

## Meeting Accompaniment Group

Friends gathered to reflect on common themes in State of Society reports at NEYM's second "Meeting for Listening" in June. The majority of the 30 monthly meetings which submitted reports in advance reported that the number of Friends actively engaged in the work of their meeting is stable. Of those that reported changed levels of engagement, three times as many meetings reported an increase in active individuals as reported a decline in participation.

Meetings are emerging from the disruption of Covid to focus on a simple question: "What supports spiritual health in our meeting?" Some meetings remain in unsettled discernment about the if's and how's of technology use. Some meetings, with new-found energy around experimentation, are exploring right-sized approaches to service and community life.

Change, and the discernment that leads to it, is not without challenge. Yet many meetings are finding refreshment as they explore structural shifts. Not surprisingly, there is a diversity of approaches to these experiments. What emerging structures look like is unique to the context and capacities of each meeting community.

- One meeting, discerning with certainty that their worship and care for each other was deep and life-giving—and that the demands of being a monthly meeting were taxing—went through a spacious and careful process, determining to be laid down by their quarter so as to become again a worship group after nearly 70 years as a monthly meeting.
- There are two new monthly meetings among us—Evangelical Friends Church of Nashua and Three Rivers—as well as two new worship groups in Maine (Belfast and Dexter).
- Meetings are experimenting with how they hold property or whether they even should. One meeting reached unity to sell its building and has found joy renting chapel space from another congregation. Many, many meetings are experimenting with sabbath periods or restructuring how the work and worship of meeting is carried. Meetings are experimenting with functioning as a "committee of the whole" or doing business every other month. Seeking right-sized structures reflecting current context—changing demographics, including aging members and smaller family sizes, number of seekers wholly new to Quakerism, etc.—meetings are merging committees or re-grouping the work they carry. Committees are being laid down and lifted up, including one meeting which now has a "Fun for Everyone Committee" committed to worship-based intergenerational welcome and fellowship.

Of course, meetings still struggle with conflict, just as the imperfect human communities that we are might. And, with God as our guide, we might well journey toward grounded discernment, toward a path forward, rocky though it may remain for a time, and find Spirit-centered Life. The journey itself is as important as what we are ultimately clear about; how we conduct ourselves, as important as what we decide.

We end with some words Winthrop Center Friends offered in their State of Society report: "We praise God for our ability to adapt and learn and we look forward to what this coming year may bring for our community."

Accompaniment Group, here for the journey.

Sarah Gant (Beacon Hill), Clerk

Gretchen Baker-Smith (Westport), Hugh MacArthur (Hanover), Morgan Wilson (Framingham), Honor Woodrow (Putney)

Ex officio:

Noah Merrill (Putney), Yearly Meeting Secretary; Carl Williams (Plainfield), NEYM M&C Clerk