

*2024
State of Society
Reports*

Connecticut Valley Quarter

Hartford Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

State of Society Report

April 2025

This State of Society report gives a snapshot of our Meeting at a particular time in April 2025. To understand how people in the Meeting felt about various aspects of the Meeting, we gathered in an 11th Hour to reflect on and respond to five questions that were raised by our Ministry and Counsel committee as described below. We also circulated the 5 questions on our Meeting listserv and people who couldn't attend the 11th Hour shared their thoughts and ideas with us by e-mail. After the Report was written, it was reviewed by our Ministry and Counsel committee and our Meeting for Worship for Business. Our thoughts, concerns and ideas are shared below.

1) Quality of Worship within our Meeting and how we can deepen our connection to Spirit?

Our worship can be deep at times. More than ever, we are a beloved community to each other. There is a quality of worship that is like being polished and smoothed in a rock tumbler – turning, turning to come round right. Having hybrid worship has been very successful – people can be together both on Zoom and in the Meetinghouse. Using Zoom has been a blessing for people unable to attend in-person worship. Sometimes, we get caught up in peoples' distress about the world – we hear, in spoken messages, an underlying collective grief or maybe despair. This can sometimes make it harder to come back from the worry and despair to focus on the power of the Divine. We often use terms like “deepen” and “grounding” which can be analogies that evoke our foundational relation to Earth – a connection that an increasing number of Quakers are finding brings them closer to Spirit. However, sometimes we are too comfortable and don't share “prophetic” words that might be disquieting and cause us to reflect more deeply.

Programs we've held like the “Experiment in Light” and the “Gathered Meeting Study Group” have been very helpful but it would help to deepen our connection to Spirit if we had more “adult religious education”. During our Meeting retreat, we watched videos about “Quakers and the Light” and “What Do Quakers Do in Silent Worship” and then discussed them. This activity was helpful in understanding more about worship. We need ways to increase and encourage conversations about our spiritual paths. Perhaps we should reintroduce a mid-week worship or give people information about daily worship on Zoom at Pendle Hill (in Pennsylvania) or maybe this could be a role for New England Yearly Meeting. At times, worship feels too short – as though we could go deeper if we worshipped a bit longer. Perhaps this is because it takes a while for us to settle in so, sometimes, many of the shared messages come toward the end of worship. Maybe, to help us settle sooner (as is done on Zoom), we could ask people to take their seats and begin to settle starting at 9:55 a.m. Having an 11th Hour or an opportunity to gather to discuss vocal ministry (perhaps base the discussion around a Pendle Hill pamphlet) would be helpful for us. Perhaps we could also re-institute Seeker Sessions after worship which used to give newcomers a chance to ask questions about Quakerism in a group setting. It also gave regular attenders a chance to discuss worship or other ideas if they felt so inclined.

2) What do you most love about Meeting and what additional thoughts would you like to share?

In our Meeting, we have a real sense of care and concern for each other. There are so many devoted people who attend and support each other. We find a real community here in which everyone is trying to look for a positive, loving spirit. We are able to keep humor in our midst. The community is loving and supportive for children and adults. We value the silence and the

messages that emerge from our worship, but we also cherish the silence and having a part of our week where there is a space that is quiet and where we can center down to reflect on the things that matter. It is restorative to connect with the Meeting community. In our own micro-way, we are practicing Love. We recognize that no one is perfect and that there is no one spiritual path that we must be following. We also value the social justice aspects of our Meeting as well as the willingness of people to share their gifts in many ways to support our Meeting community. There is appreciation for the transparency of our Business and financial affairs and for the fact that we run everything ourselves! We especially value the work of our Buildings and Grounds committee and of our Religious Education committee.

3) How has the Meeting been supportive of people over the last year and how can our support be strengthened?

Led by Ministry & Counsel, our Meeting does a really good job of reaching out and supporting people – with flowers, cards, food, rides, visits and other assistance. We are supportive of each other with “life issues” including the joyous ones. Sometimes we support people with Clearness Committees. Our tech team (the TAs) and the Zoom “hosts” before and after worship make a big difference for building a sense of community for the people worshipping with us on Zoom. We try to support our Meeting families and there is intentional outreach which has been helpful in getting people involved. We hear from newcomers that the overall community is very welcoming. Part of being welcoming is our encouraging people to get involved and engaged in the various activities we are pursuing. We also have been supportive of people pursuing projects of interest such as the meal prep for the Warming Center, Hope Out Loud, Hartford Deportation Defense and Back From the Brink. Our Greater Hartford Interfaith Alliance has done a good job of keeping us involved in the Hartford community.

4) What has been your sense of fellowship within the Meeting and how can we increase fellowship among members and attenders?

Our fellowship is strong both in person and on Zoom. The people who regularly come to worship on Zoom have formed strong ties and support for each other. In the Meeting, as a whole, activities such as our Second Sunday potluck lunches, Family Sundays on the 5th Sunday of some months, “Experiment in Light” group, and Creative Listening and Nurturing Faithfulness groups have strengthened our fellowship. We have a couple who are also sponsoring gatherings of young adults.

We would welcome having more opportunities to connect with each other. Ideas for increased fellowship include the following: We used to have a Newcomer’s potluck in the fall (around Halloween) and/or a Halloween party (and the children would collect for UNICEF) and perhaps that could be reinstituted. There also used to be organized fun, outings and game nights. Starting new Creative Listening groups and re-starting Friendly 8s potluck groups, which we are presently organizing, will be helpful. Years ago, folks used to invite others to join them for lunch at a restaurant after worship. Also, in the past families invited newcomers to lunch in their homes after worship. We have a small group for young adults...how about aging adults? Perhaps we could do something about aging and the gifts of aging. During announcements after worship, we can share information about movies, plays, carpooling to see one of our member’s art shows or visiting the Native American museum.

Our website is a great summary of all that we have going on at HMM. Many first-time attenders find us through the website. However, using the website, it is difficult for first timers and new attenders to contact anyone associated with Meeting to find out more about our activities. Perhaps

we could add a reference to our Facebook page or maybe, with a single click link, people could view our most recent newsletter. Another possible entry point for new attenders could be the Zoom session on Sunday mornings. The Zoom link cannot be given directly on the website but, if those who are interested would like this approach to experience attending a Meeting for Worship, they might be encouraged to fill in the “Contact Us” form and ask for this link. We would need to address any potential risks with giving these types of links out to strangers.

5) With all the upheaval in the world, how are we, as a community, putting our faith into action?

Many people in Meeting are doing various types of work, based on their calling and capacities. We feel united in our grief and deep concern for the future of our country. However, we recognize that deep listening to those with different beliefs/persuasions is a loving response to those whose perspective is different than ours. We have a very active Peace and Social Concerns committee which acts as an umbrella organization for the many issues we are working on including...Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA) addressing legislative issues that can make a difference for people in the Greater Hartford area; Alternative to Violence Project; Hartford Deportation Defense and Immigration Working Group; using the Maplewood home for a family; stewardship of our grounds to make them “green”; supporting the South Park Inn for the homeless; Working Group on Right Relationship with Indigenous Peoples; Carbon Tax Witness group; Back From the Brink CT; and Quaker Earthcare Witness and environmental justice issues. Our First Day School teaches lessons about Quakers and people putting their faith into action. In addition, we have a monthly Query sent out on our listserv that often invites us to reflect on how we are putting our faith into action. We hold 11th Hours on social justice and peace issues, and we display banners on our Meetinghouse that support Black Lives Matters, Gay Pride and Social Justice and Equality for all. As a Meeting, we identify Quaker organizations and other nonprofits doing peace and social justice work that we support with donations from the Meeting.

There are some concerns that we may want to address. One is providing support/nurture to the many people from the Meeting who are working hard on peace and social justice issues. We might consider holding some type of event that would support them and remind them that their effort is not totally dependent upon themselves but that they are working in partnership with God. A second concern is that, because many of our Meeting members/attenders are middle-aged or older, we need to find ways to help people (especially younger people and families) “find” us and understand what we offer because our beliefs and practices may be of great interest to people if they know about us. We need to look for ways to have visibility in the community at large, strengthen our website and Facebook pages (the Facebook page is relatively passive) and pursue other activities to let people who identify as “spiritual but not religious”, understand how participating in our Meeting might be something they would value. Finally, we can continue to consider how we encourage the “contemplative” that can then fuel the “action.”

In this Report, we have identified numerous suggestions for actions we could take in the future as we continue to grow, change and support our loving community. We are taking all of the suggestions under advisement and know that our Meeting is always “a work in progress” continually trying to be even better.

2024 State of Society - Mount Toby Monthly Meeting

As we take stock of our beloved meeting for another year, we are bound together by love and the Spirit. We are also challenged by events in the world outside meeting and by some aspects of our meeting that disappoint us but that we have not been able to resolve.

Attendance at Meeting for Worship averages about 80 in person, with about a dozen of us on Zoom. Our attendance is stable, having recovered from the pandemic closures. We continue to offer options for attenders who prefer a smaller group, outdoors in good weather and in the Champney Room. During introductions, we invite people to share their pronouns if led, and many do. We have a regular but small attendance by young children, and a vibrant Children's Meeting for Discovery and childcare program, supplemented by quarterly intergenerational worship and by a weekend campout at the meetinghouse. We do not have regular attendance by teenagers.

In individual responses to questions about Mount Toby, attending Meeting for Worship was a universal common thread: the deep silence, the messages, holding people in the light and the strong sense of feeling connected to our community, all contribute to our spiritual lives. Many spoke of private practices such as meditation, prayer, yoga, and reading spiritual works. The link between nature and spirituality is strong for many of us. A recurring theme was all the many ways people were actively involved in our community, especially serving on committees, but also attending the Tilling Hours, the intergenerational Sunday worship with our children, the Elements of Quakerism course, our concert series, and singing together before worship.

We saw many changes in our meeting this year. We have been saddened by the deaths of five dear Friends. The loss of their spiritual grounding and practical knowledge has rocked us. We were delighted to care for the marriage of two Friends. We were gladdened by enfolding some new and younger attenders who are becoming integral to our meeting, enriching our Quaker experience and infusing a broadened perspective into our worship lives.

In general, the meeting is functioning well on a practical level, but a chorus of voices say in many ways, "too much being done by too few," and many of those doing the work are our older members. Nominating Committee struggles to fill vacancies on committees. Work Days are productive and fun. Meeting for Business is going well. It is hybrid, with a screen in the meeting room for Friends to see those on Zoom. We have not been clear to have a screen in the meeting room during hybrid worship, and there are some in meeting who are uncomfortable with any level of technology in the meeting room.

Overall, some of the areas we were challenged with last year persisted. They include issues of race and gender, how to combine the traditions and beliefs of our mixed faith backgrounds, and what we pass on to our young Quakers. We are a diverse community in many ways: age, income, gender, religious and political beliefs. There is a concern that we do not extend the benefit of good faith to those who disagree with us. We could be better listeners. Though we all care deeply about equality and social justice, and none of us think that we have reached that rightly-ordered and just society which we long for, we don't all agree on how to get there. We struggle with this, but perhaps it is as it should be: we are a religion of queries, not creeds.

State of the Society Report for 2024

New Haven Friends Meeting

The year 2024 at New Haven Friends Meeting was a year of reorganization, regeneration, beginnings, and growth.

Reorganization

A new committee called Religious Education for Children and Adults was formed in order to coordinate established programs, such as the Quaker Adult Education Committee (QAEC), Bible Study (BS), First Day School (FDS), and the newly formed Spiritual Formation Program (SFP) to keep the meeting informed about ongoing religious education in the Meeting.

Quaker Adult Education Committee. The committee provided two sessions in 2024: a session to explore Quaker basics for adults and a session to explore Quaker basics for adults with children invited to ask questions. The question “Is it necessary to believe in God to be a Quaker?” led to a discussion that probed deeply into Quaker beliefs.

Bible Study. Participants in Bible Study met once a week on Zoom throughout the year. The focus in 2024 was on the Book of Jeremiah. Additional readings included *Strength to Love* by Martin Luther King and *The Wounded Healer* by Henri Nouwen. The group shared videos, prayers, and podcasts, including *The Leading Edge* and *On Being*.

First Day School. The first day school community came together and joyfully met regularly once the repairs were finished in the Meetinghouse basement after the flood, and there were no longer limitations due to Covid. The children got to know each other better, as well as a new structure through story time and discussion in a circle, followed by an art activity and then a closing circle for worship. Themes in the stories and discussion revolved around Quaker values/testimonies. The questions the children asked were posted on a large chart so they could be shared with the adults. Parents and members of the first day school committee assisted the NHFM first day school teacher. The youngest children enjoyed spending time with two other teachers.

Spiritual Formation. See *Beginnings*.

Regeneration

While 2023 was marked by tentative steps to re-establish the ease of connection Friends enjoyed prior to the Covid pandemic, 2024 saw a regeneration of attendance in person at Meetings for Worship; Friends unable to attend in person still profited by the Zoom technology with which we had become more familiar. What were tentative steps toward resuming Fellowship gatherings in 2023 took on a more formalized approach with the reestablishment of a Fellowship committee, which had been set aside due to Covid restrictions. With a sign-up sheet to bring food offerings once again visible in the kitchen/dining area, regular gatherings after Meetings for Worship featured homemade breads and cookies to accompany the always present coffee and teas that Friends enjoyed during fellowship and encouraged more people to attend. The Quarterly Potluck Lunches, tentatively resumed in 2023, became firmly re-established in 2024.

With more people attending Meetings in person and the technology to connect with Friends at home, New Haven Friends' Meeting provided programs and sessions to address the educational, fellowship, and spiritual needs of Members and Attenders. Those 2024 programs and sessions included the following:

- Regional meeting of Quakers from Connecticut and western Massachusetts on February 4
- Memorial meeting to celebrate the life of Nilla Palmer on February 10
- Seeker session on opportunities for fellowship within the Meeting on February 11
- Resumption of FDS Board Game Night on February 16
- Seeker session to identify recommendations to Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) on March 10
- Seeker session to explore Quaker basics on March 24
- Workshop on Israel-Palestine relations, *Holistic Approach to Peacemaking*, presented by Yehezkel Landau, D. Min, on April 7
- Memorial meeting to celebrate the life of Peggy Brennan on June 15
- Quarterly Potluck on September 22
- Seeker session to explore Quaker basics with children invited to join adults on September 29

- Program to present the findings of the report on New England Quakers' involvement in Indian Boarding Schools on October 13
- Meeting for Worship held on Election Day evening on November 5
- Annual Christmas pageant and potluck on December 22

Beginnings

New Haven Friends Meeting inaugurated a Spiritual Formation Program (September 2024 through May 2025) for members and attenders, with encouragement to newcomers to participate. Participants were asked to commit to two meetings a month, once in a large group of all participants to respond to readings on the spiritual life and once in a small group (self-selected by choice of day and time to meet and venue, either in person or on Zoom) to discuss their own spiritual paths and the practices they followed to develop themselves spiritually. The schedule of readings was as follows:

September 2024—Pages 148 to 152, “Embracing the Human Frailty,” *On the Brink of Everything*, Parker Palmer

October 2024—Selected text from Valerie Brown's *Hope Leans Forward: Braving Your Way Toward Simplicity, Awakening, and Peace*. Valerie Brown is an ordained Buddhist-Quaker Dharma teacher in the lineage of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village tradition.

November 2024—Poems: From *Pilgrim Island* by David Whyte, *The Uses of Sorrow* by Mary Oliver, *Start Close In* by David Whyte, *There's a Hole in My Sidewalk* by Portia Nelson, *The Journey* by David Whyte

December 2024—*Peace Pilgrim* (an essay on an experience the Peace Pilgrim had in jail) and *The Mighty Sage* (a poem by Julia Fehrenbacher)

January 2025—*Sleet*, a poem from *A Mystic Garden* by Gunilla Norris

February 2025—*My Sudden Understanding of Early Quakers' Mysticism* by Laurence Clarkberg, *Are Quakers Mystic?* from *Reno Quakers*, *Becoming Real* (a poem by Gunilla Norris)

March 2025—Pages 13 to 17, *On Aspiring to Higher Consciousness* from Pendle Hill Pamphlet *For That Solitary Individual* by John Youngblut

April 2025—*On Hallowing One's Diminishments*, a Pendle Hill Pamphlet by John Youngblut

May 2025—*I Happened to Be Standing* by Mary Oliver, a selection of poems by Rumi, and *Nothing To Hold On To* by Julia Fehrenbacher

Growth

We noticed many new people attending Meeting for Worship before, and especially after, the November 2024 national election. Even more people attended after the New England Yearly Meeting participated in the lawsuit to stop ICE from entering houses of worship to make arrests, thus violating the time-honored practice of sanctuary. New Haven Friends Meeting gained a new member who transferred membership from Stony Run Friends Meeting in Baltimore, MD, to New Haven Friends Meeting.

Addendum of Friends' Responses at the March 2, 2025, Seeker Session on the State of the Society (SoS) or through Responses to a Questionnaire on the SoS at New Haven Friends Meeting:

- Because I have been called to be with FDS and called out of worship, I am grateful for Spiritual Formation and Bible Study.
- For me Meeting has been wonderful, Bible Study and Spiritual Formation have helped me to better understand myself and my connection to the Light. It has really nurtured me in my journey. I have respect for, and am trying to better understand, how things operate. Navigating the waters can be challenging at times – like being in a boat without an oar. At the same time I like that there is not a domineering structure.
- Sunday MfW is wonderful; experienced care in a time of crisis. Coverage of the work has been a challenge; it requires knowing who is doing what. Wow – it's wonderful to be back after the pandemic.
- Members of the Meeting took me over to the hospital 44 times. Workday was a lot of fun. As clerk of finance, I'm getting to know more about what's going on in Meeting.
- I'm hearing how important Meeting is in different parts of their (people's) lives. Married under the care of Meeting in May 1983. There are many examples of support of individuals going through life challenges.

- SoS over the past year, I'm very encouraged by the many new attenders. I always hope we find ways to teach ourselves and others about our long history and carry that into the present day. I feel devoted to the Meeting, and nurtured by MfW.
- Over the last 8 months we have received the M's care and kindness. We need to look at our ability to care – we have fallen short of our own ideals – we need to be sure that we are welcoming to enlarge our hospitality and openness.
- I value how the Meeting has opened its arms to those of us who cannot be present. I appreciate that BS and SF have provided us additional ways to connect. It is good to be part of CONECT, and we could participate more fully.
- All above resonates. I am appreciative of Bible Study and Spiritual Formation. I would like to focus for a moment on my deep appreciation of Meeting for Worship. The dynamic of being in worship with all of you, rather than solitary worship, I experience a deep sense of God's presence. In solitary worship you don't get the chance to settle into a listen mode and feeling God more within you.
- It's been an eye opening experience to be clerk. People pitch in and speak truth to power, even if I am the power. I worry that there is an inner circle and an outer circle.
- It's very important that we have young people, that young people are engaged. I don't know how much the young participate in Bible Study and Spiritual Formation. I feel supported by the Meeting in the work that I am doing in the outside world.
- We are seeing more and more young people coming to MfW, and three of these newcomers initially joined our Spiritual Formation group. (One had to drop out half way through the 10-month session because of work obligations.) How we interact with them (young people) is really important for the continuity of our Meeting. This Meeting has been so incredibly nurturing to me personally, and I'm grateful that my offer of convening Spiritual Formation was accepted by the Meeting.
- I think we are still in the process of re-knitting our community after the pandemic, and the kitchen flood significantly frayed our cohesion as a community. Personally, I find sustenance and nurture in the following:
 - Meetings for Worship
 - M&C meetings and follow-up M&C work
 - Quarterly potlucks—organizing them
 - Talking to people informally after MfW
 - Special events—memorial meetings, seeker session, and so on.
 - There are some wonderful signs:
 - People are loving our quarterly potlucks

- We have restarted the Fellowship Committee
- Bible Study is going well
- Spiritual Formation groups are going well
- Some younger people are stepping up and taking responsibility on committees
- Our attendance at MfW is up, particularly with many more new young people
- Listening to sharing at MfW shows me how powerfully the Spirit moves among us

Northampton Friends Meeting
State of Meeting Report - 2024
April 2025

Introduction

Northampton Friends Meeting is a thriving, mature Meeting enjoying the abundance of community and a real sense of spiritual depth.

Northampton Friends Meeting hosts blended worship, with some people participating via web conference and some joining from the Meetinghouse on Sundays at 11am, Midweek Meeting for Worship on Wednesdays at 9:30am online only, Programmed Taize Worship on Thursdays at 7pm online only, and a variety of programs, groups, and opportunities for fellowship. Typical Sunday attendance is 35-60 people, split between the Meetinghouse and online. Typical Midweek attendance is between 20-30 people. We enjoy a steady stream of newcomers, often drawn to the area to attend or visit one of the local colleges.

The following report summarizes themes and reflections on the life of the Meeting in 2024 shared during two listening sessions held on January 19 and February 16, 2025 in a blended format. Friends shared the many positive aspects of the Meeting and made suggestions for some areas we might grow. Friends were invited to reflect on the following queries:

- What are you seeking in your spiritual life?
- How is the Meeting supporting your spiritual life?
- What positives stand out in the life of our meeting?
- What areas stand out as places we could do better or do more as a meeting?

Connecting through Service

Friends expressed deep gratitude for the sense of community, spiritual growth, and mutual support found within the Meeting. For many, these positives emerged through their service to the community. Friends reflected on the spiritual nourishment gained through committee work and noted how meaningful it was to step into leadership roles, recognizing the trust and grace we offer each other through our shared work. People mentioned that it has been rewarding to work through challenges with others. Our community benefits from our collective efforts, especially from those who contribute behind the scenes. The Meeting fosters both personal growth and a nurturing environment of care and love in which people can step out of their comfort zones and learn new things about themselves.

“The Meeting allows me to do service, to have questions, to do some seeking. It allows me to be part of it and held by it, and to do service that gives a lot of meaning to my life.”

“My relationship to this Meeting has become so beautiful; stepping into leadership roles has been so moving to me. I’m so honored to be able to do that.”

“This has been a community where the folks stepping forward into leadership roles get to make mistakes and feel the grace of the community.”

“At the heart of the meeting I see people who care for each other, who take care of each other.”

“I saw also a meeting where what could have erupted into some sort of internal conflict between members was taken care of without that conflict, and the meeting moved ahead in a much stronger way for having dealt with that conflict.”

Spiritual Maturity

Friends highlighted the spiritual maturity and depth of worship within the Meeting, emphasizing the groundedness and gatheredness of worship. Speakers appreciated the deep spiritual connections among us, the nurturing atmosphere that supports both newcomers and long-time participants, and the variety of opportunities throughout the week. Friends spoke of the richness of vocal ministry. One Friend noted that some messages are overly long, reminding us that tending to vocal ministry is a shared responsibility. Friends also called for even more opportunities to deepen our spiritual practice, such as by creating daily opportunities for worship. Overall, Friends celebrated the Meeting's ability to cultivate a welcoming, spiritually diverse and enriching environment that supports both individual and collective growth.

“This is really so refreshing, Friends. I have sat through a couple of decades of preparation for writing the state of the meeting report, and inevitably we find fault with ourselves, we find ourselves not enough. ... This is a mature meeting. I cannot think of anyone who met the challenges of the pandemic as quickly and as strongly as this meeting did. I’m so glad that we are all expressing how wonderful it is to be part of this community. I’m just very proud of this community.”

“The messages in Worship have taught me to look for the messages in my day; it has nurtured my skills to seek and see the Spirit as I go about my day.”

“The maturing of the Meeting’s ability to tend the soil to support the seed in each person who comes to worship with us, the tenderness with which we go about our work tilling and tending those seeds.”

“I have been away from the Meeting and Meetinghouse because of family demands but am struck by a palpable depth of spiritual grounding I felt upon returning.”

“Worship has been about our connection to God. This is the root of our Meeting... the inner life feeds the outer life rather than the outer life defining the inner.”

“Meeting is at the center of my life, it holds me whether I’m in worship or taking a nap.. It holds God all the time now.”

“This Meeting is willing to explore a depth of practice, offers the opportunity to worship in many ways, and keeps honing what is possible.”

“This Meeting, and Quakers in general, have allowed me to worship adjacent to Christianity. I was ready to give up on it. I don’t feel that way now.”

The depth of worship has carried into Meeting for Business, or Meeting for Worshipful Discernment, as we have been informally calling it.

“I think of a recent business meeting, where the sense of the meeting was something no one had thought of before the meeting and that for me is truly the movement of spirit in a group.”

“This now feels like a Meeting for Worship in a deep way. I really look forward to it now!”

“There is a strong foundation in discernment.”

“It is moving to see the various ways the Clerk has worked to make spaces for worship sharing in business meeting.”

Midweek worship brings people from all over the country into an intimate spiritual community. The worship is held by a small team that rotates care of worship. The format is 30 minutes of worship followed by 30 minutes of worship sharing on the query “what was rising for you/us in worship today?”

“The worship is deep. The community is wonderful. Wednesday is especially wonderful.”

We welcomed five new members this year, more than in any previous year. It has been a joy listening to the letters they each wrote requesting membership because each letter tells the story of someone’s spiritual journey, and together they give the sense that this is a welcoming place. We are so grateful for the energy the new members bring, and the steadiness of those Friends who have been part of the community for decades.

Intergenerational Community

Attendees and members of Northampton Friends include folks of all ages. We welcomed a new baby into the community in 2024, and have enjoyed the company of a small number of children throughout the year. While many in the Meeting wish that more children and families participated in our programs, we are ready to welcome children. The Youth & Families committee faithfully worked to refresh the physical space in 2024. The committee cleared out broken toys and reorganized those that remain. Friends made beautiful catalog descriptions of the children's books in the library. Volunteers are available for child care and First Day school every Sunday. We welcome many young adult Friends, including many who attend one of the nearby colleges. The Yearly Meeting's Young Adult Friends programming offers peer experiences that some in our Meeting have joined. Like many Meetings, many among us are older adults. We are able to support each other in aging by offering fellowship, practical help, and flexibility in adapting to our changing abilities. Our blended and online-only worship have increased accessibility for those Friends who are unable to leave home regularly.

"We talk about Meetings being too old, and that is a great loss of focus. Our Meeting is not too old. The Meeting is responding faithfully to a demographic phenomena. And I'm very glad to be part of that."

"I have felt enormous support from the meeting, and no judgment about the ways in which I'm not present and able to be helpful."

Blended Worship & Accessibility

Friends reflected on our blended worship experience, which integrates participants "in the pews" (in the Meetinghouse) and "in the squares" (online, referring to the profile pictures on the zoom screen). Friends expressed gratitude for the collective effort and dedication of those who maintain the technology, including the sound system, to create an inclusive and mostly seamless experience. The system has made it possible for people to participate, even when physical barriers such as snow, health, or mobility issues would prevent them from attending in person. The technology has improved accessibility for those with hearing loss who are able to read the subtitles, allowing them to engage more fully than before. Memorial Meetings are greatly enriched by participation from Friends and relatives living at a distance. Friends recognized that blended worship presents opportunities to experience grace, as both online and in-person participants demonstrate understanding and patience with technical issues, miscommunications, and occasional glitches. While there are those among us who would prefer to have no technology in the Meeting room, there is graciousness in having accepted that the technology benefits many people and enables the Meeting to be accessible. This spirit of grace, combined with ongoing efforts to refine the system, has made the blended format a vital and meaningful aspect of the Meeting. One of our microphones went missing and the other one broke this year, which gave us a chance to reflect on how much we appreciate the reliable sound system. Good stewardship has

enabled us to get many years of use out of the equipment, and we have now replaced both mics and the receiver. Friends also shared a few areas where we can continue to evolve our practices. For example, those in the Meetinghouse sometimes find it startling when someone on zoom speaks out of the silence, and vice versa.

“Having been a Quaker since the early seventies I have had problems with full participation because of my hearing loss. I have often not been able to hear the vocal ministry in Meeting. So it has been an enormous, enormous gift to me to be in this Meeting with such a well thought out and working system for integrating people who can't be fully present in the Meeting House. The zoom and the captions have made a huge, huge difference in my life.”

“When people give a message from zoom during Worship, I startle and other people do too. If someone stands in the Meetinghouse we see them, or at least sense, and adjust our focus to the message. It is hard to recenter after a zoom message. There should be a way to warn people that someone is going to speak from zoom.”

Adaptability and Creativity

Northampton Friends Meeting has adapted our practices in many small and medium ways over the years, showing our ability to follow each other's leadings and experiment to see what will work. Examples include the growth of Midweek Worship from an idea to what it is now: an integral part of the rhythm of each week. Other examples include how Quakerism 101 (which taught newcomers about our history, faith, practice) evolved into Elements of Quakerism (which offers newer and long-time attenders opportunities to reflect together on how our spiritual lives resonate with our history, faith, practice). This year, a small committee re-envisioned the Holiday Craft Fair to be broader and fuller, including music, food, crafts, family, and volunteers. The whole Meeting decided what to do with the proceeds from the successful and joyful “pay as led” pricing, which proved bountiful. This was a wonderful example of the creativity in our community. Other new initiatives this year included:

- A monthly **bereavement group**, hosted by members of the Pastoral Care committee.
- A new role for **zoom fellowship host**, who stays online to facilitate informal discussion and connection at the rise of Meeting on Sunday.
- A short series of reading group **discussions on the Quaker testimonies**.
- The **Race and Class Working Group hosted a book group**, open to all. They also hosted listening sessions around Quaker involvement with Indian Boarding Schools.
- Finance Committee began hosting a series of 9:30 hours to reflect on the modern Quakers' **theology and practices around money**.
- The **9:30 Hour programming**, coordinated by the Worship & Ministry committee, provides a springboard for many of these activities. It has held space for new openings in

ministry coming from the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, sacred text reading and reflection, threshing sessions for committees, and a variety of other opportunities.

Community Caretaking

Led in large part by our **Pastoral Care committee**, the Meeting provided support, companionship, and practical assistance to our members and attenders throughout the year. Many Friends expressed gratitude for the care offered to them through support committees, notes, meals, and other small gestures. The Mt. Toby's Burial Ground Committee interfaces with our Pastoral Care Committee and has a member from Northampton Friends Meeting. We hosted several Memorial Meetings this year. The **Fellowship** committee provided us with wonderful opportunities to share meals, connect over bagels, and have picnics in the warmer months. They coordinated monthly potlucks, including setting up, cleaning up, and handling problems in the kitchen. They bring great care to our food preferences and health concerns, with diligent labeling of dishes for ingredients. They play a crucial role in welcoming all by providing snacks at the rise of Meeting. Friends enjoyed a wonderful **retreat at Woolman Hill** in June with the theme of "Lifting up beauty and love in times of pain and sorrow." Among other activities and fellowship, we made mosaics using broken things, which was offered as a metaphor for how the Meeting finds beauty and strength even when things are difficult. Beyond caring for our own, many among us have devoted our resources to supporting the wider community. Friends have done **immigrant and refugee solidarity work** in collaboration with other area faith groups.

"I am grateful for the Spiritual Family of the Meeting, I don't have family in the area, and am grateful for the support and unconditional positive regard I receive."

"There is a lovely kindness and generous spirit that each of you brings to your attention to all of us. I didn't need concrete help from Pastoral Care, but I really appreciated that several members of the committee got in touch with me. And I especially appreciated getting a holiday card. It is just beautiful attention."

"I just wanted to really appreciate those who are leading the bereavement group. It feels very welcoming to anyone at any stage of loss or grief or kind of grief. I think I found an intimacy there."

"The Elements of Quakerism class was terrific, not only for the information that's imparted but as an example of community, of how Quakers create a community of cooperation and trust and caring."

"The retreat was so deeply worshipful, it really brought people together."

“Several Northampton Friends have done a lot of immigrant support and refugee work. The strength we're getting in this community is helping us to hold pain that is beyond us.”

Seeds for New Growth

Recognizing that the Meeting has vitality and energy, Friends suggested a few possible activities we might undertake. Each of these ideas represents a small but meaningful seed that, if nurtured, can foster new growth and deeper connections within the Meeting.

- **Supporting Families & Young Children** – Concern about the lack of families and children in the Meeting led to a practical solution: starting a zoom-based Quaker parenting group for parents to connect and support each other locally.
- **Encouraging Spiritual Growth & Connection through Small Groups** – A Friend is eager to form a spiritual nurture group and is seeking others to join. While some long-standing spiritual nurture groups are closed for deeper relationships, newer Friends and attenders seek open spaces where they can find support, accountability, and spiritual companionship.
- **Welcoming & Including Newcomers** – Simple gestures, such as noting newcomers' names and engaging them in meaningful reflection on their experience, can help integrate them. Friends were encouraged to follow up with newcomers by asking them: What was your experience of Meeting today? What was happening for you in the silence?
- **Strengthening Communications** – Since some people use texting as a primary means of communications, we may wish to create a directory for text-based outreach to foster connections and a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

Northampton Friends Meeting enters 2025 with deep gratitude for our spiritual richness and care for one another. We are grounded in worship, open to the movement of the spirit, and attentive to each other's needs. As we listen for what will unfold next, we trust that we have already planted seeds—of worship, welcome, and witness—that will continue to bear fruit in the coming years.

Dover Quarter

Concord Monthly Meeting

2024 State of Society Report

Friends at Concord Meeting are deeply aware of our blessings, and gratitude was an overwhelming response when reflecting on the state of our Society in 2024.

- Gratitude for the welcome felt by a newcomer.
- For the spiritual nourishment received from the Meeting.
- For the sharing of our spiritual journeys.
- For the role models we are for one another.
- For the way in which we build leadership skills.
- For a variety of social and recreational opportunities.
- For the car pool that saves energy and creates friendships.
- For the efforts made to keep us all healthy.
- For the ability to attend worship online.
- For the many efforts Friends make to reach out to one another.

We recognize that these points of thankfulness are widely held and help to define our faith community.

To be sure, hunger, homelessness, wars, fear, and all manner of insecurity abound in this world. Though, for the most part, free from these circumstances, we are made all the more aware of our blessings and privilege. We are challenged to find ways to be of use, and this is the Spirit at work among us.

The corporate power that flows from this Spirit is directed largely, though not exclusively, inward toward one another. People speak of the centrality of the Meeting in their lives and how the community supports their efforts to rise to and live out the shared values in their day to day lives. The Meeting is a strong countervailing force in the face of the dominant culture. That is to say, the Meeting enables us on our paths to improve the quality of the interactions we have in our family lives, work and community lives, and within the Meeting community. One Friend commented, "The Meeting teaches me to listen deeply." Another offered, "The Meeting supports me in the daily struggle to live the commandment to love your "enemies" in a way that goes way beyond an intellectual understanding and rises to a way of being in the world."

This spirit moving also leads many individuals into a variety of forms of activism such as foster parenting, political campaigning, legislative watch dogging, letter writing, vigiling, and advocating for and supporting marginalized individuals or groups. The Meeting has sponsored a weekly public vigil for peace and justice in Gaza.

Noteworthy is the fact that it has been upheld by a very small group of Friends. Similarly the Peace, Social, and Environmental Concerns Committee, while active this year, is constituted by a very small group. This year the Meeting acquired a Peace Pole inscribed in eight languages, "May peace prevail on earth." It will be installed in 2025.

Attendance at Meeting for Worship continues to hover from fifteen to twenty-five and the average age of Meeting members is on the rise. Those of us present on Sunday mornings feel delight as each person enters the Meeting Room or joins online. Several younger people have begun attending Meeting this year, and we hope they are the beginning of a trend. We know that numbers and ages are not what matters most. Friends express a deep sense of fulfillment that derives from the spoken ministry and the silence, and we trust that, in time, more Friends will heed the promptings of the spirit toward vocal ministry. There is a sense that we are a place that is mostly free from judgements of one another. Voicing this aspiration more often may act as an encouragement.

We miss having a full First Day School and feel joyful when young ones come to Meeting. We are always ready for them. One First Day School teacher commented on the need for more children saying, "They cause me to articulate my faith. We seek to pass it along, and it certainly helps me as much as the children."

We have a firm conviction that the Quaker message is as relevant today as it ever was and that people yearn for what the Meeting offers. How will we lift our light out from under the bushel? One Friend directed an observation to the assembly, "Through the years, as people have come and gone, you are exactly who needs to be here, beautiful, inspiring, and perfect. "

State of Society Report
Dover Friends Meeting
May 2025

“Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.”

Isaac Pennington, 1667

The living stream is flowing through Dover Friends Meeting. The desire to be faithful to the leadings of Spirit is clear and being acted upon. Faithfulness does not come with a promise of ease but more certain to be accompanied by difficult challenges, tests of patience and commitment and trust. The past year for Dover Friends Meeting has been a full experience of the love and growing pains that come with being within the waters of this living, flowing stream.

We are experiencing the challenge of being in a relationship with others when there is difference in language used and difference in understanding of how processes are carried out while in search of the will of Spirit. Much of the tension arose from Friends not feeling heard in business meetings when speaking to the leading of Sanctuary. Furthering the struggles of communal relationships was the lack of unity around the processes that led to the withdrawal of a Friend's nomination for committee service. The said tension has resulted in shouting and stern, accusatory voices during meeting for worship for the conduct of business. Friends intentions have been brought into question; some Friends have ceased in trusting that all who are called into our community are listening for the leadings of the Divine with the sincerest intentions and the ways have been questioned. The Accompaniment committee of New England Yearly Meeting was invited to be with us for various threshing sessions, business meetings, and state of society. Their presence has provided much needed grounding, support, and encouragement for us as a community. We acknowledge that greater attention needs to be given to the ways in which we care for one another as we discern leadings above the outcomes of the discernment.

Friends have felt the urge to avoid the tension, to want to not be present at worship or in community gatherings because the conflict has been overwhelming. We recognize these feelings as challenging to navigate, yet many of us have continued to be present in the discomfort, one or two Friends have remained at a distance. Spirit asks that we continue to hold them in light and prayer and be open for opportunities of reconciliation.

God, within the storm, is speaking through Friends, saying that maturation of our individual and collective self is available and happening because of the challenges. Furthermore, new Friends have seen moments of light where others have not, witnessing a calmness in response to anger and feeling inspired to be among us.

We are under tension, but we are not stagnant. We are struggling in meeting for worship for the conduct of business but vocal ministry in meeting for worship has been full, rich, bright. The attractive power of the spirit is present; many new persons have become regular attenders of worship, at faith discussions, and in support of leadings and ministries such as the delegation to Cuba and Ministry to the Unhoused. Their

presence is inspiring long-time Friends and providing life-giving energy in times of tribulation.

Included in that life-giving energy is a modest but growing first day school. Ten different children (ages 2-10) have been present in the past year among us. A rotation of thoughtful and caring adult Friends have participated in children's meeting. Parents and grandparents have expressed deep gratitude for the support and the uniqueness that is this space for the children to experience. The children have grown in comfort around sharing about first day school during announcements, and play time during hospitality has been abundant and energetic.

The service of Friends within our faith community and beyond is bountiful:

- The tireless work to organize our weekly memo
- Brave service and public witness with others in our wider community in support of the local immigrant community
- Devoted ministry to persons living without shelter
- Joyful work of serving a monthly meal at Friendly Kitchen
- Necessary attention to our historic building and cemetery through coordinating, grant writing, and physical labor
- Ministry to people enduring incarceration in our county jail
- An abundance of opportunities to gather outside of worship (Spiritual Breakfast, Faith and Practice Study, Pamphlet discussion, and more)
- A growing connection with our Cuban sister meeting through travel
- And an abundant and nourishing hospitality hour

We have experienced an abundance of blessings. We have experienced difficult times within our community and there are even greater difficulties facing the wider society of all people. Finding unity in the divine life, "beyond all differences of opinion and circumstance" is calling to us. Our commitment to one another is being tested; our commitment to focusing on the places where light exists is being challenged by conflict within us and beyond. A Friend shared the following quote:

"Consider your body as an example of true harmony. Its organs, bones, and cells work naturally together, each caring for and supporting the others. When one part of us is well, the whole body benefits. When one part is hurting, the entire body feels it, and instantly, the other parts respond, offering healing and care. One body part is not better, worse, or equal to another—each part uniquely nourishes the whole."

Spirit is asking us to grow in our ways of caring for and nourishing one another, to be patient in our laboring through discernment and conflict. Spirit is asking us to tend to our parts that are not well. We are being asked to let our calls to service, our individual life-styles, and our ways of being in community be our testimony, to reveal a life of the spirit.

2024 State of Society Report Gonic Monthly Meeting

We of the Gonic Friends Meeting find our greatest strength in 2024 was the offer of a respite from a world of care, whether it be societal or personal suffering. The previous year's weekly attendance averaged about four people, sometimes six when all regular attenders were present. Although 2024 saw one member move away, we were blessed by frequently having guests, almost all of whom have returned more than once, and some now attend regularly with differing levels of involvement in discussions and decision making.

Knowing that unprogrammed meetings have individual nuances that characterize a "usual" meeting for worship, the fact that ours has less vocal ministry than many has been cited as a strength. It attests, we think, to the benefits of feeling gathered in silence and of time being set aside for expression of post-worship thoughts others consider and at times respond to gently. There is a feeling of welcome that balances a sense of community with the ability to freely express diverse ideas. While we are grateful virtual attendance is possible, it is recognized the experience is limited and not as satisfying. To support inclusion and participation, we are attempting to address difficulty hearing what is being said in the meeting room by those online.

Role reassignments this year led us to consider our collective responsibility in maintaining a Quaker business process versus the more familiar secular methods of deliberation. Workshops and literature helped support those becoming accustomed to new responsibilities. Becoming aware that we could improve our understanding of "sense of the meeting", we began to address this by reading literature about seeking unity rather than consensus. Most importantly we recognized any adjustments must come from and be owned by us all as led by Spirit.

In addition to worshipping and fellowship together, care was expressed in supportive actions, such as sending greeting cards, delivering a homecooked meal, and providing transportation or assistance with errands. Outreach to the wider community continued in the form of crafting thoughtful messages for our outdoor welcome sign, and having an annual yard sale with a tour of the building offered. Additionally, in 2024 we issued a public statement regarding our position on the Israel-Palestinian conflict and explored participating in community fairs.

Never far from our minds is the ownership of an old meetinghouse and what that means for us. We hold the tension between stewardship in terms of money, energy resource use, and individual maintenance effort, and the blessing that our existence has a physical presence in the community. Due to health issues only a couple of us are physically capable of sharing cleaning and maintenance tasks, making that burden unfairly carried. In considering the impact of this ownership responsibility on what we are called to do, we have recognized we must make wise decisions but not have those be rooted in fear. In fact, a serious re-consideration of the meeting location, in large part due to our reduced attendance, was almost immediately followed by an increase in newcomers throughout the rest of the year. We realize, however, the ability to match necessary tasks to people able to provide those services remains tenuous.

We have surely been blessed and remain steadfast in our intention to provide a spiritual home for those led to seek the Light.

WEARE-HENNIKER MONTHLY MEETING
NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING, SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
State of the Meeting/Society Report for 2024

Our worship and fellowship have been strong during the entire 2024 calendar year. In December we had a well-attended Carol Sing for the first time since COVID and hope to do the same in 12 months. Mark Hewitt was recorded as a new member, transferring from Chatham Summit MM in New Jersey. There was a small gathering to welcome him on February 18 at the Ludders' condominium.

We sent a letter in January to Senators Shaheen, Hassen, Representative Kuster, and President Biden regarding our opposition to the Israeli occupation and violent destruction of many cities in the Gaza strip. Marian Baker was in Africa for her yearly ministry in the fall and returned on January 12 to the U.S. She reported on her activities. Also in February we had fruitful discussions about revisions to NEYM Faith and Practice, which we forwarded to them.

In March discussion turned to priorities for legislation through FCNL in the 119th Congress. Marian suggested that we host the World Day of Prayer on March 1 and many friends attended. She also suggested that we focus some activities on the 400th birthday of George Fox, and that we use some of his wisdom to understand those with differing points of view than our own in these troubled times. April was busy with deciding how to allocate financial and other resources to address many pressing issues. We confirmed total operating funds of \$16,493.00 in various accounts. We reported 17 members in total to NEYM and increased our contribution from \$1200 to \$1500 this year. We also set aside an equalization fund of \$500 for attendance of members at Summer Sessions. While Weare held steady in attendance at weekly worship, the Souhegan worship group decreased slightly.

In June we welcomed 50 Henniker third graders for a short visit and tour of the meeting house—they also visited the Quaker District School House. On June 23 we had successful Summer Solstice Sing with excellent food and fellowship. Scheduled for July 7 was a working session on how to have conversations across the political divide, in advance of the fall elections. On July 28 there was a gathering with food

and fellowship at Marian Baker's Contention Pond cottage for a presentation on George Fox. The weather was wonderful there was much joy amongst friends, young and old.

Bob and Connie Brookes led two excellent presentations of Quakerism 101 on August 21 and September 29. Record books have been moved from Betty's house and are now at the UMass Quaker Archives. David and Marian attended NEYM summer sessions and reported on their experiences after an absence due to COVID at the August 11 meeting for business.

We spent the September business meeting celebrating Betty Straw's 99th birthday, and thus the beginning of her 100th year. We had lunch, birthday cake, and friends joined from near and far. We are blessed to have her in our community and much love was shared. Marian, David and Mark attended Quarterly Meeting at Dover and we learned that NEYM is embarking on listening sessions in order to re-vision the annual Summer Sessions. Marian planned her annual trip to Africa from October 22 until December 19.

During November we once again turned to our annual budget and financial reporting, which Ann did with the help of Connie. Nisa Marks donated wood from her property, thus obviating the need to purchase wood for the coming winter. We ended the year with a slight surplus of \$2500, for a total of \$18,850.09 in our checking account. In December we again hosted a spirited Winter Solstice/Candlelight Carol Sing on the 20th, a snowy evening that captured the holiday spirit perfectly.

Though all members and attenders were rightly concerned about the country's direction at this time, we maintained our hopeful and loving spirit, trusting that our strong community, and God's guidance, would see us through.

Souhegan Preparative Meeting, Weare Monthly Meeting
State of Society 2024

During 2024, Souhegan Preparative Meeting continued to gather for worship, but with increasing difficulties. A small core of 5 met at the Oddfellows Hall in Milford, New Hampshire, and we continued to have occasional visitors and inquiries. As the year went on, however, attendance became less regular, in part because core members of the meeting had obligations which required them to be away often, and often for extended periods of time. By the middle of the year, the core members felt clear that we should commit to meeting regularly once a month, with the dates established and announced well in advance, and posted on our website, to continue to offer some welcome. In the event, however, even the core of the meeting could not always appear even at these predetermined times, and we agreed late in the year, that it was best to lay down the meeting. Except for a couple of considerations about the condition of the meeting, we had not held meetings for business throughout the year. Second, one couple in the meeting, part of the core, realized that in 2025 they were likely to move out of state, for retirement. Consequently, we became clear that there was no center of gravity, which could hold the meeting and recruit new attendance. Our last meeting for worship was in the month of December, 2024. Subsequent to that we informed the monthly meeting of our clarity that the meeting should be laid down, took care to satisfy any outstanding financial obligations, transferred the balance of our meeting treasury to the monthly meeting, and discontinued our website.

During its years of existence, the Souhegan worship group and preparative meeting provided a valuable service and a witness to the existence and activity of Friends in the area. We attracted a steady, slow trickle of inquirers and seekers, and three of these have in the end become members of the Society of Friends, two as members of Weare Meeting, and one as a member of Northampton Meeting. We held steady with worship through the COVID years, and maintained a regular attention and interest in each other's spiritual and temporal welfare. Our final note therefore must be one of gratitude for the leading that resulted in this gathering, for the worship and fellowship which it provided to us all, and for the encouragement and support in prayer and presence that we received from the monthly meeting, as well as from Friends in New England and beyond.

Falmouth Quarter

Brunswick Friends Meeting State of Society Report (2024)

This is Brunswick Friends Meeting's first State of Society Report in about ten years. Friends gathered on April 13, 2025 to share responses to an interactive set of questions designed to stimulate reflection about Friends' experience of worship, membership, attendance, community-building, and service at Brunswick.

Growth in Regular Meeting Attendance

Meeting attendance has grown in the past two years, with members/attenders numbering 12 to 22 attendees, including in the winter months. This current attendance level is a substantial and sustained increase. Before the Covid pandemic, Meeting typically drew 6 to 8 attendees, a reduction from prior years when there had been greater activity and participation. During the pandemic, remote attendance included 4 or 6 members/attenders. Many of the increased attendance are folks with some Quaker background, but not exclusively, and several attendees retain their memberships at other Meetings for Worship although we had three recent transfers (two within Falmouth Quarter, one from Stoney Run Meeting of Baltimore Yearly Meeting). Members/attenders tend to be "sages" (sixty years of age or over) but thankfully, not exclusively. We have few attendees with small children and currently no Children's Program. The increase in size has also added to the desirable effect of being able to hear multiple perspectives.

When Friends were asked what drew them to Brunswick Friends Meeting, responses included appreciation for the size, its quiet, its location and the Meeting setting as well as spiritual and practical support (offering furniture, suggestions about local amenities as newcomers to the area). One Friend spoke of how "all my life I never had Friends like this, with whom I connected so quickly and easily," expressing gratitude for the depth, warmth and outreach she felt. Another Friend spoke of hearing how "Brunswick Meeting was very small" and then being delighted in finding some "really wonderful people here that keep pulling us back." One Friend spoke of "feeling this is a very loving and safe place—I can't define it but I just feel it." Yet another Friend spoke of seeking unprogrammed Quaker worship and feeling, from the very first time she came to Brunswick, that she felt she was experiencing the truth of the saying, "there is not a word yet for old friends we've just met."

Brunswick Friends continue to meet in the Morrell Meeting Room at the Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick, as we have for several years, although there have been occasions in 2024 when the room has been reserved by others, requiring Brunswick Meeting to find alternative worship space. This presents a challenge for the future.

Renewed Vocal Ministry in Meetings for Worship

Vocal ministry has increased in recent years, after several years of Meetings being "quiet affairs, allowing for contemplation" after the deaths of several weighty Friends. Currently, while occasionally Friends are not led to offer spoken ministry out of the silence, the majority of Brunswick Meetings include messages that attenders feel led or moved to share. Sometimes song will accompany messages, and other times Friends are

led to share thoughts and helpful inspirations, all seeking to invoke a sense of connection with one another and the Spirit within.

After Meeting officially ends, members/attenders are invited to share Afterthoughts which seem to be helpful for those attendees who are not used to speaking in Meeting, discernment of leadings, or Quaker process. Friends have shared that these Afterthoughts are often “sparked by the Meeting, adding and deepening our spiritual and sense of community.” Another Friend shared her experience that Afterthoughts “do not dilute the actual worship time or slow down the gifts of the meeting for worship time itself” but rather, add to the depth and richness of Meeting together.

Following the pandemic, we have also sought and valued renewed in-person social engagement with one another. Typically this has happened with conversations after Meeting and at pot-luck meals. We also sometimes hold Meeting in people’s homes due to occasionally not being able to meet at the library.

Expanding Service within Brunswick Meeting

With increased attendance, there has been interest in expanding service on committees that have been dormant for some time. Ministry and Counsel recently became a committee of four Friends (rather than one). Our Finance Committee now includes four Friends, there is a second Recording Clerk (to serve if/when needed), and a newly created Newsletter Editor has renewed the practice of keeping Friends aware of happenings in the Meeting and within New England Yearly Meeting.

Societal Engagement/Activism Outside Brunswick Meeting

Our Meeting has Friends who value the silence and contemplative aspect of Meeting, and Friends who also value the witnessing aspects of the Religious Society of Friends. Brunswick Meeting does not have a history of being particularly active in social or political affairs as a group—we have not been an activist Meeting as a whole—but we support individuals who feel led to be activists in various local social justice opportunities, protests and peace vigils.

Brunswick Meeting contains many long-time Quaker activists. Many of us are disturbed about the consequences of the wars in Gaza, Ukraine and elsewhere, and the Meeting conducted a fund-raising appeal for Palestinians’ relief in Gaza, to which a number of members/attenders contributed. Two Friends offered a presentation after their trip to Palestine/Israel, to which many Friends voiced their gratitude for increasing their learning and awareness. We are also concerned about maintenance of structures of government that facilitate our democracy. Our budget is also “pretty activist,” supporting the rights and humanity of persons of color, immigrants, indigenous peoples, and transgender individuals. One Friend spoke at the Transgender Day of Remembrance at the local Unitarian Universalist church, and was grateful for the support of Friends who joined her there. We also support the Maine Council of Churches and interfaith work.

All Brunswick Friends are challenged to see how they are being led in their lives. In addition, as one Friend said, “Silence is a radical activity—and practicing it is hard.”

Participation in Wider Quaker Affairs and Governance.

Six Friends from Brunswick Meeting participated at the most recent Falmouth Quarterly Meeting held at Portland Meeting. Some of us have been involved in New England Yearly Meeting for years, and others are interested in becoming more active, including attending Sessions for the very first time. In addition, there are Brunswick Friends serving on the following Quaker organizations: the Maine Friends Council of National Legislation (FCNL) advocacy team, the NEYM Friends Camp Committee, a NEYM representative to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Board member of Haverford College, a member of the AFSC Corporation, a Friend just ending her service as clerk for the International Programs Executive Committee of AFSC, plus a Friend serving as New England Yearly Meeting Treasurer. For a small meeting, the ratio of wider participation is high.

Brunswick Friends feel that our revitalizing the practice of writing an annual State of Society Report is a useful tradition. We want all to know that “we are alive and well and growing and a vital part of the Quaker world.” Writing this Report together has been a good opportunity for reflection, rededication and gratitude, including helping us learn where we need to grow further as Friends locally, within New England Yearly Meeting and among Quakers worldwide.

(Approved by Brunswick Friends Meeting on April 20, 2025)

Durham Friends Meeting

State of Society Report 2024

After the restrictions placed on our community by the COVID pandemic were lifted and we began to meet in person in spring 2023, 2024 was a time of renewed spirit of being together and flourishing through our in-person worship. We had an infusion of energy with our new Meeting Care Coordinator. Her devotion to finding message bringers from within and outside the meeting and her efforts to use her connections across the Yearly Meeting and in the community have brought us greater connection outside the meeting.

When our Clerk stepped down at the end of 2023 and no new Clerk stepped up, Durham Friends Meeting began the practice recommended by Faith and Practice of rotating the clerkship through the committee clerks. This has been a rewarding experience for the committee clerks who have not been in the role of Meeting Clerk before. It has called up the different spiritual gifts as well as developed new skills in the way of corporate discernment.

The Makers Café is our latest outreach to the wider community. Begun through conversations that evolved into an ad hoc committee, the Makers Café events began at the end of 2024 with a wreath-making evening. The “Makers” describe this outreach as “trying to provide a welcoming, offline place for folks to hang out, learn, and connect. We want to share our Meetinghouse with a wider community. We want to help neighbors meet neighbors and help people learn how to make things, together.”

We continue to participate with other area churches in preparing meals at the Tedford Shelter in Brunswick and to support the Lisbon Area Christian Outreach food pantry, as well as renewing our involvement with the Brunswick Area Interfaith Council.

The Woman’s Society continues to meet monthly, mostly at the meetinghouse and on Zoom, and occasionally at a member’s home. We are a small caring community that seeks to support each other and any member of the meeting who might be in need of extra support. We have devotions and a program from *Blueprints*, a booklet published by the United Society of Friends Women International (USFWI). We have continued to hold plant sales, jam and jelly sales, and silent auctions, donating the proceeds to projects of the USFWI and to local organizations.

The primary activity of Peace and Social Concerns has been their leadership in the formation of Mawoluhkhotipon (Mou-look-ha-deeb-in), meaning We Work Together. Working with the Pejepscot Portage Mapping Project and representatives of the Brunswick Town Council, this organization states its mission as follows: “Mawoluhkhotipon is a community group of Wabanaki and their allies supporting projects that engage the Brunswick community in learning more about and reflecting upon the rich history and culture of the Wabanaki people of this region.” Members of Durham Friends Meeting are actively involved in the steering committee, the group working on signage and naming on public land, and the group working with the public schools to increase Wabanaki studies at all levels.

The Social Justice Book Project, an offshoot of Peace and Social Concerns, had the benefit of a grant from Obadiah Brown's Benevolent Fund during the 2023-2024 school year. These funds allowed teachers to document how they used the Social Justice books given by the meeting. The project used the teachers' work to create four guidebooks: *Creating an Anti-Bias Classroom Community*, *Exploring the Black Experience in America*, *Exploring Wabanaki History and Culture*, and a *Guide to Building a Social Justice Book Project*. These guidebooks are available online at <https://www.durhamfriendsmeeting.org/?p=6895>.

In addition to our ongoing financial support for the Puente de Amigos group, we sent one person to visit our sister meeting in Cuba in 2024, and supported the preparation for two members to be part of the 2025 delegation.

We continue the practice of using our charity account for financial support where we discern that such support is needed.

Although we had no increase in membership, we experienced new energy with attenders old and young—a spiritual elder and some parents and their new baby, who has delighted us with his own vocal ministry. Sadly, we lost five members to either death or transfer to other meetings in 2024.

We continue to recognize the need for ongoing healing in our community. We are aware that the lingering effects of hard problems and conflicts that arose during the three years of the pandemic require our care and attention. We are committed to working together with love and respect and to healing the wounds that remain. Just as our outreach confirms our sense of purpose, our time together always reminds us of the faithful love that continues to hold our small and sturdy community.



Portland Friends Meeting State of Society Report for 2024

Have you experienced Spirit at work in PFM this past year? Where? How?

This year Portland Friends Meeting is prospering after several years of struggle. Some of our struggles were caused by events beyond our control – the pandemic, national and world events which led to conflict. Some struggles we chose – a year of financial discernment, difficult conversations about vocal ministry.

But we now realize that our struggles are the wind and the rain, the sun and the compost that feed us and are helping us to grow. If Portland Friends Meeting were a tree, the struggles fed our roots, which sent nutrients to our branches, which are blossoming and bearing fruit. However, not all our branches are strong and not all the fruit is sweet. Prayer and action are the nutrients that will keep our tree growing as we face the joys and the challenges that lie ahead.

Roots:

- ★ Deepening community: Joy in a sense of deepening community and trust.
- ★ Stronger community: Increased fellowship in a variety of ways is leading to a stronger community.
- ★ Spirit led worship: Messages feel more Spirit-led and are leading us to be more faithful.
- ★ Meeting for Worship with Concern for Business: Seems more gathered with more acceptance of our differences and less rancor, although tensions remain.
- ★ Welcoming many new people: Newcomers, both those who are younger and do not fit the traditional New England Quaker profile and those who are lifelong Quakers, feel safe in our space.

Trunk: Our community, Portland Friends Meeting

Branches and fruits:

- ★ Community building activities supported by an energized Welcoming Committee included the Welcoming Booklet, a Craft Day, a Contradance, and Invite A Friend day.
- ★ Early Meeting third Sundays: The feeling of community and of being held in the Spirit is powerful.
- ★ Afterthoughts: Summed up by one person as “I feel God’s presence most consistently on Sundays at Afterthoughts. There is often very tender and vulnerable sharing.”
- ★ Underlying currents: Difficult issues which are still unresolved include (1) financial discernment issues, such as reparations, which were never addressed, and (2) concerns raised which do not come under the care of any committee and therefore tend to get neglected.
- ★ Paying attention to our youth:
 - Experiencing spirit at work when young children enter the Meeting Room towards the end of worship and with big smiles on their faces, running to the laps of their parents. “The sense of wonder and spirit lifts my heart at those moments.”
 - Return of Youth Religious Education with gifted and thoughtful leadership.

- First Day School for children ages 5-14 offered once a month.
 - Teens began meeting once a month and volunteered at the Greater Portland Family Promise shelter, offering crafts and taking shelter teens on a hike at Bradbury Mountain.
 - Advent Garden, The magic of witnessing children and youth walking the spiral of light at Advent Garden and sharing their light in our world.
 - Hosting New England Yearly Meeting Youth Retreats.
 - The Youth Religious Education Committee has reported that these efforts are not sustainable if adults do not come forward to do the work. Middle schoolers still have no one able and willing to offer them a program. No one has stepped forward to be a coordinator and perform tasks such as scheduling and making sure background checks are done.
- ★ Friends School of Portland: There is a deeper connection with the Meeting than in the past.
- ★ Adult education opportunities which included a most fruitful community retreat, studies on topics of interest both in person and online, suppers in Friends' homes, and book clubs.
- ★ The Peace Testimony: We began looking at what the Religious Society of Friends' Peace Testimony means to us at this time.
- ★ Shared witness fund: Learning what generosity with our money looks like, recognizing our abundance, and growing in our trust that giving from our resources will produce not pain and regret, but a sense of being in the flow of Spirit's generosity.
- We contributed financial support from the shared witness fund
- to AFSC for their work in Gaza and the West Bank,
 - to the proposal for the Wabanaki Elder-in-residence program at the University of Maine at Orono,
- and from our general fund surplus
- to Judith Nandikove for her schooling in peace studies.
- ★ Caring for the homeless: People unhoused, especially people at the Homeless Services Center, are finding our building and grounds to be a safe space – sleeping on our porches, camping in our cemetery, using our patio as a place to gather. We are struggling to discern ways to be good neighbors.
- ★ Social action: We are showing up at places outside our Meeting, stretching beyond our small community.
- Inspired organizing for gun safety action following the Lewiston shooting and including other Portland area faith communities.
 - Fundraising for Greater Portland Family Promise.
 - Volunteering at organizations and shelters serving asylum seekers and immigrants.
 - Member of Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC).
 - Wabanaki support: Involvement with Wabanaki Alliance, Indigenous Peoples Day special program with Sandra Bassett (Passamaquoddy), and \$1,000 for Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship added to our 2025 budget.

- Individual action: The many gifts to the world by members and attenders that may not be visible to the whole community.
- ★ Reaching out to Cuba Yearly Meeting and the wider world.
 - Our connection with Cuban Friends continues with a delegation from Portland and Durham meetings scheduled to visit our sister meeting in Velasco and Cuba Yearly Meeting in February.
 - Committed to hosting and supporting Judith Nandikove from Kenya as she pursues a degree in peace studies.

Children's Addendum:

Children in First Day School illustrated their responses to the query with pictures of Advent Garden, candles, and snacks.



I liked making candles and my friends.



I liked doing the Advent Garden with all the candles.



I like bunnies. And I liked Advent Garden. And I liked playing with my friends..



I drew a candle because it was fun to make them at Advent Garden.



I like goldfish snacks at Quaker Meeting.

STATE OF SOCIETY REPORT

2025

Windham Monthly Meeting of Friends

Windham, Maine

Our *Faith and Practice* is full of living faith examples and guidelines, and those are drawn from the Master's Manual for Life and Living – *The Holy Bible*.

The scriptures reveal to us what our Heavenly Father has to say – as someone once wrote: There, we find his voice saying: “I want to talk with you” ... “I created you” ... and “I love you” ... “I am with you” ... “I have a plan for you” ... “Come unto me.” Our faith comes to life in belief, and in the hope of His promises, as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Our *Faith and Practice* leads us into communion with our creator through prayer and trust by way of simplicity and integrity, and in personal commitment to God and to concern for our fellow beings. Philippians 4:13 tells us “In Christ we are strengthened.”

Windham Friends Meeting, now small in number of members and attendees, finds inspiration and communion with God in the fellowship of worship and in endeavors that strive to reach out and inspire others as well as one another. We stay consistent in meetings for worship each week and in opportunity to reach out to the community in giving and sharing, for instance participating in Windham History tours for third graders and contributing to worthwhile causes, particularly the Resource Center across the street from our Meetinghouse.

We are faced with challenges and blessings as always and are thankful for God's leadings and the willingness of all to share their gifts and talents as needed – standing in His light and striving to be a “light” to others.

We also have heartfelt gratitude for the various assistance we have received regarding the Meetinghouse care, repair and upgrades. Our “Faith Family” extends beyond the Meetinghouse doors. In that, too, we become inspired and see how God’s blessings consistently remain beautiful and plentiful. God loves, He inspires, and He looks to our continued holy communion and faithfulness to His callings and our inspirations in Christ’s leadings in our daily life.

At this time in our spiritual journey, we trust in God’s leadings and look for reflection on His guidance as we venture into the future for the sake of continuing WFM’s fellowship and communion with Him.

In recent times we’ve endured the passing of beloved members of this Meeting. Again, we add the name of another recent loss, our dear friend and long-time treasured member Norma Rogers who went to the Lord January 18, 2025. She will be truly missed by all who knew and loved her.

We trust in God Almighty and we know He leads the way and that His will and purpose are what leads us to the Way, the Truth and the Life.

All that said, we’ll close with this inspiration: Change and Challenge knocks at our door. We stand at the threshold and learn to endure. Come what may we kneel and pray; The Lord will lead when we express the need. No change or challenge will ever annoy for his presence is our hope and also our joy!

Windham Friends Meeting plods on with a steady pace because we know we’re secure in the Lord’s good Grace. Amen.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice L. Beattie, Pastor, April 2025

Windham Monthly Meeting of Friends

Northwest Quarter

Bennington State of Society Report for 2024

BENNINGTON MEETING is a small Meeting where the presence of Spirit is often most obvious in the level of caring and small acts of empathy, compassion, and respect that in-fuse our lives in community; as one reflection suggested, “[There is] movement to live outside ourselves.”

Meeting in person has proven important to us. The practicalities of our meeting, as we rent space in a senior center, require us to prepare for meeting by setting up chairs, arranging literature, and preparing hospitality. For some, this has become a place to experience the Presence powerfully—getting the room ready for our shared worship.

As well, over the last couple of years, we have grounded ourselves in a number of opportunities to learn more and strengthen the base of our faith, including Bible study, a course on Elements of Quakerism, shared reading of articles and Quaker writing, and individual reading and study.

These efforts stretch us. We acknowledge that we use different language and stories to define and guide our spiritual paths, but there is an openness and mutual respect that feeds our journeys and has been especially valuable to the few young people in our meeting who are testing themselves as they hear the differing manifestations of spirit-led searching.

We have been lucky to welcome a number of new people, some of whom have stayed. Others have added to our community in special ways before moving on. Our welcome to visitors is framed by our practice of allowing them to be themselves, providing as little or as much nurture as they seek. We celebrate the presence and gifts of those who come.

We reach out to many differing communities. Some among us, including the children, have helped the Meeting deepen our connection to our local community, resulting in active work to address needs both local and beyond. The Meeting has also shown trust and actively supported individual calls by those among us, such as one member’s commitment to deepening of worship through extended worship, both in Bennington and throughout New England.

We have also exercised the care to listen deeply to what we are called to, understanding the limits of both our human and our spirit-guided capacities. We let go of the many important concerns that are not our work. Some questions for ourselves as we go forward:

Do we feel a spirit deepening in our worship?

Can our worship and business be taken to a deeper spiritual level so that we may be the ever more empowered “patterns and examples” that Fox speaks of? How?

How can we build on the strength that we see of appreciating individual voices, yet striving to hold the gift of a group united in corporate (w)holiness?

2024 State of Society Report

Burlington Monthly Meeting

Burlington Friends worship, learn, serve and play on land that was a site of meeting and exchange among indigenous peoples for thousands of years. It is the home of the Western Abenaki. We are honored to be on this land and take our stewardship responsibilities seriously.

In 2024, our community experienced the joy of getting to know new and returning Friends. We also experienced deep disorientation and sadness with the loss of the faithful guidance of our dear Friends, Jean and Christopher McCandless. Much of the year has been spent in the process of finding our footing as we experienced both the grieving and joy of what it means to be in a loving community. We were particularly grateful for the spirit-led wisdom and loving guidance that our long serving Co-presiding Clerks, and Clerks' Committee were able to provide, enabling a smooth leadership transition.

Burlington Friends Meeting is growing! We saw a steady rise in both Meeting for Worship and First Day School participation, as well as in Monthly potluck attendance and activities organized by Friends including the Persian Love Cake celebration in February and the Children's Christmas play in December. We had an increase in the attendance of University of Vermont students in the fall, and many have continued to worship with us.

The Champlain Islands Worship Group has retained steady attendance throughout the year with occasional visitors. The Wake Robin Worship Group's third Monday worship has expanded, while several of their members worship in Burlington on First Day. Worship group attendees have continued to serve as stalwart commitment members on both Ministry and Counsel, as well as the Property Committee. Their faithful guidance and participation has been particularly important in this time, as we take on new and important physical plant projects: planning for lead remediation, through window replacement and painting in our 1850 building. We learned together about the day to day maintenance and operations of the Meeting House and Bassett House, while taking on the whimsical project of rebuilding the treehouse!

In June, BFM hosted Quarterly Meeting for the Northwest Quarter of New England Yearly Meeting. The program included a session presented by Minga Claggert-Borne on "Stories that Transform Us to Create a Culture of Peace." The two-day event was well

attended by Friends around the Quarter. It was a stimulating and fun event.

We greatly enjoyed welcoming new attenders, including families, to the Meeting. The Children's Program has blossomed and enriched our Meeting through worship, story time, and a monthly sing-along. This infusion of children into the Meeting has made our monthly potlucks particularly energetic and joyful (with lots of dessert offerings from First Day School). We were honored to support Friend Anna Fritz in her traveling ministry to bring hope to the incarcerated, by sharing art and music inside and outside the prison walls through live performances.

The Ministry and Counsel offered a course on Exploring Quakerism. The six-session course was offered on Zoom and open to Friends around the Quarter. The course was well attended, with generally more than twenty Friends learning and sharing about Quaker history, structure, and process. It was a profound joy to witness Friends sharing deeply about how they approach their faith and learn to live in the Light.

The Archives Committee was formed at the beginning of the pandemic. In 2024, the committee wrote a policy for handling records and transferred our records to the Special Collections & University Archives at UMass, Amherst (SCUA). We were able to disband the committee since we now have an archivist to handle records and make annual submissions to SCUA.

A new treasurer and an assistant treasurer began working with the Finance Committee to transition our accounting and reporting process. We remained financially stable due to the generous support of our Meeting community, and from community groups and tenants whose rental fees comprise more than half of our annual income.

The Property committee experienced some of the most significant challenges during 2024 due to changes in leadership and the requirement of extensive work on the Bassett House. All of the committee members remained deeply committed to the stewardship and care of this property and buildings, however there was not a shared understanding of how the work gets done and by whom. This confusion became more substantial following the loss of our Friend Christopher, who carried out much of the day-to-day property management planning and responsibility.

Despite these challenges, we strengthened the role of the property scheduler in 2024 and lived into several of our social concerns, increasing use of the property at a vital time. Weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs, memorial services, and non-profit meetings have long been held within the Meeting's buildings and grounds. For over a decade, food

entrepreneurs have used our commercial kitchen to launch their businesses. Peace groups, a Jewish mindfulness group, Narcotics Anonymous, Preservation Burlington, and the Freedom Finders (a part-time school for Black children) are among the more than ten groups who utilized our buildings in 2024. Small Potatoes, an interfaith hunger relief program started by Burlington Friends thirty seven years ago continues to use the Bassett House kitchen to prepare food for this Saturday morning ministry. Our property preservation efforts and community service were lauded by a Burlington Friends Meeting partner, Preservation Trust Vermont, in the agency's 2024 annual report.

As we approached the end of 2024, Friends became increasingly concerned about the state of our country and the world. In response to the escalating violence in Israel/ Palestine, long serving Friends and newer attenders labored over a minute to express our heartache over the expanding devastation of infrastructure and people. That minute was approved in January 2025. We joined other Quakers, faith and secular groups, to amplify the call to end the middle east violence with an immediate and durable cease fire; the release of all hostages, detainees and political prisoners; provision for safe passage of humanitarian aid, and the creation of a just peace throughout the middle east.

We experienced the death of Christopher in March 2024 and his wife, Jean, the following month. Their physical absence was deeply felt by all of us. Christopher and Jean McCandless' lives were celebrated under a large tent on the Meetinghouse grounds on a cold and rainy June day. The tempestuous weather did not deter the McCandless' many friends and loved ones from joining together in a Memorial Celebration. Friends and Neighbors from near and far celebrated Christopher and Jean in person to share memorabilia and fabulous potluck food. Many more joined us on Zoom. The McCandless Memorial Meeting was the event of the year!

We continue to be grateful for the many signs and blessings of the Spirit as we prepare for a new political reality in 2025.

Respectfully Submitted,

Burlington Friends Meeting

Ministry and Counsel

2024

State of Society Report 2024 from Hanover Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends

Many members feel we have entered a period of fresh growth and momentum as a spiritual community, although the worldwide adversities noted in our 2023 State of Society report – climate crisis, war, polarization, and the abuse of political power—have only deepened. A member observed that our meeting had been “pruned” back by the pandemic but is now “resprouting” again. The pandemic forced us to lay down many things but allowed us to reexamine them as we decided whether to pick them up again or to grow in new directions.

Within our community, we have learned more about sharing our burdens. We turned towards each other in times of difficulty. We have adjusted the roles of clerking to further distribute responsibilities, hoping to make the role of the meeting Clerk more manageable and the recruitment of new clerks easier. We have expanded the communications committee that provides the electronic connections that are now essential for including a wider group of participants.

This year has reinforced for us the importance of listening more deeply. In 2023 and 2024 we took time as we sought unity on worship modalities amid technology changes. We held our discernment process tenderly, listening to one another over many months. We sought to listen well to people with different needs in worship and to offer a wealth of opportunities. The care taken with the process made people feel more seen, heard, and cared for.

Our current worship offerings include a hybrid Meeting for Worship each Sunday, plus tech-free options for extended worship one Sunday per month and early worship one Sunday per month, hybrid programs from Adult Education and Peace & Social Concerns committees following the Sunday Fellowship hour, and a Tuesday morning online meditation and worship sharing group. Committee meetings may be in person, hybrid, or via Zoom. Hybrid meetings have proved especially welcome when snow makes travel difficult. Over the course of 2024, about a fifth of our weekly average of 45 worshippers chose to gather via Zoom. We also cherish gathering in person, as in our quarterly intergenerational worship combined with a potluck and social activities, led by the Fellowship Committee. We seek new opportunities for outdoor worship and smaller house meetings for worship as well. We find that the more we worship together, in many modalities, the more we grow together.

Our Kendal Worship Group meets on Thursday mornings on Zoom and Sunday mornings in person and on Zoom. Sunday attendance has doubled over the past year and a half, so that we now have 20 people participating. These meetings are home to lifelong Friends as well as

spiritual seekers, a rich and rewarding community at Kendal. Twice a year, Hanover Meeting has the joy of joining the Kendal Worship Group in Kendal's Gathering Room for Sunday worship.

While technology can enable better inclusion of elderly members and others unable to travel to the meeting house, personal contact is needed to support and engage children, youth, young adults, and families with children. In last year's State of Society report we listed among our goals:

- Better support of newcomers, and better integration into the life of the meeting for those who begin to attend regularly.
- Support the loving First Day School and Young Friends programs with additional volunteers, seeking new ways to draw in families with children and facilitate their participation in meeting activities.
- Spread the good word of what Quakers offer to the wider Upper Valley community.

In addition to Fellowship Committee's warm welcome, First Day School and Young Friends leaders have emphasized really listening to families to learn what works best for them. Although there are opportunities for children every Sunday, programs for our children and youth are now focused on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month so that families can prioritize those Sundays, and more children can attend together. We have been blessed with growing participation by families and children this year. Our youth have found loving guidance in looking toward the larger world, especially in their Alternative Gift Mart, where they learn about the work of charitable organizations and raise money for them.

We still need to find more ways to draw newcomers into the life of the meeting through participation in committee work and opportunities to learn about Quakerism through adult education. We used to offer "Quakerism 101" or similar courses, but we have not in recent years. Our outreach to young adults, particularly the college community at our doorstep, is not very active but we take joy in the rich and lively presence of several young people who return often to Meeting for Worship and Fellowship. More growth and ministry are needed in these areas.

We are trying to live up to our sign outside our meetinghouse that reads: "All Are Welcome." We reflect on the queries: Who is our community? How are we welcoming them? What does it mean to live into being a truly inclusive community for LGBTQIA+ community members? For people with differing political views? For immigrants? For people of color? For individuals across the economic spectrum? We aim to consider these questions without shying away from them, to listen to those who experience exclusion firsthand, and to seek guidance from the spirit.

Our commitment to do our share in the climate crisis continued with further adjustments to our new HVAC system to reduce energy usage. Sustainable landscaping efforts on the Meetinghouse property made visible some ways we can make a difference here in our local setting. The Climate Priorities Ad Hoc Working Group encouraged each committee to consider its part in the work to protect our environment and led the community in celebrations with food and music.

As we seek to strengthen our engagement with the wider community, we support the leadings of individual members and in turn are enriched by their ministry. We are grateful for the return of prison ministry last year and this year. Work on the regional housing crisis continues through a local interfaith coalition. The meeting hosted interfaith listening sessions on the Israel/Gaza conflict this fall that brought people together from different parts of the local community. Members continued service through Northwest Quarter, NEYM, and through the regional and national work of AFSC and FCNL. Our Cuba Sister Meeting committee sent a delegation to Cuba in 2024 and keeps a loving connection through fundraising and messages of friendship.

As we engage with the wider community, we experience the perennial tension between contemplation and activism. Some people see a Quaker meeting as a haven from the stress and politics of the outside world where they can find some peace, recharge, and reconnect with spirit. Others see the meeting as a place where they can find people who share their values and sense of mission to support one other in living their faith into action. Ideally a meeting can serve both roles, with each role feeding and lifting the other.

We find ourselves at a moment in history that calls for Quakers to step up again and engage actively with the wider world. We want to rise to this call. In December, our meeting formed an Ad Hoc working group to try what love can do in the storms of that wider world. We aspire to a spirit-led path with guidance from the vision Quakers forged in other times of great trials. Our history together as a meeting has prepared us for where we are now. The spiritual grounding we need going forward is already present amongst us.

STATE OF THE SOCIETY
MIDDLEBURY FRIENDS MEETING
FEBRUARY 2, 2025

QUERY: *How does our meeting listen to and respond to spirit?*

Middlebury Friends met in worship to consider this query. Each person's response was written down and then assembled in a highly personal but ultimately consistent report. Spirit moves us to take care of each other and gives us strength to look outwards.

THE SESSION BEGAN WITH A PERIOD OF SILENT WORSHIP

Vocal ministry has been very rich and sustaining.

Collective worship has been very supportive and sustaining this year. It has helped clarify to many how it is often much more powerful and deep than autonomous individual meditation. It moves one off self-centeredness and into a much broader fellowship.

Several recognized the importance of membership in our meeting and in the Society of Friends itself. While we make little distinction in our monthly meeting between members and attenders, establishing membership represents taking a further step of commitment to the long-term health and stability of the meeting. In terms of the Society of Friends, it represents concrete support for the mission of the Society in its witness for peace and social justice. The effort of several yearly meetings recently to file lawsuits to protect the integrity and sanctity of houses of worship in the spirit of the First Amendment to the Constitution serves to awaken our need to lend our spirit to the larger Society.

A long-time, long-ago member of our meeting, Honey Knopp, was an example of the strong support offered members of the meeting and how we can all respond to the needs of others.

Meeting helps us reckon with the role of religion, for better or for worse, past or present, in our lives. A recent project carried out by our worship and study committee involved Interviewing each person in the Meeting community. Friends found the experience of being interviewed to be deeply moving and powerful. Many felt heard. The project has helped with conflict transformation.

What is most needed and how can we be more helpful to others?

We are "beads on the Middlebury Friends Meeting rosary." We are in touch with Friends who are away or ill. There is a beneficent spirit that is here in moments of great stress and need.

The idea of “The Beloved Community” is especially strong among Friends. We recognize growth and improvement this last year. Each of us has their light and darkness, but we try not to back away from its challenges. We can forgive and let love grow. We recognize our “humanness” more often. It is strengthening.

Our sense of urgency to care for people in our community has been strong. This “spark” has jumped very well from spirit to action this year.

Moving forward, what do we hope for?

Openness and generosity of spirit in this meeting has allowed many to examine their own religious upbringing. We can be vulnerable in this meeting and it allows us to examine our lives in new ways.

“Whence cometh my help?” The meeting has supported many. This meeting is the basis for our connection to Quaker institutions. It’s here every First Day.

MFM has been there for many. The spirit and learning are passed along to other family members including children and grandchildren.

Meeting is where we can be vulnerable and express ourselves while we hear of many who do not have close connections.

There is much valued from those in the meeting who have stopped by asking, “How are you?” and “What’s happening?”

There is a strong thread that is the Society of Friends around the world that holds us.

We hear that family members are inspired by what the Society of Friends is doing.

The MFM “Benevolence” list that we support is and has been impressive.

“Faith without works is powerless” [Gospel of James] and vice versa.

When returning from an absence, no one asks “Where have you been?” They say, “Welcome back!” We are made whole by that encircling.

The recent cut-off of the USAID funding by the current administration has directly affected one of our families. We need to be there for them.

As we go forward, we remember our shadows. We can’t deny them, but we can’t give in to them entirely. This year we will have to be very strong and learn to love.

Northeast Kingdom Quaker Meeting State of Society Report 2024

THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM QUAKER MEETING is central to our lives as Friends who are both active in our world and contemplative in community. As we reflected on the challenging past year, we have lifted up many ways that the Meeting holds, gathers, and enriches us. It connects us in relationship and love, and provides us with a starting place for the justice work we are led to do. It offers a spiritual welcome as well as continuity over time, both for founding members and newcomers, thereby giving us a warm home from which to face the world.

The Meeting has welcomed several new attenders this year, and three of these Friends have chosen membership in the Religious Society of Friends. We consider all regular attenders as members in our Meeting, and our active Meeting list has grown to 25 Friends ranging from twenties to eighties in age, with several children aged toddler to teen who are occasional attenders. We hope to offer something for all children in our First Day School programs in the future. Weekly attendance at MfW tends to range from 15 to 20 Friends. During the summer months we often meet outside by the Barton River in Glover. The sharing of joys, concerns, prayers for those suffering or in need, and after-thoughts from Worship is a rich time that can last for an hour after Worship as we feel our communal sorrow, laugh with joy together, and sometimes sing to soothe our hearts. Whenever possible, we enjoy potlucks together, a time of community and exchange.

Ministry and Care facilitated Clearness Committee meetings regarding membership and the following of leadings. A clearness committee supported a Friend who has chosen War Tax Resistance as a response to the war in Palestine/Gaza. Another member has facilitated several Quakerism 101 sessions emphasizing Friends' history and testimonies, which will continue in the Fall.

The horrors of genocide in Gaza—piling up month after month—have increased Northeast Kingdom Meeting's work for peace and justice in Palestine. We are grateful for wider Quaker support in the form of approved Minutes from other Monthly Meetings in NEYM. A monthly Care and Accountability Committee now supports a member's return to Palestine in 2025 to document, educate, and facilitate support for peace efforts there. As an Apartheid-Free Community we have been led to organize community-wide education programs on Palestine; nurture weekly peace vigils and de-escalation training; invite Quarterly and Yearly Meeting Friends to attend our threshing session on internalized trauma & antisemitism, international law, and war tax resistance.

We celebrate our ongoing membership in Northeast Kingdom Organizing (NEKO) for its increasing presence and recognition in the wider community. We have also been led to

support LGBTQ+ rights; embrace equity initiatives in our local schools and towns; and encourage continuing attention upon the state's failing criminal justice system.

We are grateful for the communal pastoral endeavors that allow us to care for each other in both practical and spiritual ways from stacking wood and providing transportation to Meeting for Worship, to contributions to a neighbor after a devastating house fire. On the deepest level, as we consider our aging and eventual passing from this life, there is a constancy of feeling that we have found a spiritual home together.

Linda Schneck, Clerk
Susan Rhodewalt,
Clerk of Ministry and Care
Scott Rhodewalt,
Clerk of Peace and Social Concerns

Plainfield Monthly Meeting
Plainfield, VT
State of Society 2024

Plainfield Friends met to reflect on 2024 and how we have nurtured our faiths individually and as a Meeting. We are clear that we have made some steps forward in growing together as a community and at the same time very aware of being somewhat fractured.

Strengthening our community included a series of fall monthly programs that provided a way for us to learn more about members' faith backgrounds and personal histories. We heard from two Friends about what led them to lives of active Quakerism and from two others about their involvement with a local community restorative justice center. We opened one of our programs, a Death Café, up to the community. These programs provided opportunities for us to know each other on a deeper level and we were motivated to continue on with the monthly programs into the new year.

We also built community through our traditional yearly endeavors. These included a discussion on FCNL initiatives, a gathering for our August potluck picnic and outside worship (even though flooding damage prevented our gathering at Wrightsville Beach), and December caroling. During the caroling, we were keenly aware of the absence of our member who for many years had led the singing and played the piano.

Several members of Plainfield Meeting, coordinating with other Friends, supported this member emotionally and spiritually in the last few months of 2024 by providing her a home, caring for her daily needs and helping her find her way to the local Hospice program.

We continued to support a member in her work with the Central Vermont Refugee Action Network, with a financial contribution and hearing monthly about the organization's work.

One feature of our Meeting is that although we are small, we continue to have two meetings on Sundays. A consistent group of six or so people meet by Zoom at 8:30 a.m. for an hour of Worship, followed by another hour, or more, of conversation. (This virtual meeting began during COVID, because there is no way to bring internet service to the Meetinghouse.) Although there is not usually any vocal ministry offered during Worship, this group is very interactive and supportive with each other in conversation following Worship. The second Meeting for Worship happens at 10:30 a.m.

at the Meetinghouse, with anywhere from two to 12 people attending, including some occasional visitors. Vocal ministry at these meetings is described as rich and deep.

Geography plays a part in people's choices about what to attend on Sunday. In addition to these two groups, it was noted that members of our Meeting sometimes attend other meetings as well, including Burlington Friends Meeting, a Worship group in Montpelier, the monthly Northern Friends in St. Johnsbury, as well as the Rahway and Plainfield, NJ meeting, and this may affect the number of people who are at the Meetinghouse on Sunday mornings.

Geography is also a challenge for us as the majority of PFM members do not live in Plainfield, and often only interact at Meetings on Sunday. This comes to light in a concern that we don't always operate as a cohesive community. One member stated that "we appear to be on a divided path." Another commented that it is difficult to develop deep friendships when we are only together once a week for an hour or so.

There are many times our members are also enriched by being parts of other Quaker communities. In addition to the groups mentioned above, we have Friends consistently taking advantage of resources beyond our meeting that have supported their individual spiritual growth including participation in the Northwest Quarterly Meeting, a NWQM faithfulness group, a shared Worship Group with Burlington Meeting to support a member of Plainfield Meeting who was terminally ill, the New England Yearly Meeting Listening Sessions on Spiritual Life of our Meetings, The FGC Gathering at Haverford College, New England Yearly Meeting, and the monthly NEYM Meeting Leader Check-In calls. "I relish these opportunities," one member stated.

Because we are small in numbers, we are slow to complete some initiatives, like developing a website, following through with the Woolman Hill Remonstrance, or disassembling the Books for Prisoners Library.

For the second year in a row we were confronted with more environmental challenges when July flooding rerouted the Winooski River that flows past the Meetinghouse and now encroaches on our driveway and could possibly threaten access to the Meetinghouse. We are talking with town and state officials about how to mitigate the damage from the flooding, and various ways the cost of the mitigation could be paid for.

Some members worry about the viability of our meeting, and others

consider that we are currently in a “lull, resting in the moment with a strong sense of core spirituality that will continue on.”

Putney Friends Meeting State of Society Report

Dear Friends,

Prompted by the invitation from NEYM, and guided by their queries, Friends met on May 4, 2025 to reflect on the spiritual health of our Meeting in Putney, VT. It is with joy and gratitude that we report that we find our Meeting grounded in deep, and vital worship, blessed with new members and attenders, and faithfully engaged with one another and the wider world.

We hold two Meetings for Worship on First Days, one of which is a hybrid meeting with some participating on Zoom. Sometimes worship is held in deep silence, and when ministry is offered it consistently feels faithful to the leading. Our co-clerks have had attenders describe the meeting for worship as “holy”, “stirring”, “comforting”, “like putting on a warm coat.” A friend who worships on Zoom shared that the quality of worship comes through even online.

We feel that we are and have been very clear about what we are doing here, and that clarity has been apparent and attractive to others. As many as half of the attenders on any first day may be new in the last three years, although not all are new to Quakerism. We have been joined by a mix of young and old, and of seasoned Friends from elsewhere along with others finding Friends for the first time. Those who have been led to join have magnified the life of the meeting while keeping it grounded.

We have faced some practical challenges in the past year involving finances and our Meeting House. Our fire alarm system unexpectedly required a very expensive replacement. At the same time we found ourselves short of the funds we expected for our budgeted needs. Business meeting involved some straight talk and members found themselves faced with discerning what commitments each could make. In this process we also discovered how important a role our Meeting House plays in our small community where it hosts many other groups. We discerned that it was time to make a modest increase to our rental fee, and became more willing to announce the existence of our contribution box at the rise of meeting. With each of these changes, we discovered that we were able to meet the need, and to fund the replacement fire alarm system, better equipping the meetinghouse for those of us who worship here, and for those who rent our space.

Many have felt challenged by events in the wider world and have been led to respond in different ways. What began as a series of peace vigils has grown to include a series of conversations about bearing witness in the community. These are opportunities to reflect together on the experience of Witness in Friends tradition, which may include following a

leading to social or political engagement. We can see that not everybody does everything, and that we don't need to winnow down to one collective engagement. Rather, we are holding one another's engagements in prayer and supporting many faithful individuals in their work, which *is* the work of the meeting.

In our reflection we were reminded of many of the other, similar ways we show up for one another. In an active pastoral cares committee, tenderly and quietly showing up for those in need of that kind of support. The simple practice of always having two adults with the First Day School children because that is how to keep kids safe. A popular Adult Religious Education program that is well attended in person and on Zoom. A group of Friends who work in healthcare that has met to engage with their experience of serving in that way. Our care and support for the Orchard Hill worship group that has experienced a similar growth and vitality. An annual men's retreat that has been going on for over ten years. And the many, many spiritual friendships that arise in the Spirit-centered web of a vital faith community.

We also asked ourselves what we saw emerging. We wondered if we were seeing a growth in our engagements outside the meeting. We reflected on opportunities to increase our engagement with the Northwest Quarter, and with the Yearly Meeting. Not only or even especially at sessions but in the many opportunities throughout the year for those with a specific focus (vocal ministry, support for asylum seekers, archives, nominating, clerking, pastoral care, extended worship, etc.).

Our time together closed with expressions of gratitude - for those who had been led to our Meeting this year who have been such a gift, for the faithfulness of longtime members and attenders, and for the precious heritage we have inherited from Friends, now gone, who established this meeting and nurtured it through its youth and maturity.

Submitted by clerks Michelle Wright and Julie Forsythe,
on behalf of Putney Friends Meeting
New England Yearly Meeting

Meeting to discern the State of South Starksboro Friends Meeting, April 7, 2025

Present: Joy Pile, Greg Pahl, Patty Heather-Lea, Pete Antos-Ketcham, Steve Brown, Peggy Kadima-Mazela, Tom Perry, Susan Smiley

Quality of Worship

Friends remarked on how important the silence is to centering their busy lives, and that foundation of spirituality carries through the rest of the week. Another mentioned that sharing the communal worship in silence allowed him/her/them to be more in touch. That after the Rise of Meeting, there is a sense of community, weaving us together, and being with each other through the shared silence of worship. There was gratitude that the silence and Quaker thought, allows one to contemplate continuing revelation, and not be locked into a rigid theological framework. One Friend reflected that he had recently returned to Meeting for Worship after an extended sabbatical and found comfort in the fact that the spirituality in worship remained as he remembered it. South Starksboro Meeting continues to be mostly contemplative and one Friend talked about how he had a long attendance at a fairly vocal meeting where he often participated in the vocal ministry. He mentioned that one time in this Meeting a person stood up and began reading a long diatribe against same sex marriage. After a few minutes others in the Meeting gradually began standing up and stood in silence. Finally, when the majority were standing in silent protest the speaker felt the weight of the community of Friends eldering him and sat down. The Friend describing this event was impressed by how effective communal silence could be. But the Friend also said that he also has been reflecting on vocal ministry and when the thoughts that bubble up during Meeting for Worship rise to the level where they should be shared as vocal ministry as it is sometimes hard to discern when to speak.

Efforts to Foster Spiritual Growth

In the fall Ministry and Counsel and the clerks, solicit suggestions for a book or Pendle Hill pamphlet to read as a Meeting. After the New Year, the Meeting has a discussion, often over Zoom to accommodate the busy schedules of more Friends. Last year we discussed the Pendle Hill Pamphlet, Walking with the Bible. This year we read and discussed The World According to Mister Rogers.

One Friend mentioned recognizing the joy and spirituality in sharing the journey towards the death of her sister, talked with others in Meeting. The Meeting will hold a discussion later this spring on death and dying.

A Friend talked about attending one of the series of extended Meetings for Worship clerked by Jean Rosenberg and Michael Wajda. Friends were reminded that we have set aside a line in our budget to offer assistance to Friends wishing to attend such gatherings.

Stands taken on Friends Principles

Friends described how they took stands as individuals, by standing on the town green every Friday for half an hour and holding a poster with the word Peace on it, by writing letters to the editor which are printed in the local newspaper. A Friend who participated in several recent protest demonstrations noticed that these demonstrations were different from the ones he'd participated in when he was younger. These recent demonstrations were protesting actions of the Federal Government. They were better organized, which he found hopeful. By participating he reflected on Quaker principles in relation to civil society and found demonstrating to be a positive action to highlight situations not being recognized by the government.

Personal and Family Relations

South Starksboro Ministry and Counsel supports Friends with personal concerns and those of the world at large. One Friend remarked that she had received the comment that Friends in our Meeting feel appreciative of being listened to. Friends feel comfortable asking for a "Clearness Committee" to help reach discernment. They also occasionally reach out for other sorts of assistance, such as a "food train".

Relations with community and other religious groups

South Starksboro's outreach to others in our community is mostly through a yearly distribution of benevolences. Friends have reached out to those living near the Meetinghouse and are grateful for those in the community who help us care for the grounds and generally keep an eye on the Meetinghouse.

Participation in general activities of Friends

Technology, Zoom, in particular, has allowed Friends to connect with a healing circle for a Friend in California, and Friends worshipping internationally and in other locations in the United States including a variety of Friends Meetings, including ones from the Conservative tradition of Friends. It has also allowed a Friend to attend sessions on leadership within Quaker Meetings.

Significant Concerns

The discussion the Meeting held on the future of the Meeting as many of the regular attenders age, was lively and brought an awareness that actively participating, beyond just occasionally attending Meeting for Worship, is important for the continued survival of the Meeting.

Youth of the Meeting

Although children are infrequent attenders, the Meeting welcomes their presence, and it adds a vibrancy when they attend.

Meeting Community

The Quakers of South Starksboro feel that we are holding our own and have come through the years of the Covid-19 pandemic with slightly greater average attendance at Meeting for Worship. A Friend sometimes bring tea and light snacks for Rise of Meeting hospitality and the annual cleaning of the Meetinghouse is an opportunity to build community.

,

Salem Quarter

State of Society Report 2024

Amesbury Friends Meeting

Amesbury, Massachusetts

This report was prepared by the Ministry and Counsel Committee of Amesbury Friends Meeting (AFM).

Amesbury Friends Meeting continued in 2024, as in previous years, as a modest yet active Meeting. We endeavored to live by, and sought to share, Quaker values. We joyfully welcomed members, attenders, newcomers and visitors. Our worship has been deep and nourishing as we gathered each First Day to invite the presence of Spirit.

Weekly First Day worship has been attended by Friends both in person and remotely by offering an opportunity for folks to join via a Zoom link. This remote opportunity to join was also offered for Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business and for all other special meetings that took place in our Meetinghouse.

Amesbury Friends remained disturbed by the ongoing wars in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Sudan, and in all places around the world where there is violence.

The Peace and Social Concerns Committee was active in a number of areas. With the leadership of this committee, Friends participated in a town wide yard sale and raised a considerable amount of money which was donated to World Central Kitchen. Financial support was given to select charitable organizations throughout the year. Friends supported a local food distribution organization, Our Neighbor's Table. On two occasions, AFM prepared, served and shared an evening meal for residents of Heritage Towers, a local residence for the elderly and disabled. One musical Friend invited fellow musicians to provide lively music at these dinners. Food, fellowship and music were a joy to all. In December, gifts were given to a local supportive housing program for women in recovery. Throughout the year, Friends participated in local annual gatherings for gun violence awareness and the Pride Parade. In July, AFM hosted the John Greenleaf Whittier Home and Museum's reading of Frederick Douglass's 4th of July Speech. Friends met with members of Lawrence-Andover Friends Meeting to learn about their substantial support for a water project in the Turkana region of Kenya where there is a Friends Meeting.

We continued to struggle with ways to achieve outreach to our community, to let people know that we are here as a place and a people of peace and spiritual nurturance. Friends have

continued to write a quarterly column for a local newspaper, to explore both Quaker and universal themes of spiritual inspiration. We were pleased to again provide hot chocolate and hospitality to marchers in the Amesbury December holiday parade. We were able to provide a member to resume participation in the Amesbury Council of Churches.

We had only occasional and unexpected visitors with children in 2024. While we don't have a set First Day School curriculum, when we do have visitors with children someone always offers to spend time with the children either outside or downstairs where we have a ready box of materials for activities.

Ministry and Counsel Committee was active in the spiritual and pastoral concerns of the meeting. The committee offered monthly opportunities to explore and deepen spiritual growth. We spent several months reading and discussing the book "Letters to a Fellow Seeker". We took time to listen to one another about concerns prior to the 2024 election, and pondered the question of how our community could be an oasis of peace in a time of turmoil. In the fall, M&C offered a well-attended and well-received one-day retreat at Adelynrood Retreat Center with the theme of "Nurturing Our Community." We began a series of monthly sharing of members' spiritual journeys. Some in the meeting began gathering monthly for in-depth discussions about aging and end of life issues. In December, we gathered for our annual Lessons and Carols worship. Our much beloved social potlucks continued most months. We welcomed one new member to our meeting. And we accomplished a needed update to our internal census.

With the leadership of the Building Committee, Amesbury Friends lovingly cared for our historic Meetinghouse, attending to needed maintenance. The Meetinghouse continued to be the home of a Montessori pre-school, whose rent helped us to maintain our Meetinghouse. Additionally, it is a welcoming space for weekly Al-Anon meetings as well as regular acoustic music sessions.

In 2024, AFM continued to be blessed with a sound financial footing, allowing us to care for our Meetinghouse and provide support and outreach to our local and broader communities.

Amesbury Friends acknowledge with gratitude the many blessings of Spirit and community we received in the past year, and we move forward with hope as we care for one another and our world.

State of Society Report for Beacon Hill Friends Meeting, Final draft - 24 April 2025

Attendance at Meeting has been slowly but surely increasing, and we have been receiving more visitors in the last year. While the number of visitors often rises when our country is in a difficult space, other factors include a change to the Meeting's mask policy and concerted efforts to warmly welcome these visitors. We acknowledge a challenge to then more fully integrate new people into the Meeting community.

Our members and attenders have reflected that our waiting worship and vocal ministry have depth and resonance for them. One Friend shared his observation that "We seem to be coming to Meeting more prepared for the promptings of the Spirit." It is that waiting worship that is most important to many in the Meeting. Our vocal ministry is not that frequent but the messages coming forth out of deep and powerful silent worship stimulate new thoughts and prayerful reflection.

For the past few years, we have been ending each meeting for worship with an invitation to Friends to share prayer requests, joys, and sorrows. During this time, we have heard inspiring and heartfelt messages and been asked to hold each other in the Light during both challenging and joyous times. We are reminded of how much we can really support each other if we are comfortable enough to share what is going on in our lives. This time in worship helps us to feel more closely connected as a community, and the community, for many, is the most important part of Beacon Hill Meeting.

Our First Day School and Childcare programs are strong, due to dedicated teachers and willing volunteers. Moving both programs during the recent Friends House renovation was challenging, but was accomplished smoothly by hard work with abundant support from the House.

We appreciate the work of our Adult Religious Education Committee, which provides interest and challenge for members, frequent attenders and visitors. One Friend's experience is that Adult Religious Education presentations provide "a basis for talking to people about their faith."

We are grateful for the work of the ad-hoc justice committee, which was launched in recent months. It feels like it's bringing energy to the Meeting. Although we have long supported and continue to support individual leadings in peace and justice work, the absence of a group active in justice or social concerns had troubled many in our community for several years. We see that working together on justice issues is an important kind of glue to bring the community together.

We've been using Zoom now for five years. Zoom continues to make our meeting accessible for Friends at a distance and for Friends who cannot attend Meeting in person due to physical or medical challenges. We have done a lot of work to integrate the in-person and Zoom worshippers, but it remains a challenge week to week. Zoom has made committee meetings much easier for many, but some miss the experience of meeting with Friends in person to discuss committee business.

The Meeting is closely monitoring its finances. As a community, we look for creative ways for the Meeting to secure more income. Our service auction, putting up goods and services of Meeting community members for bidding, is one example.

We were encouraged by having reached unity late last fall on a masking policy for the Meeting. It was a difficult process as we realized there were some different opinions about masking within our community and between members of the Beacon Hill Friends House (our landlord) and the Meeting. Our process involved meetings with the House staff and then independently as we discerned as a Meeting community. We held listening sessions which involved us holding each other very tenderly, seeking divine guidance and discerning how the Spirit was leading us. Although our policy has been received well by most in the community and by the House, we appear to have lost one member of the Meeting and we are still in the process of repair and healing with the House.

We struggle to populate our committees at even the smallest possible level. Many people new to the Meeting are at stages of their lives where they don't have the time or the energy to be on a committee. We need to better mentor Meeting members and attenders about committee service as a component of being in a spiritual community. However, even with this struggle, we are encouraged by a greater sense of energy within the Meeting community than we had last year.

Beacon Hill Meeting is many things to many people. It is a place where we have the space to reckon with our spiritual commitments in the midst of chaos and a spirit of unkindness in the world. It is a safe space where people feel they can be who they are without worry. It is a space where

the faith of others can be inspiring when we feel distracted or discouraged by our own personal concerns. For this we are grateful and it keeps us coming back.

FRIENDS MEETING at CAMBRIDGE

STATE OF SOCIETY REPORT

MAY 2025

Introduction

Friends Meeting at Cambridge prepares an annual State of Society report to provide an update on the life of our Meeting for New England Yearly Meeting and to give community members an opportunity to reflect on the spiritual and community life in the Meeting. This year we engaged the community in a two-part process to reflect on three topics: 1) What comes to mind when you think about Worship at FMC; 2) What comes to mind when you think about Community at FMC; and 3) What comes to mind when you think about Witness at FMC.

We first engaged community members in a discussion of these three queries at a Sunday morning Forum. These queries were based on components of the Beneficial Cycle (Deepening Spirituality, Increasing Witness, Strengthen Community). The Beneficial Cycle has served as an important framework for our work over the past several years. During the Forum, participants generated a list of words / phrases in response to each of the queries. Later in the day we asked that individuals identify the three responses that best reflected their own perspective from the lists that had been generated in the Forum. Subsequently, we sent out a survey so that individuals who had not been present for the Forum and those who participate only via Zoom had the opportunity to reflect on the queries and respond. Between the Forum and the Survey, we obtained responses from approximately 50 people. The responses are highlighted in the narrative below as well as in the visual depictions that follow. The visual pictures reflect unity of responses in the font size for each word/phrase that was offered.

What Word / Phrase Comes to Mind When You Think of Worship at FMC?

Through the Forum and Survey 14 words/phrases were most frequently identified as reflecting individual perceptions about worship. Those words / phrases are highlighted below in rank order from most to least frequently chosen.

- Presence of Spirit and Each Other – *More than half of the respondents were in unity with this phrase*
- Gathered Together Communally
- Centering
- Worship is the Center of Meeting
- Authentic Listening
- Grounded
- Challenging
- Comforting
- Our heritage
- Gathered Meetings
- Importance of Preparing for Worship

- Worship as Preparing for Week Ahead
- Inclusive
- Vocal Ministry

What Word /Phrase Comes to Mind When You Think of Witness at FMC?

Through the Forum and Survey 15 words/phrases were most frequently identified as reflecting individual perceptions about witness. Those words / phrases are highlighted below in rank order from most to least frequently chosen.

- Worship at Raytheon – *more than half of the respondents were in unity with this phrase*
- Faith in Action – *almost half of the respondents were in unity with this phrase*
- FMC Committees & Groups that Support Witness
- Compassion in Action
- Speaking Truth
- Providing space for other Witness Groups
- Cambridge Friends School
- Prison Work
- Avison Fund
- Social Justice Work
- Good Friday Witness for Peace
- Efforts Supporting Peace in the Holy Land
- Sharing Circle with Prisoners Returning to Community
- Immigrant Support
- International Day of Peace

What Word/Phrase Comes to Mind When You Think of Community at FMC?

Through the Forum and Survey 15 words/phrases were most frequently identified as reflecting individual perceptions about community. Those words / phrases are highlighted below in rank order from most to least frequently chosen.

- Simple Lunch – *more than half of respondents were in unity with this phrase*
- My Spiritual Home – *almost half of respondents were in unity with this phrase*
- Volunteer Service to the FMC Community
- Seeking to Know One Another in Love
- Small Group Opportunities
- Quaker Identity
- Discerning and Threshing Together
- My Sense of Belonging
- Clearness & Support Committees
- Intergenerational Efforts (Getting to Know Each Other
- Forums

- Exploring Ideas Together
- Efforts to be Inclusive
- Working on Conflicts / Differences

Closing Summary

There are clearly strengths that were identified as key to a sense of belonging within the FMC community and finding a Spiritual home where worship is at the center. The third Sunday of each month many of us participate in a Meeting for Worship held in front of Raytheon (a primary producer of weapons of war) was identified as a key witness activity in support of the Peace Testimony. Our efforts to organize the Good Friday Witness for Peace and involvement in the International Day of Peace also provide examples of our witness in the larger world. During these troubling times, more and more individuals at FMC are becoming involved in witness activities related to Immigration, Climate, and Prison work. We have several faithful members / attenders actively involved in witness related to Gaza. In addition, in March, the Meeting approved a \$12,000 grant to a non-profit providing aid to Gaza. As many other Quaker communities, FMC has continued to work towards finding the right balance to ensure inclusion of those individuals for whom participating via Zoom is the best way to stay involved at FMC and those who continue to be challenged by the presence of technology in our spiritual and community activities. Over this next year, FMC will be exploring our committee and Clerking structures to further deepen our Spiritual connections and attend to the work that Spirit is calling us to do. Despite the few structural and technology challenges, FMC continues to seek ways of implementing the Beneficial Cycle by deepening our connection to Spirit, strengthening our community, and increasing our witness in the world.

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK of WORSHIP at FMC?

Presence of Spirit & Each Other

Gathered Together Communally

Inclusive

Challenging

Authentic Listening

Centering

Grounded

Gathered
Meetings

Worship to Prepare for Week Ahead

Worship is the Center of Meeting

Vocal Ministry

Our Heritage

Comforting

Importance of Preparing for Meeting

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK of WITNESS at FMC?



WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK of COMMUNITY at FMC?

**My
Spiritual Home**

Intergenerational Efforts

Forums

Simple Lunch

Discerning / Threshing Together

Efforts to Be Inclusive

Clearness & Support Committees

Volunteer Services to FMC Community

My Sense of Belonging

Working on Conflicts / Differences

Small Group Opportunities

Exploring Ideas Together

Seeking to Know One Another in Love

Quaker Identity

State of Society Report March 16, 2025

Framingham Friends met in a worship-sharing format, responding to a set of queries to discern the spiritual state of our Meeting, resulting in this report.

Framingham Friends Meeting has a strong sense of community. We care for each other and take care to welcome folks into our community. Work by the Outreach committee, the Meeting Directory, Fellowship time after worship, the use of nametags, and encouraging conversations especially with those new to us help to welcome all. Rides are arranged for Friends who need them, and quiet support is offered among one another on a regular basis. We have much needed work to do to support the young families that make up our First Day School and plans are in progress to do so via a committee made up of representatives from the standing committees of the Meeting.

Our worship was described as “substantive, meaningful, and uplifting” with great appreciation for the silence as well as vocal ministry when it is offered. Worship continues to be a source of strength, inspiration, and renewal. We no longer worry if a Meeting for Worship is completely silent or has multiple messages and embrace the spiritual connection we feel when we gather. We appreciate the sense of revitalization that newcomers have brought to our worship. The sense of community is fostered both in person and on Zoom via our hybrid meetings.

While our Meetings for Worship feel deep and centered, and we have cultivated a caring community, Friends have a real hunger for more spiritual deepening outside of Meeting for Worship. We are living in challenging times when taking action feels urgent but discerning what action to take feels confounding. Framingham Friends seek to ground our actions in Spirit and are asking for more opportunities to connect spiritually to equip us for the challenges ahead. A strong sense of community helps, but the best way to find our way forward is through listening to the Divine. It can feel difficult to know how to move forward into the world without contradicting our traditions as a peaceful people. But there is a false dichotomy between acting in the wider world and our spiritual lives. We are called to support those among us with a more public ministry, pushing back on the harm and hatred that the current political climate is exacerbating, and to remember the importance of how we treat people individually in each moment. While we do not want our gatherings to become opportunities for political/polemical diatribes, we do need to be able to speak to the ethical and moral questions raised by the current political climate, continually seeking Divine guidance in our words and actions.

Like many other faith communities, our population is aging. There is some concern for the Meeting's viability in 10 to 15 years. We are called to care for aging Friends, as well as nurturing and welcoming young families. Our primary hope in last year's State of Society was that our Meeting would grow, and to our joy, it has, with new attenders feeling welcome and continuing to worship with us. Several years post-pandemic, we are beginning to recover some of what was lost, and we are moved to continue to do the work needed to nurture Framingham Friends Meeting into the future. This should include outreach to those no longer attending and/or who have moved away.

For the coming year, we hope to find more ways to connect and deepen our spiritual lives, to help each other find joy and support each other, to make our Meetinghouse greener and become a center for wider community activities that align with our leadings, to take advantage of Quaker resources available to us through Friends General Conference, and to have our actions guided by our faith, working with other area Quakers as we are able.

We are stepping into a challenging time with the support of a loving community and a hunger for Spirit's guidance. With Divine assistance, we seek to do our work as led.

2024 State of Society Report – Fresh Pond Monthly Meeting

A review of our recent years' State of Society reports reveals a continuum of living from year to year in Faith, Hope, and Love. This perspective shows that the content of our faith community's character and spiritual life is not delineated per annum. It is only partially linear, because a life and a year are not discrete. For in both the eternal and present moments, "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). We experienced a perpetual, flexing rhythm of meeting, listening, holding, and responding to holy invitations and opportunities.

In the last half-decade Fresh Pond Friends have found ourselves in purposeful, flourishing, joyful times while also experiencing unsettling, painful events through periods of uncertainty and flux. The worldwide COVID pandemic lingers as a heightened awareness of our vulnerability and resilience, increasing our desire to be together. We underwent abrupt and necessary changes and transitioned to hybrid worship, experiencing the particular capacities and cognitive dissonance of being joined through a digital portal. We were clear we could not go back to exclusively worshipping in person at the Cambridge Friends School, yet we were still laboring in 2024 with accessibility concerns that all may be seen and heard.

After a Sabbath Year in 2023, the four seasons of that shared spiritual journey reverberated throughout 2024. Had God invited us to new forms of organizing ourselves? Were we functioning adequately and faithfully? How did we know if we had answered God's holy invitation to us? Had our simplified structure freed us to address other concerns? Were we experiencing joy? As the queries persisted, the listening continued.

We laid down all standing committees in 2023, except for the Pastoral Care Team. Structurally, we did not reconstitute standing committees in 2024. Our former Ministry & Worship Committee, however, had been a committee of the whole and in 2024 we continued with regular, open committee of the whole meetings for discernment and threshing of various topics and concerns. This loosened, welcoming structure has resonated with us—deeply. We welcomed a new, valuable Finance Working Group to assist our treasurer. After extended effort and consultation we once more revised our Safety Policy reflecting our intention to be safer with each other, holding concerns for all of our most vulnerable.

We continued to accompany, worship with, and marvel at the spiritual depth and burgeoning growth of the Three Rivers Worship Group, which transitioned to Monthly Meeting after approval by the New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM) Permanent Board in February 2024. This digital worshipping community led us by example on how the needs of spiritually thirsty Friends across the country could be met. Though we were grateful that Three Rivers had become NEYM's newest monthly meeting, the journey had been wayward and stony at crucial moments. The resistance to their acceptance within Salem Quarter and NEYM Permanent Board was perplexing, injurious, and ultimately felt *disgraceful*. We had hoped to celebrate this momentous transition with Three Rivers, yet the pain of the process and the unresolved conflict has left the community not yet ready for celebration.

We suffered with concern for the spiritual health of our beloved yearly meeting as a result of the fraught discernment process and challenge to Fresh Pond Friends Meeting's spiritual authority in recommending that Three Rivers become a monthly meeting. We felt guided, however, to stay open,

step up, and persist in our course. We felt the beginnings of grace being restored when our invitation to the leadership of NEYM to meet with us was accepted and we met together in October in willingness and mutuality. With the accompaniment of appointed elders from beyond FPMM we experienced the beginning of forgiveness and repair to a breach of trust. We moved toward reconciliation and healing, not casting one another off, but dedicated to our shared membership in one body. As a small meeting with an outsize presence in our yearly meeting through the years, we remain steadfast in our commitment to the vital work of NEYM.

By the end of 2024 we felt and acknowledged an increased strain on our presiding co-clerks and a diminishment of attendance at the Committee of the Whole gatherings. After two years of having three co-clerks we anticipated that just two presiding co-clerks in 2025 might not be sufficient. We were concerned that key aspects of our shared responsibilities were landing heavily on our presiding clerks and that aspects of our spiritual life were at risk of falling through the cracks. We wondered if we might be better served by re-establishing a Ministry & Worship Committee.

We were profoundly shaken by the deadly violence and destruction in Ukraine and Gaza. We united with Northampton Friends Meeting's minute on Israel-Palestine. We sent our minute to the U.S. President and our Federal representatives and advised Northampton Friends of our unity with them.

We were pleased to contribute spiritual and practical support to Cambridge Friends School through our members who serve on their board. We joined in worship with members of the school community and endeavored to increase their understanding of Quaker practices. During their times of courageous struggle, we held in care the staff, students, and their families.

We joyfully welcomed two new members into our meeting and noted with anticipation and gratitude the continuing influx of visitors and new attenders. We established a working group to offer programs about Quaker faith and practice that we hoped could answer inquirers' questions and wonderings as they joined us in worship. Simultaneously, we finalized the memorial minute for Nancy Shippen, a leading Friend amongst us, whose ministry of peace making and reconciliation inspired and encouraged people around the world.

We have cared for each other well, holding and sharing in worship and other settings matters close to our hearts. Among us we faced unique and varied challenges – some brought before the meeting, others known only to a few. We endeavored not to lay guilt trips and unreasonable expectations on each other. We feel concern that our long-developed care and trust in each other may make us less inclusive and open to newcomers than we would wish. With no regular attendance of families with children, we find it challenging to address their needs. This brings sadness to us.

At the end of the year and an agonizing election season, we grappled with a mean-spirited national political movement intent on degrading our democracy and the diversity of individual freedom. We experienced the repudiation of Friends' values, undermining decades of initiatives for equity and peace and increasing distrust between our neighbors and families. We reminded ourselves to live as we have been guided—reaching out in support and empathy, speaking Truth to power, working toward justice and mercy, all while hewing close to the Ground of Our Being in worship and prayer.

State of Society Report 2024-25
Lawrence Monthly Meeting of Friends
Fifth Month 18, 2025

Lawrence Monthly Meeting with the help of nearby Friends enjoyed a very productive year. Blessed by rich silences in its Meetings for Worship, members and attenders were active in the world, as well as local Meetings, the Quarterly Meeting Planning Committee, the Permanent Board, the Yearly Meeting, and in travel ministry. It is heartening to be part of the evolving Meeting---our members are managing to maintain and advance a small monthly meeting amid the many responsibilities of their active lives.

One member, who travels widely within and beyond the Yearly Meeting, speaks of the spiritual gifts and exemplary works of the small meetings in New England. We approve her evaluation, since we are ourselves a small meeting.

It was a good year for the spirit expressed through an outpouring of good works.

1. Water Access Project in Turkana, Kenya: Arrangements for the construction of the water access project at Kalong'olomoe, Turkana, Kenya were finalized with Friends United Meeting and the Turkana Friends Mission thanks to the unending help of our good Friend and steward, Muchuma Niva, from New England Evangelical Church in Nashua. Sufficient funds were raised to cover a large part of the cost, with help from neighboring Friends in Amesbury.

2. Educational Courses for Turkana Friends: Lawrence Friends felt clear to offer educational courses to Turkana Friends, with skills focused on the water access project in Kalong'olomoe. Five candidates for courses were selected by the Mission and others, and Lawrence Friends were able to support three students for courses in plumbing, pipe fitting, and a three year program in water engineering.

3. Food Program with the United Society of Friends Women, Kenya: Meeting members and attenders were able to continue many years of funding for the food program run by the United Society of Friends Women in Kenya with the leadership of Zelika Galavu. Contributions were made toward the purchase and shipment of food for Turkana, or sometimes just to provide transportation for food and other articles for Quaker youth conferences.

4. Charitable Work with Quaker Organizations: Friends were able to continue gifts to a variety of Friends organizations both in New England and beyond. These gifts were often an expression of interest from one or more members.

5. Peace Work: About half of the active members/attenders of the meeting are involved in local peace work, particularly with the Merrimack Valley People for Peace and FCNL. The peace groups activity confronted the ongoing massacre in Gaza by participation in lobbying politicians and participating in weekly peace witnesses at the Raytheon plant in Andover and in Shawsheen Square, Andover. Active opposition through lobbying against the manufacture of nuclear weapons has been a long-term effort.

6. Travel Ministry: Our member, Kathleen Wooten, continues to travel in the ministry under a Travel Minute approved by the Meeting. Kathleen traveled extensively to small and large meetings and Quaker conferences, listening to members' concerns with a gentle loving spirit.

In practical matters, members in Lawrence continue to meet faithfully for worship, business, and study, as well as fellowship after meeting often leading late into the evening. Our finances are in-hand and the combination of charitable gifts and income from earlier endowments meet our needs and enable us to do extensive projects outside the Meeting.

Our numbers are relatively stable, with some declines recently because of transfers and interest in other religious groups. We were fortunate in welcoming into membership one young adult Friend, Maille Wooten, who is now in college and often joins her mother in travelling in the ministry.

Virtually all the members and attenders at Lawrence Friends hold office in the Meeting or are members of the Quarterly Meeting or Yearly Meeting Committees. One Friend, Janice Sifferlen, recently joined the Salem Quarterly Meeting Planning Committee. Another, Brian Quirk, who has been a long-term member of the Yearly Meeting Archives Committee, has recently agreed to join Kathleen Wooten's Care Committee. Kathleen Wooten serves on Permanent Board. Muchuma Niva has been an invaluable help in furthering the programs in Kenya and has agreed to administrate our new educational programs in Turkana and Nairobi. Maille Wooten recently served on the Youth Ministries Hiring Committee and regularly serves as tech host for Permanent Board. The Meeting acknowledged with gratitude the increase in the workload for our Treasurer, Ann Spires, as the result of our involvement with projects in Turkana.

We thank our faithful members and attenders for their generous efforts and look forward to the coming year in the hope that Love and Light prevail in our Meeting and in our lives.

Submitted by,

Allan Sifferlen. Clerk

Lawrence Monthly Meeting of Friends

Approved by the Business Meeting, Fifth Month 18, 2025

North Shore Friends, State of Society Report

Contents

- Vocal ministry
- Budget and financial management
- Children
- Relationships
- Spiritual growth
- Hardships and challenges
- Social or civic concerns and stands taken
- Relationship with wider Quakers Community
- Service and relationships with community and other religious groups
- In conclusion

Fourteen friends gathered in silence then shared reflections on the last year from March 2023 to March 2024. We based our sharing on the guidance we received from the clerk of New England Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel.

Vocal ministry

We continue to have strong vocal ministry. The worship experience has improved since we conducted our Quaker 101 program and studied, among other topics, the Pendle Hill pamphlet on vocal ministry. We have also come to unity on proper conduct in worship. We remain mindful of the length of messages, and of the importance of allowing a lengthy pause after each message and we discussed this with individuals as needed.

We typically have about 16 to 20 people at worship. We meet in a light-filled worship space at a private Beverly school.

Budget and financial management

Because we rent our space, we have a modest but comfortable budget. Our Treasurer met with a bookkeeper who made suggestions to help organize the budget in a more effective way. In subsequent paid consultations she met with our Treasurer to develop better tools for financial accounting.

Children

Before the pandemic, we had three active families and an outdoor program for children. Over the last year, one family has continued to attend, albeit periodically. One of our members and another adult stays with the children which he considers a joyful experience.

Relationships

We are fortunate to have strong leaders. Our clerk feels encouraged and supported and it has been a joyful experience.

The meeting community responds generously when there are members in need, sending cards, making meals, providing financial support and visiting or calling. These many spontaneous acts strengthen our bonds and a feeling of care and love.

We have held monthly potlucks with excellent speakers, some from within our community and others whose topics are of interest. The potlucks also provide opportunities to get to know each other better. We are grateful to be able to meet in person again.

Although not conducted under the care of our meeting, several of us supported the wedding and marriage of one of our meeting attenders through a Clearness Committee and helped in organizing a Quaker-like wedding ceremony.

We are blessed with many artists in our community. We share our love of the arts and culture, and express our gratitude for the ways in which their gifts enrich both our own and local communities.

Spiritual growth

We take seriously the importance of spiritual development and the deepening of our spiritual practice. We selected two of our members to attend Phil Fitz training of trainers for a Quakers 101 program. Soon after this training they organized this program for our meeting on Zoom. It was well attended. Our members and attenders wanted more which led to the organization of another program focused on the study of **Testament of Devotion** by Thomas Kelly. Members expressed gratitude for these classes and for the willingness of leaders and participants to hear each other as we wrestle with the material. Through meaningful sharing and friendship while participating in the **Testament of Devotion** study and in a spiritual support group, one member has found an ability to embrace conflicting ideas.

The practice of careful listening that we try to implement in the meeting gives us an important skill to take to our activities outside the meeting.

Hardships and challenges

We are concerned about the aging of the meeting, with most of us over age 60. There are some benefits to that as we welcomed back those of us who retired and were thus able to be more active in our community.

Several of us are grieving about losses, whether this concerns our own aging bodies, illnesses or diminished abilities, or concern for family members and dear friends. Given our commitment to be there for one another, especially when the loss or losses aren't as visible, or are taking place slowly in the background, we need to consider the importance of extending our fellowship beyond Sundays or potlucks, as that may not be enough. At our last potluck, where one of us spoke about her work and passions, some remarked how little we knew about her and how wonderful it is to get to know each other better. We may need to give more attention to do something about that, for example by getting to know each other better over a meal, coffee or visits.

We continue to wrestle with the hybrid meeting model for our Sunday worship. Since we don't have our own space, as well as a modest budget, acquiring the equipment and devices for a hybrid meeting seems outside our reach at this time. We are able to hold our adult education session and our meetings for business on Zoom during the winter months. The rest of our meetings for worship are in person.

Social or civic concerns and stands taken

Six members of our meeting showed up for a community meeting on the state housing bill, hosted by Essex County Community Organization, an ecumenical group of 59 congregations in Essex County.

Though we suspended our Peace and Social Concerns committee because we could not get the necessary leadership for this committee, we continue to have a strong commitment to social issues and we support each other in our individual social activism, living out the Quaker testimonies. Two of our members took a winter polar plunge to raise funds for a local charity. Others participate in climate activism and support of immigrants. One member and his partner have taken multiple trips to Ukraine over the last few years to offer financial and emotional support. In turn they have enriched and deepened our meeting's relationship with the people of Ukraine whose lives they have impacted through their reports each time they return from a trip. They are supported in their initiative, both spiritually and financially, by our community. To facilitate bringing in contributions from the wider community we have created a 'pass-through' mechanism to make financial contributions.

We give about 20% of our budget to organizations in which our members or attenders are involved as well as AFSC and other organizations that operate on a global stage.

NSFM State of Meeting report 2023/24- Page 3

We grieve for the people caught in conflicts in the world. Our meeting developed a carefully worded letter on the war in Gaza, which we sent to our representatives, as our Quaker Peace Testimony.

Relationship with wider Quakers Community

Many of us recently attended the Salem Quarter meeting in Amesbury. One of our members gave a moving presentation on the life of Lucy Stone, a nineteenth century suffragist and abolitionist, whose activism remains relevant today.

Several of our members attended Yearly Meeting Sessions, including some for the first time, building the connection between our meeting and the Yearly Meeting. The monthly Tuesday Leaders calls organized by NEYM, the monthly midweek meetings with Bryan Drayton and the monthly NEYM check in calls keep us connected to fellow Quakers in New England.

We organized a worship sharing on the draft Introduction to the revised NEYM Faith & Practice and presented our reflections to the committee charged with the writing.

Service and relationships with community and other religious groups

We continue to serve meals at the First Baptist Church in Beverly as we have done for many years, even during the pandemic.

Some members attend a Wednesday bible study with Tabernacle Baptist Church in Salem where the Quaker presence is appreciated. Several members participate in Eastern spiritual practices. These connections with other congregations and disciplines brings depth to the meeting worship.

In conclusion

Northshore Meeting, while small in numbers, is a vibrant community actively seeking to deepen our spiritual lives and ministry and witness in the world.

State of Society Report – 5/6/2025

During February, March, and April 2025, thirty-five members and attenders of Wellesley Friends Meeting met to discuss the state of our Society. Five gatherings were facilitated by Ministry and Counsel, four in person and one on Zoom. Each gathering opened with fellowship and silent worship, with the following queries as prompts for worship sharing: *How does our community come together in these times to provide spiritual sanctuary, a community that holds us in safety and nurtures us to move forward in the world to be a force for good? How does WFM help you deepen your own spiritual life and the spiritual life of the community?*

In thinking about Wellesley Friends Meeting as a spiritual sanctuary, we feel a deep sense of community, caring, and safety that has been built through many years of being part of each other's spiritual and life journeys. Wellesley Friends Meeting is always there for us and it satisfies many needs: e.g. spiritual sustenance, community, connection (especially during COVID). At Wellesley Meeting we talk freely and deeply about spiritual feelings and questions. We each bring our own spiritual understanding and theology—we recognize there is quite a spectrum of belief among us, and each of us has the security of knowing that in our community we hear one another in loving acceptance—especially when we disagree. In a spiritual sanctuary we encourage one another, hold one another in love with no exceptions.

The meetinghouse itself is a spiritual sanctuary, and Friends find that the time spent each Sunday in the meetinghouse creates a valuable pause in the week. We note the importance of being physically together in the meetinghouse; we know each other better when we meet in person, including in the informality of the coffee room after worship; such connections feed us. Being present with other people in worship is powerful — we feel blessed that most of us are now able to attend in-person and grateful that Zoom allows those of us at a distance to be integral members of the community. We recognize that Zoom has allowed us to expand our sense of what connection should feel like.

We are enriched by knowing the joys and sorrows of others in our spiritual community. We are grateful for all the ways we watch out for and support each other; during times of profound loss the tenderness of community is particularly special. Offering consistent, ongoing presence and support is a practice that strengthens the connections and sense of trust that are at the heart of the spiritual life of our community.

In discussing how the meeting helps us deepen the spiritual life of individuals and the community, we reflected on where we are now compared to a year ago. In meeting, the silence is more carefully protected between speakers, and messages often build on one another. There is less talking about personal issues during worship. The meeting is experiencing somewhat of a renewal with the influx of new attenders. The reinstitution of a children's program is another sign of new life in the meeting. We did well last year budgeting for childcare and then the families came. Our outreach and follow-up with new attenders have been helpful—one person described a sense of genuine kindness and interest that is not overwhelming.

New life in the meeting is also evidenced by the forming of new spiritual growth groups, the Elements of Quakerism class, the monthly lunch meeting of the Ooo's (On our own), outreach to members unable to get to meeting, and resurrection of the Friendly 8's. It is good that new people are coming and getting involved—and we want to be sure we have the depth that we and they can be called into. We are grateful for the Adult Religious Education programs before Meeting for Worship; the spirit that arises during these discussions is taken into worship, deepening our time together. We are also grateful for the renewed focus on *Faith and Practice* and for the series of discussions *How to live as a Friend using queries to help us mind the Light*. They were very well-attended and have helped us integrate Quaker values into our daily lives.

Thinking about how we can be a force for good, we recognize there are many opportunities to witness to the dignity and humanity of every person with whom we come into contact. We feel that everyday witnessing is important. It can help to allay feeling powerless to make significant changes. We recognize that we are not powerless within our own community and that small changes can sometimes create chain

reactions that result in significant change. Being an example for others is important. Several Friends spoke of having lived lives of activism in earlier decades, working hard for social justice—and now having less stamina to be on the frontlines. Younger members now look to the example set by those older members and carry the Light forward. One Friend noted that not everyone needs to be on the frontlines—we each do what we are able at this time in our life.

While we work to foster a community that “holds us in safety,” we acknowledge that not everyone is or can be safe in the current environment. One Friend said “I don’t need to be held in safety”—particularly if accepting the risks of stepping forward to act can help to keep others safe. We recognize that there may be consequences for participation in public demonstrations or actions such as the 1st amendment lawsuit brought by New England Yearly Meeting (and other meetings) against the Department of Homeland Security policy allowing Immigration and Customs Enforcement to enter houses of worship.

Looking to the year ahead—

In terms of the spiritual growth of our community, we seem to be on the right track—so in the coming year we should keep on doing what we are doing, only perhaps more so. Suggestions were offered for ways to deepen connections and conversations. We might explore having a day-long Meeting retreat, which would be a great way to get to know newcomers better. We can look for more ways to help newcomers learn about participating in committees, spiritual growth groups, and other meeting activities. We can continue to find ways to improve the experience of remote attenders—speakers in the meeting room can be encouraged to move close to the Owl; we can consider options for sharing Quaker studies through Zoom and for connecting with people who would be willing to talk about the Religious Education/Second Hour programs (after they happen). We can look for ways to raise our profile in the community and connect with other spiritual communities with similar values.

In terms of being a force for good in the world—how do we behave in the face of chaos and hate? Be kind, be intentional, share financial resources, build networks of trust, and keep asking, *what more is required of me? what are we called to do?* We trust that the spiritual sanctuary of Wellesley Friends Meeting can provide the grounding and spiritual energy necessary for activism. We are not hopeless because the Dark cannot overcome the Light. We are called to be the Light in the world.

Sandwich Quarter

Sandwich Quarterly Meeting State of Society Report for the Year 2024

Draft approved at Sandwich Quarterly Meeting Ministry & Counsel meeting on March 22, 2025, to send on to Sandwich Quarterly Meeting in April

Sandwich Quarterly Meeting remains an important connecting force for Friends in our region. Many of the individual meetings and preparative meetings in our quarter are not large in membership, so our gatherings offer a valuable way for Friends who take part to learn about other meetings' activities and connect with a larger group. It is particularly rewarding when meetings present their State of Society Reports, usually at our April meeting.

Our quarterly gatherings rotate among meetings. We meet on Saturday mornings for meeting for worship to conduct business, have lunch together, and the host meeting plans a program that is presented following lunch. Our 2024 meetings were as follows:

- In January, we met at Mattapoisett Meeting; the program presentation was "Doing Right by the Right Whale," which included some history of Quaker whalers and concluded with what we can do about the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale.
- In April, we met at the Dartmouth/Smith Neck Meeting; after lunch, a guest speaker presented his ministry work, which included aiding persecuted Christians and others impacted in war zones worldwide.
- In July, we met at New Bedford Meeting; after lunch, we enjoyed a presentation on Quaker efforts to influence the First Federal Congress against slavery, presented by a historian who attends that meeting.
- In October, we met at Westport Meeting; following lunch, we learned about that meeting's innovative intergenerational activities and their revitalization of their First Day School and childcare; we were invited to join Westport Friends in their intergenerational activities and also to think about how our meetings might engage in similar activities.

Sandwich Quarter Ministry & Counsel holds open meetings twice a year. These meetings offer a chance to discuss issues our meetings face, learn from each other, and offer differing perspectives. A major project for both Ministry & Counsel and the Quarter in 2024 was developing updated guidelines for the Susan B. Kirby Fund, a small fund the Quarter administers that had been seldom used in recent years. Revising and approving new fund guidelines that fit with both Susan B. Kirby's will and the needs of the Quarter today was a nontrivial amount of work, but the new guidelines have already resulted in Friends applying for small grants from this fund to facilitate projects to help our neighbors in need in Sandwich Quarter. We appreciate this renewed vitality and the opportunity to learn about meetings' activities in their communities through this grant application process.

We welcome more Friends to participate in the Quarter's meetings; they are joyous opportunities to participate in fellowship with Friends from across the region as we worship, work, and eat together. However, we recognize that the Saturday schedule is hard for many working Friends. While our goal is to offer a hybrid meeting, unfortunately, there have been occasions where we have been unable to provide one due to Internet access issues.

Approved at Sandwich Quarter meeting for business on April 26, 2025

Allen's Neck Friends - State of Society 2025

739 Horseneck Road, Dartmouth, MA 02748

3/2/2025 / 10:30 AM / Friends Attending: 18

Care of Meeting / Blair Tatman

We gathered for Hybrid Worship, beginning with a 25 minute period of silence, followed by an invitation to share about the State of our Society here at Allen's Neck Friends Meeting.

Three Queries were offered:

Do you feel the Spirit move among us?

What are our strengths and weaknesses?

Where should we focus our attention in the future?

Friends rose and spoke as moved by Spirit.

"The word that comes to me is "fragile". I feel that there is some drama behind the scenes between prominent members of our Friends, detrimental to our community. I wonder why this is such a small gathering today for such an important day of Worship. "

"We have a history of being over frugal". "I feel a lot of joy this morning." "Generosity has flowed from the Meeting at several times, there is a basic goodness that we can trust." "We can share times when we have trusted". "Friends have stood up and spoken about the support and love that they feel at this Meeting. "The more we trust the love that is here, the more we will reach out and the more we will do."

"The Meeting for Learning means a lot to me, helps me to clear away all the stuff and settle myself. It is a good way to begin worship."

"I find the small, local acts of kindness done by our Friends form a warm web that stretches well beyond our community. This made me decide to attend more frequently."

"I feel nourished here, mind, body and soul." "I am fed by the outreach that we do." "I am challenged to welcome people and to get involved." "I find Spirit here, I see God working amongst us here." "We care for peoples' bodies and souls, when we go for a visit."

"During Covid, a bunch of us met on Zoom for daily worship, from that worship I've learned how to Settle, where I find a deep strength." "My depression has lifted since I've had this time to Settle during this daily worship." "Quaker Worship is not rational, we go to a place that is hard to define." "This place helps to destroy fear."

“In this last year, the parking lot is full, 5 or 6 years ago it was not full. For some reason people are coming back.”

“What we have here is the antidote to the cares of the world and the difficult times we live in.”

“The word that comes to me is Love.” “Friends believe there is the love of Christ’s light in every being.” “It is sometimes a struggle to love everyone, but we do pretty well here.”

“I wandered in here 23 years go, and never wanted to leave. There has been a lot of change, I see people reaching out a little more. We have been through some hard times, but we are getting through it, the heart is still beating here, I’m grateful to be a part of this body.”

“About 10 years ago I was struggling internally and facing immense challenges. I felt comfort in the silence of Meeting for Worship where I could find that small voice, and the strength to let that light shine more brightly. I came to Meeting today feeling afraid due to the times that we live in, which are so dark. It’s here, identifying as Quaker, we gain strength from each other. We have an amazing body of people here. I want to reach out to other Quakers to do things together that can make the world a little more peaceful and loving.”

We closed as we began, rising from Worship to greet each other anew.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jeffrey Schmalz, Recording Clerk
and Ministry and Counsel Committee

Approved at Allen’s Neck Friends Meeting for Business, March 23, 2025

2024 State of Society Report of Barnstable Friends Meeting a Preparative Meeting under the care of Mattapoisett Monthly Meeting

Barnstable Friends Meeting (Preparative) continues to be a precious space for those who meet for worship every Sunday. While tiny, we continue to feel led by the sentiment expressed in the passage from Zechariah 4:6, “You will not succeed by your own strength or by your own power, but by my Spirit” and Psalm 127: “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” We see this as related to all aspects of what we feel spiritually called to build.

In 2024, one of the things Barnstable Friends felt called to build was a micro-mini podcast that shared short messages that came out of our Meeting for Worship. Although suspended during the summer, at the end of 2024, this podcast led Barnstable Friends, with the approval of Mattapoisett Friends, to support and work with a member to begin building a new website, Healing Reflections.

For Barnstable Friends, a very sad event occurred in March 2024 with the death of Katherine (K.) Brown, one of our most beloved founding members. K. never betrayed the principles the Meeting was built upon or wavered in her steadfast participation, faith, support, and love. Barnstable Friends held a memorial service in the manner of Friends July 14 in Eden’s garden, attended by most of her multi-generational children and some old friends. Since only a few in attendance were Quaker, Barnstable rebuilt the attached Description of a Friend’s memorial service.

Toward the end of 2024, it felt like our world shattered, and it continues to feel like the strategies that we used in the past, could today be ineffective, divisive, counterproductive and could leave us and our loved ones vulnerable to fear. We struggle with how to respond. How do we stay in that place of love, truth, and peace? How do we respect and honor the light within everyone and build the world we vision?

Out of prayer, we heard that when a builder reconstructs something that has fallen apart, they will first assess and evaluate the damage, what is so rotten it is unsalvageable, and what can be repaired. They then gather the tools, materials, and people with the talents and designs needed to complete the work. So, what are the tools, materials, and skills we need to design and lift up together what is good and solid in our country, communities, and Society of Friends? What do we need to put together today to be able in the future to build something that sustains all we hold dear, a place and space where we can join together in that joy and beauty, justice and truth, that love and respect that will build an intimate sense of connection with each other and oneness with the Divine.

This is an hour of change.

Within it we stand uncertain on the border of light.

Shall we draw back or cross over?

Where shall our hearts turn?

Shall we draw back, my brother, my sister,
or cross over?

This is the hour of change, and within it,
we stand mutely on the border of light.
What lies before us?



Shall we draw back, my brother, my sister,
or cross over?

From Mishkan T'filah

.....

Approved by Mattapoisett Monthly Meeting on March 23, 2025

Received by Sandwich Quarterly Meeting on April 26, 2025

STATE OF SOCIETY 2024

East Sandwich Preparative Meeting

This past year, 2024, brought to light a renewed commitment to our seeking and speaking Truth. We saw our meeting increase in membership and attenders. We followed the leadings of our members and attenders by gathering for morning discussions that challenged us to reflect both inwardly (understanding our Quaker faith, vocal ministry, membership, unity vs consensus, how we define God, how we live with suffering) and outwardly (civil rights in Selma, how to help the helpers in Gaza, supporting local organizations with environmental/climate change, honoring the work of homeless advocates, assisting with the Friendship Garden in West Falmouth). More than just discussions, these regular gatherings served to strengthen our faith community, our compassion for each other and our world. Rather than remain insular, we took our Quaker faith to the larger community. We supported: the activism of the Peace Abbey, the Unitarian Universalist Church in Kingston that was maliciously

vandalized, the homeless families and individuals on Cape Cod, and the Wampanoag tribe to whom we donated essential supplies for their pantry. Additionally, we gathered to work on our Quaker library and museum to educate people about who we are and what we believe. Painting and making repairs to the museum was another opportunity for Friends to come together, serve, and socialize.

Being such a close-knit community was a comfort as we mourned the passing of three of our most dear and beloved Friends: Randy Harelson, Barbara Parker, and Linda Holton. They were, and are, deeply missed and will be forever held close in our hearts. Their lives were a blessing to us all.

The closeness of our meeting gave us the courage to assess our strengths (listed above) and weaknesses realistically. We are an aging meeting and sometimes tasks repeatedly fall to the same few people. We have no children for a first day school. Personality styles sometimes clash and lead to disagreements and misunderstandings.

However, we attempt to keep the lines of communication open. We listen to each other. We try to practice our Quaker faith with each other by being less judgmental, more open-minded, and welcoming to each one's beliefs and experiences.

Our meeting is committed to each other, this community, the world, and God. The year 2025 will require all of our gifts, strengths, and energy. We are now connected to the other Sandwich Monthly Preparative Meetings by the Gazette newsletter, which fortifies our sense of community. We are beginning a support group to offer balance, refuge, and resources in this time of political uncertainty. We will stand together to speak out against the injustices that are happening in our country and the world. We will be turning our faith into practice in our service to God, and we remain "a small but mighty meeting".

Approved by East Sandwich Preparative Meeting on April 13, 2025

Received by Sandwich Quarterly Meeting on April 26, 2025

State of Society 2024, Martha's Vineyard Monthly Meeting

Approved 4/20/2025

This is for the most part a compilation of contributions by members and attenders, some submitted in writing, others as recollected from a worship-share process. The seams show. There are shifts of tone, perspective, and voice.

Who we are

Martha's Vineyard Friends Meeting is a small group of faithful people who are committed to worshipping together and to supporting each other through life's challenges. Our Meeting is a stable vibrant small community based on friendship and love, guided by the Spirit. Zoom is a vital enabler for us, as some of us are away from our Island home for months at a time. Typically, six to eight people are present, occasionally as few as two or three and as many as fifteen or twenty.

The strength of relationships and trust within the meeting community

Repeatedly, Friends affirmed how important our meeting is to them personally, with words like sanctuary, support, sustenance, grounding. The meeting is cherished, and we each feel cherished in our meeting.

"The Meeting and the individual Friends who comprise it have been a strong, compassionate source of reassurance, hope and stability in a time that I find personally very trying."

"I feel at home spiritually in our Meeting."

We are committed and connected to the point that often if one is going to be absent for Sunday worship, an email noting the absence is sent to the group. This is not usual in meetings.

Our Meeting cherishes the differences among us. No two of us are alike.

The quality of worship and vocal ministry

Messages during worship are meaningful and given with thought and caring.

Friends are not reticent to share their leadings. "I find their messages thought provoking, spiritually grounding and sources of personal spiritual growth."

On 14 April, the morning 'Quaker fortune cookie' sent to qfcs@googlegroups.com was this:

Quaker spiritual practice involves much contemplative waiting, not waiting for something, but simply waiting. The region of my awareness where I have most often had direct experiences of God is deep, inner space. When I sit in meeting, I release into that space. Of course, my mind sometimes has stuff it is processing, and when that stuff arises, I release it. Over and over, I release. After a time, I am able to release into abiding in the vastness of inner space, where I experience God. I feel God's palpable presence. I feel God drawing my awareness to a non-personal, transcendent level.

— Robert Atchley (2017) Mystical Experience, the Bedrock of Quaker Faith (*Friends Journal*)

A seasoned member responded: "Very appropriate after yesterday's meeting for worship."

The process of centering in worship and being led along in the formulation of a message carries over as patience and attentive seeking for direction in the momentum of daily business.

Efforts to foster spiritual growth and evidence of growth

Our hosts at St. Andrews Episcopal Church having kindly agreed, we designed and purchased a very nice sign identifying our meeting place, and fastened it to the front of the building. This has led several people to find us and join us in worship.

During Covid, the Meeting spent time clarifying and deepening our processes. Although we were hoping to reach out and bring in new people, we have not followed through as much as we might have. Those who do find us are warmly welcomed.

Our Meeting is welcoming to all and cherishes visits of other Friends and people of different spiritual traditions.

At least one of us has begun a 'publicity' practice of stating his affiliation as a Quaker when engaged in some social service or significant action.

Possible hardships for the meeting, and how Friends are responding to those challenges

Our rather precipitous move mid-month October 2022 from the Good Shepherd Parish Center to be hosted by St. Andrews Episcopal Church required a change of meeting time to noon, after they finished using the space. This has not been as challenging as some of us anticipated, and in fact the change makes it much more possible for those of us who migrate to and from more westerly time zones to attend remotely.

Social or civic concerns of the meeting and stands taken on Friends' religious principles

There is tender caring not only for each other but also for the Vineyard community, our nation, and people in other parts of the globe.

We are active in peace and social concerns according to individual leading rather than corporately. For example, Friends participated in the Crop Walk severally, not as an identified group walking under a banner. When there is a stand-out or demonstration at five corners (a busy intersection near the ferry landing) there are sure to be several Friends participating, but not identified as such.

Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee comprises the only still active members of the Martha's Vineyard Peace Council (MVPC), an organization with roots dating to 1986 and civil opposition that ended military bombing practice on Nomans Island 3 miles south of our Chilmark coast. We have regularly had a contingent in the 4th of July parade. The meeting is now recognized as the joint sponsor, with MVPC, of the Embarking Peacemaker scholarship awards given to graduating seniors. One qualifying requirement is to write an essay on peace founded on justice and sustained by good will.

Service and relationship with Friends beyond the local meeting

Two members attended FGC this year, and loved it. Sue Regen led her forgiveness workshop again at FGC. Some of us have joined with Friends in Yangon Friends Meeting who meet by zoom in exile from Myanmar. Travel to other meetings is somewhat more involved for us. Some of us attend West Falmouth Meeting if we are opportunely off Island. One of us represents us in the Sandwich Quarterly Meeting, another in New England Yearly Meeting. Our clerk does travel quite a bit, and makes a point of connecting to Friends whatever the location.

Received by Sandwich QM on April 26, 2025

State of Society 2024
Mattapoisett Monthly Meeting

In 2024, we continued to find sustenance in the silence of worship and in our fellowship with one another. We gained a Mattapoisett member who blesses us with the 4-legged attendee she brings along to meeting. We lost a Barnstable Friend who, we found out at her celebration of life, was even more wonderful than we knew! We missed the presence of a couple members who were unable to attend because of health and family issues. Two of our elders who previously had to stop attending, rejoined us last year, and we are so pleased.

In 2024, we raised money for a Nepalese friend to travel to the US for medical attention, and we enjoyed his presence among us. He runs a school for 40+ impoverished children in Kathmandu, his way of giving back for the care and support he received from Mattapoisett Friends and others as a youngster.

We feel the absence of young families with children and are hoping to grow our meeting in 2025.

Approved March 23, 2025

Received by Sandwich Quarterly Meeting on April 26, 2025

State of Society Report for New Bedford Monthly Meeting for 2024

Approved at the meeting's April 6, 2025 business meeting

As a meeting, we experienced new beginnings in 2024: We completed our first Nominating Committee process in many years, and now have a new clerk, a new treasurer, a new recording clerk, and new trustees, as well as our first Peace & Social Concerns Committee in years. The number of young adults who have some connection to the meeting community increased a bit, and the presence of a parent and toddler fairly often in our Sunday morning meeting for worship has been a source of joy.

Friends find our meetings for worship, both on Sunday morning and on Wednesday evening, valuable. Friends value the meeting and are grateful it exists—one called it a blessing—and a number of members work very hard for the meeting, each in different ways. But we also find our community life difficult; some of us feel alienated from the meeting community, and we struggle with differences in perspective. We are reminded that people in our community whom we find difficult may have valuable spiritual lessons for us, including teaching us patience and compassion. We could do a better job of supporting one another.

An important source of nurture and community-building in our meeting is our weekly potluck lunch after Sunday morning meeting, which we call “food fellowship.” Members contribute to the meeting in many ways—for example, by showing up at meeting for worship and other meeting events, by doing the considerable work of the meeting, and by exercising discernment about whether to speak in meeting or not. Some Friends worry that we try to do too much as a small group, but Friends also noted that the meeting makes a real effort to be welcoming both to newcomers and to community groups who want to use our building—whether as a stop on an educational tour about New Bedford’s abolitionist history, as a storage area for baby supplies for a nearby nonprofit’s diaper bank program, or as a space for a potluck gathering for a local grassroots community group.

Although we still have much to do, we have put a lot of work in recent years into making our building more presentable and welcoming. We see our growing edge as centering both individually and communally, learning from our differences, being more loving toward one another, and preparing to do more outreach in New Bedford.

Received by Sandwich Quarterly Meeting on April 26, 2025

State of Society Report, Sandwich Monthly Meeting, Calendar Year 2024

During 2024, Sandwich Monthly Meeting made progress on recovering from the isolation and separation our three preparative meetings experienced during the pandemic.

The Gazette, which had originated as the newsletter of West Falmouth Preparative Meeting, was recognized as a Monthly Meeting newsletter, sharing voices and pictures that increase our sense that we are one community. The Preparative Meetings also began updating a combined website to communicate efficiently to modern seekers in a single style, an effort that is continuing. We continued to work together on creating a Cape Cod Quaker museum above the worship space in the East Sandwich Meetinghouse.

Sunday meetings for worship, business, and special gatherings to nurture spiritual growth continued at the three meetinghouses, with welcome intervisitation among the preparative meetings. SMM Friends were active in the Friendship Garden project that was using the West Falmouth garden to address food insecurity in our area.

We shared experiences of losing beloved elders and restoring beloved old buildings. The Monthly Meeting's September picnic, pre-election Seekers' Day, and New Year's Eve worship service were well attended. These potlucks were the scenes of joyful reunions of Friend/friends from different preparative meetings. Monthly Meeting hosted a memorial service on the longest night of the year for our homeless neighbors who passed during the year, with a potluck and optional sleep-out.

We supported the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe's programs to care for its vulnerable members and to reclaim the Wôpanâak language. Friends shared their grief on discovery of our Monthly Meeting's history of support for the United States government's boarding school program for the purpose of assimilating indigenous populations.

The meeting took a Friend's public ministry under its care. This responsibility is overseen by our Monthly Meeting's Ministry and Counsel Committee, which also advises the Preparative Meetings' Ministry and Counsel Committees. Monthly meeting also has an active Committee of Oversight for Property and Finance that meets to offer support and to advise on these matters at the Preparative Meetings.

Looking ahead we acknowledge challenges, communication being one of them. Effort continues to not simply welcome Friends from other Preparative Meetings to each meeting's regular and special events, but also to communicate when planning events so that they can be joint activities or avoid scheduling conflicts. We are also challenged to nominate the number of committee members and officers required by our organization structure.

(Recommended by Monthly Ministry & Counsel and approved by Monthly Meeting for Business on April 6, 2025.)

Received by Sandwich Quarterly Meeting on April 26, 2025

2024 State of Society Report, West Falmouth Preparative Meeting

West Falmouth Preparative Meeting, founded in 1681, occupies a historic meetinghouse within walking distance to the sea. Here our Meeting has become primarily an older community, graced with the wisdom and deep commitment of experienced Quakers.

The Ministry and Counsel Committee opened our work on the spiritual state of our meeting in 2024 with a listening session and wrote this report on themes that arose during that session.

One legacy from the pandemic is the use of Zoom for committee meetings and as an optional way to be present during meeting for business. As we move out of the pandemic, we continue to rely on virtual participation for committee meetings. This helps to support participation by those challenged by illness, disability, darkness, busy-ness, distance, and weather.

While we are getting closer to integrating the worship experience into a seamless whole for both those who participate on Zoom and those who are able to be in the meetinghouse, we are just beginning our work toward integrating all participants into the fellowship periods before and after meeting for worship. We hope to find ways to help those online and those in the meetinghouse connect with each other, as we value the informal small group and one-on-one conversations which foster bonding and insightful and inspirational exchanges. In the past we have found such activity valuable in encouraging wider participation in the internal functions and external outreach of the Meeting.

We continue to worship and conduct full-meeting business with a hybrid format in which Zoom participants are heard but not seen in the meetinghouse. This year our technical committee was successful in enabling good audio quality for Friends connecting through Zoom as well as for those in the meetinghouse. However, our hybrid format's lack of a video connection diminishes our worship experience because Friends in the meetinghouse and those online are not fully aware of who is present. A challenge for the coming year is to modify our practice to enable Friends on Zoom to know who is in the meetinghouse, and vice versa – without introducing customs or technology that distract from settled worship.

Over the years, it seems that vocal ministry had become increasingly rare in West Falmouth Meeting. Friends find peace and comfort in the shared silence of a meeting without speaking. Yet we miss the voices of Friends whose messages during meeting touched and inspired us over the years. This year, we have noted a marked increase in vocal messages shared both during and after meeting. In some cases, messages have carried on insights gained prior to meeting during the morning *lectio divina* study of the Gospel of John. Other messages have brought insights from diverse sources, from literature to current events. Extended participation in vocal ministry has flourished as well during “afterthoughts” offered as we, both friends on Zoom and in the meetinghouse, each introduce ourselves and share thoughts that had not risen to speech during the designated hour of meeting for worship. Our shared spiritual journey has been deeply enriched by this increased vocal sharing.

A Friend introduced her vocal ministry one Sunday by quoting the “gospel according to Tolkien.” “I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo. “So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” [J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings*]

As in the past, West Falmouth Quakers seek “what to do” in these times, in other words, how to live our Quaker values, how to be led by the Spirit in our witness to the world. We are grateful for the opportunities we are given to participate with other faith groups in our community through a strengthened connection with the Falmouth Interfaith Clergy. Other notable “fruits of the Spirit” during 2024 have been active engagement with numerous organizations which share our Quaker values:

- internationally through AFSC
- nationally via FCNL
- in Massachusetts through Mass Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence
- in Falmouth through No Place for Hate, and Belonging to Each Other
- with the Wampanoag community, Quaker Earth Care Witness and Quaker Institute for the Future
- with a Quaker-initiated restorative gardening project, growing produce in our own backyard to give to a local food pantry
- by bringing in people from outside our Quaker meeting to speak at Second Sunday Forum

Following the November election, our cries echoed Frodo’s. As the year 2024 drew to a close, we found ourselves living in a time of crisis, which calls upon each of us to answer Gandalf’s implicit query: “What [can] we do with the time that is given us?”

As Quakers, we can find hope by embracing new connections with others who seek both practical and spiritual insight, strength, and courage to meet these times in ways that foster truth, justice, and peace in the world.

approved at West Falmouth meeting for business (3/23/25)

Received by Sandwich Quarterly Meeting on April 26, 2025

Yarmouth Preparative Meeting

State of Society, round two, 2024

During the past year, while our Meeting house was being restored with the aid of our talented Restoration Committee, who spent hours of planning meetings across the months and mustered funding from a Town of Yarmouth Community Preservation Grant, our meeting itself has been growing in the Spirit. Vocal ministry has become more common and deeper, and at the end of worship, when those gathered are asked for after-thoughts, new wisdom often emerges from words spoken by some who may have felt a bit timid about speaking out during worship. The camaraderie created by the words of the service and the welcoming silence as well is carried over into our hospitality when those returning to the Schoolhouse sit around the two big tables to sip coffee, enjoy food brought by many, and get to know each other better. Often the conversations are sparked by something spoken during meeting for worship, but may also, in this safe environment, reveal personal struggles, or worries about the world, or even discussion of simpler things like recommendations for books that have proved inspiring. So hospitality allows us to care for each other in important ways.

Focused discussion is at the heart of "Dialogue Across Differences," a gathering led by a talented facilitator. These conversations occur several times a year and have attracted people from the other preparative meetings as well as a number of members and attenders from South Yarmouth. Here participants talk to each other with respect and often emerge with new ways to manage controversies in their own lives.

For a small meeting, South Yarmouth Friends had been able to undertake a wide range of service projects, supported both by our official budget and by contributions by individual Friends who feel a special call to donate to a particular project. Thus, for a year we have been sending over a thousand dollars each month to a Quaker meeting in Poland that has been working to support Ukrainian refugees. Closer to home, we have committed to raise funds for the next three years to provide a substantial annual sum to help pay the salaries of teachers in the Wampanoag Language Reclamation project. We also gather donations each month for local food pantries, for A Baby Center, or for gifts and clothing to children in an "adopted" family at Christmas. We also took part in a project to provide backpacks and school supplies to local children in September and have held an annual pie sale whose proceeds are divided amongst several food pantries.

All in all, South Yarmouth Friends has been growing into a welcoming, caring community in which the energy of the Spirit spills over into our individual and community service and manages to make a few loaves and fishes go a long way. South Yarmouth Friends Preparative Meeting considers itself blessed, though we are constantly challenged, being so small in number, to find enough volunteers to take on the responsibilities of running the meeting.

In a world that often calls forth anxiety, depression, and fear, the silence of worship and the messages and support given by the worshippers offer a gift of calm that soothes the turmoil and

promotes inner peace, allowing us to go forth into that world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

Approved

3-16-2025

Yarmouth Preparative Meeting

Received by Sandwich Quarterly Meeting on April 26, 2025

Southeast Quarter

Providence Monthly Meeting State of the Society Report for 2024

To aid in the preparation of this State of the Society report, Friends expressed their thoughts on a list of topics suggested by NEYM. We are grateful for Yearly Meeting's guidance. As part of our preparation for this report, we asked Friends to write answers to some questions during coffee hour and again online. The quotes below are from those queries.

Meeting for Worship has returned to much as it was pre-COVID, both in attendance and quality of worship. Friends are mostly happy with the worship experience, citing a good mix of vocal and silent ministry and a sense of support and empathy through the messages. There has been some interest in having a query or inspiring message at the beginning of worship, while others would prefer uninterrupted silence.

An interesting comment: "I and I know others sometimes feel that some messages say a lot more about the speaker's privilege than anything, and it's hard to know what to do with that feeling in worship and in the community - for me it's become part of my meditation to practice just hearing things as they're said, uncritically."

The fact is that we have been fortunate to worship in safety and in a beautiful setting. While most of us live comfortably, we must try to deepen an awareness reflected in our Meeting's culture that we don't all share that privilege.

The Spring Cookout, an Estate Sale, the May Breakfast, and the Christmas Gathering all brought Friends together, as did the monthly potlucks and weekly social hours. New people have started attending Meeting for Worship, and social hour has provided opportunities for new connections, although there is recognition of the challenge of bridging the gulf between new attenders and long-term members and attenders. Investment in child care during worship and on special occasions has made it more possible for families with young children to be involved. Increased adult religious education activities have nurtured spiritual growth and are appreciated. We have been delighted to welcome several new members, who are stepping into deeper involvement with the life of the Meeting.

"The meeting community welcomes newcomers beautifully and helps them to feel welcome."

"The meeting is welcoming to our attenders, and we have many young families who have found us in the past decade. We have cooperated on various projects and members and attenders have enjoyed these ways to work together and get to know each other better."

"The Zoom group is a very tight group, often spanning vast distances but keeping people connected. At the same time, it easily welcomes in people who are new."

Ministry and Counsel Committee monitors and strives to improve the worship experience, dealing with such issues as how to encourage Friends to arrive on time and how to manage announcements at the end of worship. The online worship has been successful for those who prefer it or who are unable to attend in person but we have not found unity regarding how often to blend the online and in-person worship setting, currently happening only once a month.

Within Meeting some Friends are concerned about the large number of committees (18) and wondering whether it is again time to reorganize our committee structure, perhaps by consolidating some of the committees into broader categories. This needs further discernment as we move forward.

We have reached out beyond our own Meeting via our FCNL Advocacy Team and the relationship with our Cuban sister meeting, Floro Perez. Several members have become involved with community efforts to address homelessness as we think about how to respond as a Meeting. We would benefit from more involvement with NEYM via Sessions and other yearly meeting-sponsored activities.

“While we have a few members who are very active in the yearly meeting, most at our Meeting have little or no connection. That’s too bad because there is much to be gained from that larger connection. There is a very good youth program, for example, with several opportunities for children to go on retreats hosted at other meetings around New England, and to make friends from all over the region.”

We need to take advantage of opportunities that arise to connect with other religious groups, both local and afar. This has been lacking, but, fortunately, some of our newer members and attenders are eager to make these connections.

“I want to see more investment in the community for those among us who are hungry, facing oppression, living on the street, etc.” This comment reflects well the above-mentioned need for attention to privilege.

“We have begun to grapple with using the meetinghouse to provide much needed emergency shelter in the winter for unhoused folks. I hope that conversation continues.”

As is always the case, we face a variety of challenges. Friends are concerned about the political situation and the economic hardships that may result, and there is hope that Meeting will find more ways to answer the needs that are sure to arise. There is a sense that the political situation will test us.

“I’m concerned about the federal administration impacting immigrants, federal funding authorized by Congress, young people, and the LGBTQ+ community. I think many in the meeting are grappling with how to respond, and I am too. I hope that we can take a thoughtful and compassionate stand and support our wider community during this period.”

Sixth Month 2025

Smithfield Friends State of Society

After many years of faithfully holding our Meeting together, Smithfield Friends are gathering in joy and excitement as we experience growing attendance and participation. Even as we welcomed new members and attenders, our meeting has faced many challenges. For years, we were unable to make any improvements to the building, but now we have active members who help address these challenges.

Last year, we started meeting regularly again for business. We elected an interim clerk and began a journey to grow the meeting. A member of our meeting has been faithfully holding First Day services with guided meditations and Quaker readings, and we are deeply grateful for that gift, including a moving Thanksgiving service. Late last year, an interfaith minister began worshiping with us. In December she held a beautiful holiday service with moving songs, talented singers and meaningful messages.

In January, we named our new clerk and recording clerk, and now have a new treasurer, a new nominating committee, and many people serving the meeting.

Shortly after our holiday service, the boiler for the meetinghouse stopped working, requiring time and resources to repair it. Members and attenders gathered together and donated the resources we needed, with some members generously managing the repair work themselves.

During this challenging time, we found joy in visiting other meetings for worship at Saylesville and Providence, where we were delighted to travel and meet fellow Friends. We also met at Slatersville Memorial Town Hall and held Zoom meetings for Friends unable to meet in person.

In February, we lost a dear Friend who had been actively engaged in the building repairs for over twenty years. We were deeply grateful for his gifts and service and truly miss his presence.

In March, our guest minister held a beautiful spring celebration of peace, with Friends from other meetings joining us.

Our Peace and Social Concerns committee was revitalized, and they put to good use the donations we received. They also approved a Minute of Intent to Protect that was authored by Fayetteville Friends Meeting and

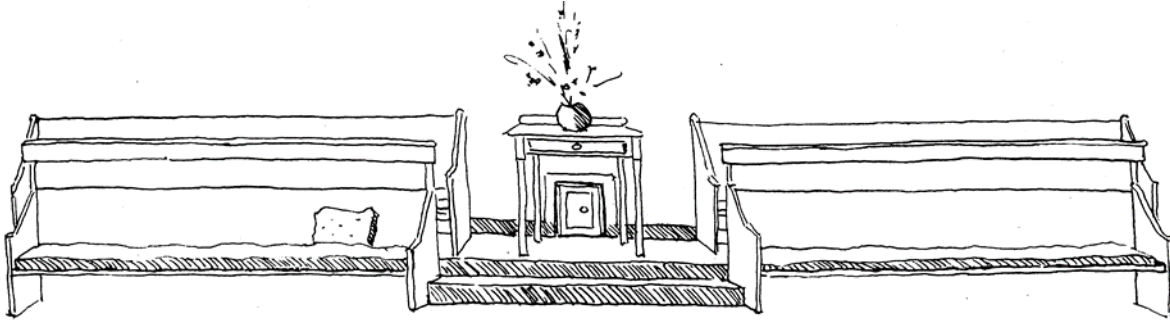
endorsed by Smithfield in May. We pledge to provide “shelter, cover, aid, and advocacy for our beleaguered neighbors.”

Through challenges and celebrations alike, our meeting continues to grow in strength, fellowship, and faithful service to each other, our community, and the wider world.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Keene

Clerk



Report on the State of the Westerly Monthly Meeting 2024

As varying numbers of Friends have done in our meetinghouse since 1879, we gathered weekly for unprogrammed worship every Sunday during 2024. We were grateful for those who have “a gift for putting the Divine experience into words.” A Friend noted how “our vocal ministries often align, dovetail, and/or build upon each other. It feels like we have gotten somewhere together by the end of Meeting for Worship.” Worship was “a wonderful feeling of being together” and particularly appreciated by those who felt worries coming from the world outside the meetinghouse. Some of us had experiences of deeply meaningful worship, including meetings where not a word was spoken throughout the hour. This was part of the mystery of Quaker worship that can make it difficult to describe, especially to those from other faith traditions where worship includes a choir, spoken prayer and a sermon.

As has been true in preceding years, we had a small core of Friends that did most of the work required to maintain a Meeting physically and spiritually. We could call on one another for help when it was needed, and those calls were answered by Friends pitching in. Solid relationships were developed by this cooperative spirit and grew as a result of the trust that was built among us. At the same time, we felt concerned about the difficulty, compared to years past, in getting people to serve on committees.

We recognized that the Meeting is comprised of many who are getting close to the age of retirement or have been retired for a number of years. While those of us in this category are still vigorous and engaged with life in a number of ways, we knew that the future belongs to younger generations. Those of us who are older wanted to stay connected with young people. We were heartened to see children attending worship and taking part in activities and lessons that impart our faith traditions to them. We were grateful for the members of the First Day School committee as well as for all Friends who instructed children. Friends tried to provide a space that children could call their own, both in terms of an actual room set aside for them and, even more importantly, a sense that they are welcomed and valued as part of our Meeting.

Educational opportunities were also made available to adults. In the spring, Ministry and Counsel members led a series of discussions on the Quaker testimonies of SPICES (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, Service). These meetings were well attended and appreciated. Each meeting was marked by robust and energetic discussions. A Friend on the First Day School Committee attended the NEYM First Day School Zoom meetings.

A feature of being a Quaker is placing an emphasis on frugality. Since we are a small Meeting that was especially necessary for us in 2024. A lack of new membership was a challenge for our meeting, not only in terms of community building, but also for maintaining a healthy financial status throughout the year.

An older building like ours required upkeep. The Housekeeping Committee made sure the meetinghouse always presented a bright, clean and cheerful appearance throughout the year. The Building and Grounds Committee pursued a proactive approach that sought to keep costs down while maintaining a high standard of attention and care. This was particularly seen in the construction of a ramp and railing to make the front entrance accessible for people with mobility disabilities. The money that made this possible was bequeathed to the Meeting by a Friend who passed away several years ago after having dealt with the effects of MS for decades.

We had to make some hard choices about whom to donate to and how much should be given. This meant not supporting all the organizations we have in the past. We appreciated the efforts made by the Finance Committee to create a budget that realistically addressed what we were capable of while at the same time using our money in a way that expressed our values. When discerning how money should be allocated and spent, we did so in a spirit of friendship until unity was reached.

The Peace and Social Justice Committee once again attended the annual Peace Day celebration at the University of Rhode Island in September. The committee set up tables on the quadrangle where members distributed literature and spoke with students and faculty about the posters and the “Eyes Wide Open” display of civilian shoes symbolizing innocent men, women and children killed in war.

Peace and Social Justice wrote a minute of concern about the war in Israel and Palestine. After the minute was approved by the Meeting, it was sent to Southeast Quarterly Meeting and NEYM as well as to our legislative representatives in Connecticut and Rhode Island. This resulted in an opportunity to lobby with staff members for Senator Sheldon Whitehouse and directly with Representative Seth

Magaziner. The minute was also used as a resource for lobbying during FCNL's annual meeting in November.

Peace and Social Justice met twice via Zoom with Jeremy Langill, the executive director of the RI State Council of Churches. We discussed the challenges transsexual and gender-nonconforming students are increasingly facing from right wing Christian Nationalist groups. We made plans to have Jeremy visit the Meeting in early 2025.

This committee worked on planting a peace pole in the front yard of the meetinghouse. Our goal of getting approval from the Narragansett tribe to use their language as one of the four on the pole had not been realized as the year came to an end.

The committee submitted a proposed minute on abortion and reproductive rights to the women of the Meeting for their approval. It was decided that the minute would be put aside for the time being, but those who met to discern this created a space where women could talk frankly and energetically with each other.

Attendance by Westerly Friends at Quaker workshops and gatherings such as Living Faith and Tuesday night Leaders' Call continued to increase and encouraged us to grow individually and as a community. A member of our Meeting served as the Clerk of the Southeast Quarter and a member of NEYM's Permanent Board. Another member met with the FCNL Advocacy Committee at Providence on their Friday Zoom meetings. Another completed service on Friend's Camp Committee and regularly cooked for NEYM's youth retreats. A Westerly Friend was appointed as an FCNL Representative for NEYM and attended FCNL's Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. Others participated in online sessions with Friends Peace Teams with a focus on Indigenous Peoples and opportunities for learning about Quaker ministry and support. Our clerk's participation and sharing of the experience of extended worship opportunities through NEYM was yet another way to deepen our own perspectives on the potential for deepening worship. Service to the larger community of Friends benefitted our local meeting and challenged us to find new purpose as Friends.

Westerly Friends continued to engage with our local community in many ways. As in previous years, we provided a meal for 40 to 50 folks once a month throughout the year at Westerly Area Rest and Meals, aka WARM. This became a challenge as fewer Friends actively participated. Toward the end of the year, Friends encouraged greater participation by gathering at the meetinghouse on Saturday afternoons to prepare the WARM meal and share a meal together. A member participated in several community organizations in harmony with Quaker values: Westerly Area Peace and Justice,

International City of Peace, Westerly Anti-Racism Coalition, and the Town of Westerly's Multicultural Committee. Another member attended New London NAACP meetings and worked on organizing and setting up their Juneteenth celebration.

During 2024, we sought, both individually and as a community, to live by the Quaker testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and service. As the year drew to a close and we faced a future that had suddenly become filled with foreboding, these testimonies became ever more important to us.

Worcester Friends Meeting State of the Society Report May 2025

Meeting for worship is a source of spiritual strength for our day-to-day work in the outside community. Messages are spontaneous and from the heart. We have a custom of designating the last 10 minutes of our worship time as “worship-sharing,” during which Friends are encouraged to share thoughts or concerns that “didn’t rise to the level of spoken ministry.” Our worship is often silent until this time. Sometimes it seems that the messages during worship-sharing could have been offered during waiting worship. On the other hand, lately there have been a couple of occasions during worship when people have spoken right after a person has provided a message. Maybe we need to remind Friends to leave a space after messages for the words to be truly felt.

We feel positive about the strength of relationships and trust within the meeting community. Our weekly potlucks help Friends get to know each other better. Our committees are functioning well: Friends trust each other’s skills and can listen to differing ideas without judgment. Several clearness committees met during the year for membership or personal support. Our joint work on social issues provides more opportunities for building relationships. Yet we recognize that sometimes Friends don’t want to share their troubles. And we need to check in frequently with people doing the work of the Meeting to ensure that their work does not displace the spiritual restoration they need.

Over the past year we have held spiritual enrichment discussions about once a month. These have provided valuable opportunities for Friends to reflect on their spiritual life and to grow in community. Also, we sponsored one Friend to take part in “Participating in God’s Power” with the School of the Spirit. Her experience has enriched all of us.

With the installation of a radical right-wing administration in the US, most if not all our members are experiencing strong emotions of grief, anxiety, fear, and anger. We grieve over the loss of the rule of law and support for democracy. We are fearful for the safety of immigrants, LGBT people, and other marginalized people in our community. We are angry at the cuts in government programs that benefit all of us, the graft and corruption in the federal government, the imprisonment of residents without due process, and so many more egregious actions. This situation has motivated us to renew our commitment to nonviolent social change and to form alliances with other churches and civic groups to protect and aid the afflicted communities. Specific activities include attending protests, leading AVP training, supporting the LGBT Asylum Task Force, and initiating a new interfaith network to witness against immigrant detentions and aid immigrant communities. These activities are concrete expressions of our Quaker testimonies.

Other challenges we face include the upkeep of an aging meetinghouse and conducting hybrid meetings for worship. The acquisition of a DTEN video conferencing system has greatly facilitated Zoom meetings and other meetings where a big screen was useful. A core group of members has contributed much time and energy to building improvements, and we are fortunate to have the financial resources to pay contractors when necessary.

We have had a welcome increase in new attendees in the last year, but most of our active members are beyond middle age. While we are grateful for regular attendance by a few young people, we wonder how to attract more young people when we still have relatively few in the Meeting.

We appreciate the opportunities that the Yearly Meeting offers to connect with other New England Quakers around joint concerns, such as the monthly meeting leadership calls and the check-ins for

immigration work. Several of our members serve on NEYM committees or volunteer at Sessions. We participate in and host Quarterly meetings and extended worship sessions.

~~~~~

# Vassalboro Quarter

## **STATE OF SOCIETY REPORT FOR VASSALBORO QUARTER – 2024 (and early 2025)**

### **Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting Gatherings**

Our Quarter is very active in sharing spiritual energy between Monthly Meetings. In addition to sharing worship and food during our gatherings, our host meetings sponsor moving programs. Our Meeting for Worship for Business is part of our quarterly gathering program unless noted that it was scheduled separately. In 2024 and early 2025, Acadia, Farmington, Vassalboro, Cobscook, and Midcoast Meetings provided inspiration with their programs and worship, acting clerk and recording clerk of the Meetings for Business, and community engagement and fun with lunch and hospitality.

February 2024 Meeting was hosted by Acadia Friends Meeting on 2/3/2024: **“Letting Our Love and Light Speak to Family, Friends and Others: A Valentine’s Gathering.”** Speakers in the program were two Acadia Friends. Carol Woolman shared about her forthcoming book “Ecology of Grief: A Mother’s Witness about living through the violent death of a child” and Gray Cox spoke about his book published by Quaker Institute for the Future, “Smarter Planet or Wiser Earth? Dialogue and Collaboration in the Era of Artificial Intelligence.” In addition to hearing these Friends present about turning life lessons into books, we discussed how to share experiences with family and friends. A separate Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting for Worship for Business was held 2/11/2024.

May 2024 Meeting was hosted by Farmington Friends Meeting on 5/4/2024: **“Quaker experience with local educational issues, school boards, political issues, racial issues, etc.”** Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting for Worship for Business was held in the morning, followed by this presentation and discussion. Farmington Friend, Hank Washburn, spoke about his attendance at school board meetings to provide balance against politically motivated manipulation. Greg Kimber, son of long-time Farmington Friends Rita and Bob Kimber, spoke about his work as a member of the school board.

September 2024 Meeting was at Friends Camp in South China, hosted by Vassalboro Monthly Meeting on 9/7/2024: **“Fall Gathering.”** The program included presentations by Friends on where their leadings have brought them. Shirley Hager from Winthrop Center Friends Church spoke about her leading to foster creating an Elder In Residence pilot program to help Wabanaki students at University of Maine in Orono. Janet Hough from Cobscook spoke about how a deep dive into the Friends participation in Indigenous Boarding Schools is changing her. There was no Business Meeting, but Friends from around Vassalboro Quarter gathered on zoom on Friday evening 9/6/2024 to share about the spiritual life in their Meetings.

November 2024 Meeting was hosted by Cobscook Friends on 11/2/2024 at Cobscook Institute: **“The Maine Indian-Tribal State Commission (MITSC).”** Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting for Worship for Business was held in the morning, followed by a presentation by Rachel Bell, MITSC Projects Director, then discussion. Many Cobscook Friends shared about projects of the nearby Wabanaki community that they were actively participating in. Many attending this Meeting arrived the night before and stayed either with local Friends or at the Cobscook

Institute's Heartwood Lodge, where both groups gathered on Friday for a potluck supper, then an evening of visiting and games.

February 2025 Meeting was hosted by Midcoast Friends Meeting on 2/1/2025: **"Be Ready: Mobilizing – Organizing – Resources for Everyone."** Midcoast Friends' MORE Committee -- Mobilizing and Organizing Resources for Everyone (Diane Dicranian, Gretchen Hull, Andy Burt, and Sue Rockwood) prepared notebooks of useful resources to help protect ourselves and our neighbors. Diane and Sue led two groups in reviewing and discussing the materials. The binders are a flexible framework to enable us all to be able to be more helpful and collect additional resources as we learn about them. After the morning presentations on the topics of immigration, environment, reproductive health, and LGBTQ+ concerns, Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting for Worship for Business was held in the afternoon.

Additional planned VQM events for 2025:

- 5/3 All Maine Gathering hosted by Vassalboro Quarter, with Falmouth Quarter joining us.
- 9/6 Fall Gathering hosted by Vassalboro Monthly Meeting.
- 11/1 Winthrop Center Friends host Quarterly Meeting.

### **Vassalboro Quarter Organization**

With no on-going Quarter clerks, we formed LSG, a Leadership Support Group to guide Monthly Meetings as they host Quarterly Meetings and develop confidence and competencies in leadership and programming. Members of the LSG are Janet Hough (a former QM clerk), Holly Weidner (past clerk for VQM's M&C and VQM's Gifts & Leadings), Mark Rains (Clerk of the VQM Finance Committee), and Cynthia Harkleroad (VQM Treasurer). During the past year LSG accepted with regret Carole Beal's retirement after many years of service, especially in fostering communications throughout the Quarter. We're finding that this method of sharing the clerking responsibilities is working reasonably well for us. It supports Monthly Meetings as they are assisted in program and agenda development, then provide an acting Clerk and acting Recording Clerk, typically for the next Business Meeting after their hosting turn.

VQM Finances are small but reasonably sound. We took a few jubilee years during covid when we encourage Monthly Meetings to direct the funds toward more urgent local needs. Most Monthly Meetings have resumed supporting the Quarter now. VQM, Monthly Meetings, and individuals are stepping up their financial support for Maine Council of Churches, following the withdrawal of NEYM. VQM has pledged support for the Wabanaki Elder in Residence program and matches up to \$500 of individual contributions for the Ramallah scholarship.

### **Inter-Meeting Activities and Projects**

Our Quarter encourages intervisitation. One of the joys of our wide geographic spread is that we encourage Quarterly Meeting attenders to arrive the night before and deepen relationships with local Friends by being their guests overnight. Eggemoggin Reach and Narramissic plan to meet to share discussion of a book they each chose to read, "A Quaker Book of Wisdom: Life Lessons in Simplicity, Service, and Common Sense," by Robert Lawrence Smith. Cynthia from the LSG has participated in worship with Farmington, Midcoast, Acadia, and Eggemoggin Reach Friends.

VQM engaged in several projects in support of our indigenous neighbors. In addition to those mentioned above, Members of VQM hold key leadership roles in the Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy, which includes members of both Maine Quarters. In 2024, FCMPP continued their active support of Wabanaki-led initiatives at the state legislature.

For 13 years, VQM has sponsored an Eli and Sybil Jones Ramallah Friends School Scholarship raising funds (\$3,500 in January 2025) for tuition for one student, Jasmin Aawad until she graduated and now for her brother, Adam Aawad. VQM is grateful for all the donors from Maine and NEYM, and for the leadership of Hank Washburn. Although this project is led by VQM, Falmouth Quarter and Monthly Meetings have been actively contributing to the scholarship also.

### **VQM and the wider world**

VQM's spiritual energy reaches out into the wider world. VQM endorsed the Poor People's Campaign joining the nationwide march in capital cities across the country, including Augusta. Monthly Meeting members serve on a variety of faith-based groups, including Right Sharing of World Resources, interfaith social justice groups, including those working with the unhoused in the Vassalboro area, local food pantries and heating funds, and the Midcoast Outreach and Peace Center, to name a few.

Several Monthly Meetings are regularly represented in NEYM's monthly zoom support for Monthly Meetings leadership service. They also participated in NEYM gatherings, including one in Portland, featuring AFSC and NEYM focus groups. Many Monthly Meetings in the Quarter have members who serve NEYM on committees and Permanent Board.

In September VQM Friends led by Mark Rains shared resources and conversation about Quaker faith and practice at a table in the Social Political Action area of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association Common Ground Country Fair, attended by 60-70,000 fairgoers from across New England.

Maine Council of Churches is a vital organization bringing the spiritual energy of many religious groups together to work for peace, justice, and compassion. Diane Dicranian of Midcoast Friends provides leadership on their board, representing both Vassalboro and Falmouth Quarters. She has served in this role faithfully for many years and brought valuable insights from that larger community back to Monthly Meetings in our Quarter and Falmouth Quarter.

*Approved by Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting on April 25, 2025*

Belfast Area Friends Meeting  
State of Society Report for 2024  
(written March 2025, edited in April)

As we met to reflect on the condition of our Meeting, we felt the guidance of Spirit and knew that we supported each other as Quakers to witness our faith, in this messy world. Our Meeting is hybrid, and we are glad that we can be together in worship as a community despite distances and difficulties. Our book discussion group is on zoom, too, and we value the time to share ideas and widen our connections with each other. We continue to offer Mid-Week Meeting on Wednesday afternoons, on zoom. Our small numbers and geographic distance make it hard to be helpful to each other in practical ways. Individual Friends also benefit from participation via zoom with the wider Quaker world, including the Three Rivers Vesper Service based in Massachusetts, and White Friends Confronting Racism (international), sponsored by Friends General Conference.

Friends from our Meeting are involved in local witness in many areas: Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy, Wabanaki Alliance, and Ministerium activities such as Lenten Lunches, Taize worship, and the food cupboard. Friends also volunteer in their own towns. Our pamphlet “A Quaker Welcome” was published in the local Republican Journal. Archival material from our Meeting has been placed in a NEYM archive at University of Massachusetts in Amherst, and will be added to this summer.

We looked closely at our conduct of Meeting for Business, seeking guidance from the new Faith and Practice, and found the process helpful. We want to be grounded in Spirit and understand corporate decision making. Our Peace Activist Award continues to offer a scholarship to a graduating high school senior.

Our budget allowed us to support the new Wabanaki Elder-in-Residence pilot program at the University of Maine (Orono), initiated by Maine Quakers.

We know that we need Spirit, and we need each other, as we keep in tune with the still, small voice within. Being in worship and community together feels warm and solid in a troubling time.

## **SPIRITUAL STATE OF SOCIETY REPORT 2025**

### **Midcoast Friends Meeting – June 2025**

The Midcoast Friends Meeting, located in Damariscotta, ME, is a very small meeting with wide geographic distribution and an aging membership. Our attendance varies from 4 to 16 people in the winter months (including a couple of Zoom participants) up to two dozen in the summer months. Our median age is probably about 75. The bulk of the committee duties are therefore handled by a very small, but dedicated group of mostly veteran and aging members. This report is based on written and verbal communications from 9 of our year-round members, including one relatively new member to our Meeting.

#### **The Quality Of Worship and Vocal Ministry**

Sunday Meetings are usually held in a worshipful and centered silence. Attendance is small at times, especially in cold or difficult weather. A silent meeting can be a powerful and nourishing experience. Whether we have a larger or smaller group, the quality of worship has been quite deep.

We often have deeply fulfilling fully silent meetings. The silence is deep and restorative. For those of us who live alone, it's uplifting to experience the effect of "when two or three are gathered together." At the end of worship, when a Member of Ministry and Counsel asks us to introduce ourselves and greet one another while still seated at the close of meeting, s/he encourages us to share insights that didn't rise to the level of vocal ministry during Meeting. This practice often inspires a rich, spiritual sharing, which then continues during the Social Time after Meeting. Quiet meditation at Meeting is valuable for all of us, as is the social time after.

Vocal ministry is variable from week to week. In general, those who share a message speak from the heart with tender regard for those who are listening. It feels meaningful and appropriate. But a wider range of spoken ministry would be welcome. Often the same people speak, so that too few different voices are heard. Occasionally, vocal ministry includes multiple contributions that sometimes can be more than a few of us can properly process.

We have one or two members who regularly join us on Zoom and seem to find comfort in being able to worship with us from their homes, but they don't participate in vocal ministry, perhaps due to the technical difficulties of being heard via Zoom.

We have a couple of members who struggle to hear and understand vocal

ministry during Meeting, even with the help of the system we use to assist the hearing impaired. That system does not seem to be working well, as it sometimes channels the service from the Mormon Church next door, rather than the sound from our own Meeting room.

### **The Strength Of Relationships and Trust Within The Meeting Community**

In the past year, we have, once again, lost the active participation of a couple of our members due to misunderstandings and divergent opinions. However, there is less contention among members than was evident a few years ago. Several members feel a strength of trust with meeting members and attenders.

Our problem is not so much that there is friction among members, but that we are a diminished and dispersed cohort. The issue is not distrust, but coming together from widely scattered backgrounds. Social time after Sunday meeting and other events staged to develop mutual acquaintance among the membership have been helpful, but could use strengthening. One member reports: "I have a few relationships in the Meeting that are very strong, and I treasure them. But Trust is not strong for me in the Meeting community. The meeting has changed for me in that respect. For years, my trust was very strong. Then the Meeting changed, things happened, and my trust has never been the same." Another reports, "We do pretty well, but it would be wonderful if the sense of unity were to grow."

We've welcomed some new attenders while some have slipped away. New members often have trouble figuring out where and how to fit in and how to build relationships with veteran members. Social times after Meetings are often sparsely attended and quite short. New members and attenders particularly like the "Simple Soup Sundays" on the first Sunday of each month as a way to build more relationships, as these Sundays encourage members and attenders to linger over a meal. Special mention was made of the meal where table settings allowed for small group socializing. This arrangement will be repeated in coming months. The successful summer Barbecue will also be staged again as an occasion for bringing attenders together.

In 2024, we once again initiated "Groups of 8" for meeting members and attenders to meet socially for meals. A couple of these groups were very successful and evolved from dinners to become strong support groups. But other groups never actually met, due to lack of commitment and general busy-ness among members.

## **Efforts to Foster Spiritual Growth and Evidence of Growth**

One measure of our spiritual growth is the care and warmth with which we greet newcomers and seek to have them understand Quaker faith and practice. We have not always been attentive to their needs but have drawn some new regular attenders who may become members. The challenge is greatest in summer when more visitors are present for Sunday worship. The oft-mentioned intention to create a *Quakerism 101* course to provide a more coherent introduction to our customs and spiritual concerns has not yet been accomplished.

Political realities and the need to be active in political discourse can often overwhelm our ability to foster spiritual growth. As one member says: “Maybe it is the times, but I sometimes feel like political urgencies are swamping spiritual growth opportunities.”

In the past, when our attendance was higher and there were more of us to help with projects that would foster spiritual growth, such as book groups and study groups, we were quite vital in nourishing our communal spiritual growth. The combination of the pandemic and aging has taken a toll. Still, we grow spiritually simply by worshipping together.

## **Possible Hardships for the Meeting and how Friends are Responding to these Challenges**

We have often failed in our ability to support members in need, primarily due to the lack of younger, committed members to engage in Pastoral Care. There is a core group of reliable Friends, who rally to help one another. But this is a small and aging set of members who are also active in Ministry and Counsel and Social Outreach.

We have piloted the Meal Train service to provide food to members in need, but there are too few of us who are able to actively participate in providing or distributing meals. The Pastoral Care Committee feels that their efforts are appreciated, but this is a tiny group of elderly individuals that is not able to keep pace with the needs of our aging and widely dispersed members. We have members in need of spiritual uplift, nourishing meals, hospital visits, home visits, and help in downsizing and moving, and we are struggling, and often failing, to meet their needs.

One member feels that we could also meet the challenge of following Quaker process more intentionally.

On a positive note, our small Library Committee has been quite active this year, making books and resources more welcoming and accessible, reporting statistics in our monthly business meetings, and in placing a “Little Library” on the front porch for visitors to take and donate books.

We have no young families or children as regular attenders. We make efforts to become known locally as a welcoming congregation and engage in local good works such as the diaper bank and People United Against Racism.

### **Significant Events or Activities in the Meeting's Year Together**

The local Unitarian Universalists now use our Meeting House on Wednesday evenings for their Youth Programs, which makes use of the Meeting and exposes them to our children's library and our bulletin boards.

We are hopeful that some of these young people may, at some point, be interested in becoming meeting attenders or members.

In February 2025, Midcoast Friends Meeting put together a truly wonderful program when we hosted Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting. A lot of thought went into the program and resulted in binders of resources that were sent home with all the meetings, with organized information on mobilizing resources for everyone who is at risk from the policies and actions of our current President and his team.

### **Social or Civic Concerns of the Meeting and Stands taken on Friends' Religious Principles**

This meeting is impressively involved in civic and social issues, solidly rooted in the Quaker testimonies. We continue to fly the LGBTQ+ and the Black Lives Matter flags in front of our Meeting House.

We were proud of New England Yearly Meeting when we joined one of the first lawsuits against the new regime to assert the sanctity of meeting spaces and churches, etc. But we were extremely disheartened when NEYM refused to move its Summer Sessions away from the UMass Amherst Campus due to the University's tolerance of police violence against peaceful demonstrations. We pray that in the coming months, NEYM will continue their discernment until it leads them on a different path.

We also feel that we have a long journey ahead of us this year, given the totalitarian regime of oligarchs now controlling our country.

## **Service and Relationships with Friends beyond the Local Meeting**

In addition to hosting Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting this year, the Treasurer of the Quarterly Meeting is also now a frequent attender of our Meetings for Worship.

A number of our members are fully engaged with Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy (on Wabanaki concerns--i.e. tribal/state issues) as well as with the American Friends Service Committee and the Friends Committee on National Legislation through donations and relevant program opportunities.

Some Friends also work hard with Environmental groups and issues. Members have joined in public protests at the State House in Augusta on specific legislation (e.g. Poor Peoples Campaign). The meeting continues its witness against the hiring practices of Friends United Meeting which discriminate against LGBTQ persons.

## **Relations with the community and other religious groupss.**

Midcoast supplies the Quaker representative to Maine Council of Churches and she brings communications back to us from there.

Our Meeting hosts meetings of the local Indivisible group, we provide rentals of our space for local like-minded organizations.

Through our Midcoast Outreach and Peace Center (MOPC) and as individuals, we are actively engaged in community outreach projects and local activism.

We believe that keeping our Midcoast Meeting open and our MOPC activities available as beacons and resources, we are doing what we can and it's worth doing.

## STATE OF SOCIETY REPORT 2024

### Winthrop Center Friends Church

This State of Society Report was drafted from responses to the following Queries reflected upon in a worship-sharing format:

- 1) How did we sense the movement of the Spirit in our midst during 2024?
- 2) How do we feel nourished as part of the Meeting? And how are we able to nourish others within our Meeting?
- 3) What is our growing edge as individuals and as a spiritual community? (an area with potential for growth, development, and learning)
- 4) Are there areas of our life as a spiritual community where we feel the need to devote more energy and attention?

We at Winthrop Center Friends Meeting ended the year 2024 feeling graced by the Spirit as we worshipped together with mutual support during times of challenge and of celebration. There has been a sense of bonding as a family of Friends, centering around Spirit-led decisions that have been held in love. Many Friends have expressed feeling the Spirit's presence within our Meeting and for themselves as individuals, often-times related to changes over the year. It was a joy to minister in the lives of two beloved members as their health declined and through their dying process. It was also a time of deep meaning, to extend support to their family throughout, honoring and cherishing the blessings that their parents gave to our community over many years.

Guided by the Spirit we felt it was time to consider the gifts among us and invite new leadership, with gratitude to those who had served faithfully and skillfully for years. Friends graciously stepped up to fill the roles of clerk of the Meeting, treasurer, and Ministry and Counsel clerk. These roles seem well suited to each Friend's gifts and talents. Even when someone had previously felt reluctant to take on a role, they responded to what they felt God was leading them to do in service to our community. God's guidance in this process of change has been a blessing by strengthening our connection to one another and adding balance and stability to the Meeting's necessary workload.

As a body, we have continued to support one particular Friend's leading, first for the publication and then distribution of her co-authored book, *The Gatherings: Reimagining Indigenous-Settler Relations*, a description of community and friend-building among Indigenous and white peoples. This past year we furthered our support by endorsing her leading with prayer and financial aid to establish funding for a pilot program to hire an Indigenous elder who will mentor Indigenous college students within the University of Maine system. Our Friend's tireless efforts to bring this leading to fruition has been an excellent example of God's work among us and has inspired our Meeting greatly. This inspiration has culminated in more-than-full funding for the pilot, coming mostly from Quaker meetings and individuals in Maine, and raising awareness of this great need and allowing a heartfelt opportunity for reparations to our Indigenous neighbors who, for centuries, have endured disenfranchisement.

We also felt a leading to become one of the congregations in the BTS Center's small church leadership program this year - "Cultivating Refugia: Building the Resilient Church" - a program designed to educate and empower small churches to become places of "refugia". (Based on Debra Rienstra book "Refugia Faith") Five Friends (one faithfully attending online from another state) committed to this enriching 9-month program, participating in zoom sessions bi-weekly and three in-person retreats. We have been learning about spiritual leadership in a climate-changed world, with emphasis on ways to protect and help heal our relationship with the Earth. Assignments have been a heart-felt and thought-provoking education that has inspired us all at the Meeting. Our program participants' excitement has been infectious, opening hearts and expanding awareness of the 'more-than-human' world. One of the joys

of this program came from discoveries hidden in a delightful Advent study book gifted by the BTS staff: "All Creation Waits". It inspired us with the almost unbelievable ways in which animals prepare to endure and survive harsh winters. We felt moved to buy copies of this insightful book for everyone at our Meeting to read during Advent. At the beginning of the Refugia program, we couldn't have anticipated the blessings we have all experienced in our increased appreciation and reverence for God's gifts of the natural world, and a renewed devotion to protecting it in all its forms. Besides the many ways the content of the Refugia program has blessed us, we have felt nourished by our interactions with the other three congregations participating in the program. We have learned from them and also benefitted by seeing ourselves through their eyes and through what they have found valuable about our Quaker way, especially our unhurried Spirit-led discernment process.

As a Meeting we have felt nourished in many ways over this past year. As the Spirit moves among us Friends mention feeling a tighter bond where we make time for one another's needs, and the needs of the Meeting in general. With increased trust there is a freedom to ask one another for help or support. and even to feel that we can more patiently wait on the Spirit's lead. Some Friends nourish our Meeting with their loving presence each week online, dedicated even from different time zones. One Friend in New York acknowledged feeling especially welcomed sending her love to us in the form of handmade prayer shawls and painted stones. Appreciation was expressed for the way we "feel nourished by each Friend through their individual examples of generosity and loving spirit", through those who "repeatedly lift us up", whether worshipping with us in our physical location or online. Another Friend spoke about the "hunger for spiritual companionship" and how this has truly become a place of spiritual community for her. We continue to hold a mid-week prayer time via Zoom. While small in numbers, the core group of Friends who attend regularly from various states say they "cherish this sacred time together". We have also nurtured our relationships with regular monthly fellowship meals, social times of laughter and sharing life stories and interests. Spouses who do not attend worship join us regularly for these meals and have become cherished, supportive friends. Surely, we have been nourished by the innumerable Spirit-led gifts each of us shares! "We are tied together like a web for the blessed encouragement we give to each other". One Friend described these blessings as "signs of the Eternal among us".

More of us attended Quarterly Meeting this year and four of us participated in the Meeting Care Day at the Portland Friend's School in the Fall, being especially appreciative of getting a feel for being in a wider circle of Friends. The break-out time focusing on clerking skills was felt to be very valuable.

As we consider our "growing edge", we are aware of our ageing population and wish to learn ways to offer support during illness and/or age-related, life-altering disabilities. "Illness and death are frequent companions, as are grief and loss". Two Friends have taken a grief educator course and we hope to learn more from them.

Additionally, we value our more visible presence in our small town that has drawn in some worshippers who have simply seen our sign. However, we feel called to stay alert to ways we might enhance our visibility further in ways that share who we are as a spiritual community and in service to the community. "I feel some hesitation about expanding us, but I think we are ready"

One Friend used this metaphor: "It's like the potluck suppers; each one brings a dish and pretty soon, a whole feast results!" We pray we may find more ways to put our faith into action. New persons might explore our Meeting by seeing action consistent with a message of love. "That's how we show our spirit. We are many parts but all one body and gifts we have we are given to share."

“We need to be more visible; to be ready to respond when opportunities to open ourselves up arise”; There are those who are hungry for God and for spiritual companionship and for whom this Quaker path would be valuable. We pray for ways to invite these seekers.

Friends also spoke to the question of where we need to place more energy and attention.

We feel “invigorated about seeking clearness regarding our right use of our financial resources”. Our Meeting has been praying for clearness and look forward to the Spirit’s guidance in the coming year, trusting that we can serve God best by using a patient and prayerful process.

We also want to pay ongoing attention to the assets we identified among us and in our wider community during one of the program exercises.

Feeling a renewed interest in a closer spiritual relationship with the Earth, we hope to worship out of doors when feasible and listen for the wisdom shared by our non-human kin. We might also include inspiring poems or other natural-world readings more often during our indoor meetings for worship. We want to hold close our learnings and awareness of refugia, maintain the energy we have felt and find ways to pass on what we are learning.

We cherish our small meeting community, grateful for the love, the wisdom, the vulnerability, the trust and the steadfast faith there is among us.