic, frugal meal, Christmas candlelight dinner and a New Year's celebration. The committee has initiated the use of "Fair Trade" coffee and cocoa at Meeting events and makes them available for individuals to purchase.

Finance Committee reported that the Meeting 2007's income exceeded its expenses.

In 2007, LMM had four transfers in from other meetings, five new members, one minor member who became a full member and two releases from membership. Total membership in 2006 was 176. With the changes, the new total is 183, a net increase of seven. (Note that the change from minor to full does not change the total.)

In conclusion, 2007 was a busy and joyful time for Lancaster Monthly Meeting. We not only learned more about our strengths and weaknesses but also laid the foundation for future growth and spiritual enrichment.

Respectfully submitted,

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Jean Eaton, ad hoc committee member

Cynthia Hummel, ad hoc committee member