

Lancaster Monthly Meeting Report on the State of the Meeting in 2017

Friends gathered on Sunday, Jan. 28, 2018, to discuss the state of our Monthly Meeting. Queries addressed the fruits of the Spirit evidenced in our Meeting community, the challenges we have had and met this year, the challenges we still face, and the work we have done seeking to heal racism. About 28 Friends attended; we gathered in small groups to discuss the queries and then shared our responses. The following is a summary of those responses.

We have a vital, active, engaged community of supportive Friends. We have gifted people engaged in a wide variety of tasks both within and beyond the Meeting, and their faithfulness to Spirit, to our beloved community, and to the betterment of the world is strikingly evident. We have much to celebrate here, much for which to be grateful, yet important challenges to work through together as we grow in Spirit and in Love.

One of the most evident fruits of the Spirit is the work it leads us to do in the greater community and in the world. As John Youngblut, wrote: "It is contemplative prayer that confirms the inseparable unity of all things. From it springs the passion for social action that does not grow weary in well-doing." ("For That Solitary Individual" PHP 316.)

We had many projects helping those in places beyond the United States that were in desperate need of care. Two Friends spent 18 months in Malawi where they brought medical and spiritual care to the community there. Another Friend traveled once again, with two of our Young Friends, to Vietnam to bring needed support and material goods to several orphanages. Our Alternatives to Violence emissaries continued their work in Guatemala, Palestine, Israel, and the Gaza Strip, teaching people living with violence ways to find peace with each other and beyond. Another group of Friends went to Honduras with Shoulder-to-Shoulder to support medical work there and bring eyeglasses and eye care. Yarn Friends sent hand-knit baby items to Korea. Recently, a Friend organized a shipment of solar lights for citizens in Puerto Rico who are still struggling from the effects of the recent hurricane.

Our spiritual energy and gifts have also been shown in projects within our local community. Members of our Meeting were founders and are leaders of the local Peace Action Network; supported RMO, an organization for Returning Citizens; worked for and gave leadership to Advoz, which offers restorative justice practices and conflict mediation; worked to oppose the Atlantic Sunrise Pipeline in Lancaster, work that included numerous meetings, protests and a photographic book of the project; sent six members to the Friends Committee on National Legislation Annual Conference in November as well as establishing an FCNL Advocacy team to visit legislators and send letters to the editor of the local paper. Our FCNL letter-writing campaign continued monthly, led by our beloved Friend, recently deceased, Pat Lea. Our Healing Racism group, among other activities listed below, built and conveyed an isolation cell to various locations to illustrate the cruelty of mass incarceration. A concern for our environment manifested itself in work to encourage vegetarianism and other planet-friendly changes we can make in our daily living habits.

Within our own Meeting community, Spirit has flourished. Our First Day School has had a vibrant year. The children are coming into worship with us and participating in both worship and the sharing of joys and concerns. There has been renewed energy among the teachers, especially because of Friends' willingness to volunteer. During the summer, FDS was led by various Meeting committees, involving the children more closely in the work of our community. Camp Foxtales was again well-attended and enthusiastically received by participating children and adults. The Adult First Day School continued to offer a variety programs, seeking to enhance our spiritual lives as well as the closeness of our community. In the fall, Marcelle Martin bought us a workshop on deepening our spiritual journeys, and in the summer, a retreat for renewal at

Mariawald was offered to Friends. Spiritual Friendship groups flourished, as did Friendly 8's programs.

Our building has also been faithfully cared for. The Garden Committee continues to create aesthetically appealing surroundings, inviting to birds and other friendly creatures. A challenge was finding a replacement maintenance team, but that was patiently and lovingly accomplished and its good work is obvious. After years of discussion, sometimes heated, our Property Committee provided us with an air conditioning system for the worship room that meets our needs for quiet as well as for varied temperatures. They also provided improved hearing devices for use in the worship room. The same committee, with the help of another friend, recently rescued us from the effects of a frozen pipe and the subsequent flooding in the kitchen and classroom area. They are now carefully overseeing repairs.

The Finance Committee has labored with us to keep expenditures within our means, in spite of some unusual expenses and an overall decline in donations over the last several years. We are grateful that the Meeting remains on solid financial ground and there are adequate, and even generous, funds available for the work of our many committees.

All this good work is grounded in the spiritual life of the meeting which gives us the energy and motivation. We work from a centered place. One Friend noted that he was gratified to have come back to our community, after a two-year absence, to find a place where love and care were clearly evident.

But our Meeting has challenges, some of which we have yet to resolve. Friends mentioned that our vocal ministry is sometimes not sufficiently weighty, and the covered meeting experience is lacking. The general busy-ness of our lives has an impact on our Meeting, diverting our energies and Spirit. We continue to lack ethnic diversity and struggle with how to become a more visibly inclusive community. Our members are aging, and we may need to do more to help them attend meeting. While we are delighted that we have had new members and attenders this year, we have lost some as well. And we want and need to bring younger members and their children into the community. Financially, we were distressed that it was necessary to drastically reduce our support to Friends' organizations this year, such as FCNL, American Friends Service Committee, Friends World Committee on Consultation, etc. to token amounts.

Because working to overcome our own racism has become a predominant challenge in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, we were led to examine our own anti-racism work. We are grateful that our Healing Racism group has done this essential work for 10 years. Friends continue to support Crispus Attucks, the Race Against Racism, the Martin Luther King breakfast, work in voter registration, anti-mass incarceration projects, Yarn Friends' work at Brightside, and relevant letters to the editor. We are blessed by the efforts of a Friend of color, who brought a 6-week workshop to our community and continues to devote her life to anti-racism work.

While our awareness is growing, we need to continue to grow our capacity to notice our own racism, to pause and focus on what's happening within us, to apologize when our failings are perceived. One Friend suggested what we take ourselves to places that are out of our comfort zone, where there is ethnic diversity, to the upcoming Islamic Conference, for example. Because Quakers have a history in anti-racism work, we will find ourselves welcome. One Friend is participating in Bible Study at Bethel AME. One Friend advised that we avoid using abstract, academic, and coded language, that we make ourselves more open when we tell our stories.

As a Meeting community, we are blessed by the presence of the Spirit in our midst and by the many gifts of our members and attenders. We are always challenged to continue to follow the Light. With the strength, commitment and faithfulness of our community, we are hopeful that our challenges will be met. It is key that we stay grounded in the Spirit, remembering that this is the source of our action both within the Meeting and in the world.