

Lancaster Monthly Meeting Report on the State of the Meeting in 2018

Friends gathered on Sunday, March 3, 2019, to discuss the state of our Monthly Meeting. Queries addressed the fruits of the Spirit, the joys, evidenced in our Meeting community, the challenges we faced as a Meeting community and ways we met those challenges. In many cases the fruits of the Spirit and the challenges were two sides of a coin. About 30 Friends attended. We gathered in small groups to discuss the queries and then shared our responses. The following is a summary of those responses.

Continuing growth of our Meeting has brought new energy and the challenges of growth, of welcoming and getting to know newcomers, expanding our First Day School program, and providing opportunities for building community and for spiritual growth and learning. A Friend wondered if we need a handout for newcomers that would inform them about our structure such as committees.

Our active and vibrant First Day School program socializes our children and youth and nurtures them spiritually. We continue working to include them in Meeting for Worship. Currently they join Meeting at 10:40 and stay through joys and concerns and rise of Meeting. Integrating youth into our community is an ongoing challenge.

Friends appreciated the many opportunities for building community, including sharing joys and concerns in Meeting for Worship, the social hour following Meeting for Worship, and our diverse Friendly Eight groups, all making it easy to meet and get to know people, though one Friend expressed the need for more time for open-ended visiting and socializing. The bulletin board with photos of Friends helps us connect names and faces. Projects such as the print sale and Meeting t-shirts and activism through our FCNL advocacy group, AVP program and the work of the Healing Racism group all help to bring us together. Our website is kept current and the weekly e-news and monthly newsletter provide up-to-date information on Meeting activities and events.

Opportunities for spiritual growth and learning are abundant. The Adult First Day School has enlivened us with its spirit of intellectual ferment. Quiet is returning to Meeting for Worship though we are still dealing with issues of closing meeting, the interruptions of Friends entering and leaving, and the quality of worship, especially vocal ministry. We appreciated Worship & Ministry Committee's approach to working through these issues with transparency.

Caring for individuals in need has been both a joy and a challenge. A particular joy has been having a family from the Democratic Republic of Congo join our Meeting. The family has been both a blessing and a challenge, with the need for many volunteers to help them in their adjustments to living in the US. A Friend reminded us that people who aren't coming to Meeting sometimes need repeated contact and little pushes to help them get past obstacles. Also, many in our Meeting are aging and may need help to stay involved in meeting.

One Friend rejoiced that men and women are equal here. Others spoke of the acceptance of all genders and the embrace of eccentricity, of individuals who are "oddbods," with respect and affection. We are waking up to white privilege, though understanding and dealing with racism remains a challenge, as does our lack of diversity in terms of class, political perspectives and race.

In 2018, for the first time in several years, our income equalled our expenses, which was a joy, but concerns about income continue. When our treasurer stepped down, the Finance Committee

assumed his duties—a big challenge. The committee continues to work to figure out ways to deal with everything.

Friends named other fruits of the Spirit: our international outreach in Guatemala, the Middle East and elsewhere; having a Recording Clerk with skill and integrity; improvements in the care of our property. They also named challenges: the need for more activism in our current political climate; and the Quaker School proposal, which is controversial. A Friend asked: What does it mean that so many on our member/attender list are never in Meeting?

One Friend wondered about the busyness of our lives, our over-committedness, our paying for services formerly done by Friends. Are we too busy? What is ours to do? Do we need to "Do less but do it better," as Brian Drayton advised?

Another Friend spoke of how we tend to ignore some fruits of the Spirit within Meeting because we take them for granted, for example, Social Committee's contributions and our solar panels. They are invisible to us but they are helping to make our community strong and whole. Likewise, many problems are invisible to us because we don't want to face them or we haven't developed sufficient awareness of them. The effects of class, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, our own homogeneity, and conflicts that are unspoken but unresolved all weigh on us even if we do not see them. Perhaps it would be valuable to spend more time to try to see and name our unseen gifts and deficits, though maybe such an exercise would be pointless navel-gazing. Whatever the case, let's be humble in our self-assessment, knowing we are missing a lot.

Another Friend was struck by the paradox that we treasure and value this community but we all wish it were better, that we could go deeper. If we saw only the joys we'd become complacent and self-satisfied, but if we saw only the shortcomings, we'd become cynical. What is the balance here?

We concluded with gratitude to each other for the faithfulness, commitment and love shown by so many Friends.