

# InnerViews

An Occasional Publication of the Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee

## SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE MEETING REPORTS - 2003

### ADELPHI

Adelphi Friends Meeting is a vital, active Quaker community with nearly 125 children and adult First Day worshippers. The members and attenders of Adelphi Meeting personify many different spiritual journeys, but all unite in the creation and sustaining of a caring community grounded in love, and a common commitment to Quaker testimonies and practices. The entire Meeting community is called upon, with same sense of urgency, to find a variety of ways to satisfy the desire of those relatively new to Quakerism to become grounded in Quaker faith and practice. This grounding is the prerequisite to the quality of our worship, the practice of our faith, the effective sharing of our many spiritual gifts, and the unity of our faith community. Many strongly feel that our meetings for worship would be greatly enriched by a community-wide commitment to the Quaker tradition of expectant waiting for divine guidance, from a better knowledge of Quaker practice, and more reflection from everyone as to whether their messages are Spirit-led.

In 2003, our community was especially challenged to discern and act upon God's will in light of war, terrorism, persistent violent conflict, injustice and a changing global economy. Many of us have struggled to decide where best to invest our time and resources, and to find a balance between works and faith. The Meeting for Worship can provide a well of strength so that we go back into the world and let our lives speak.

For many in our community, Adelphi is their first Quaker experience. The Meeting is blessed with many newcomers and many families with young children. We have a variety of opportunities for worship. A small but committed group participates in mostly silent worship at our 9:00 a.m. Meeting on most First Days. Following this early gathering, people join together in a short period of joyful song in preparation for our large 10:00 a.m. Meeting for Worship. On the third First Days of each month we set aside our 9:00 a.m. Meeting to leave way open for an opportunity of protracted singing. During

the last period of Meeting for Worship, we share joys and concerns. There is concern about how to make this sharing period a continuation of the worship experience. The mid-week evening Meeting continued during the year, but dwindling attendance led to a proposal to lay it down. Junior Meeting for the children K through 6th grade and Young Friends Meeting for grades 7 through 12, held on fourth First Day, provide a learning experience in Quaker faith and practice for our young people.

Committees continue to provide opportunities to grow in our faith community through education, service, care and fellowship. Long term planning has been a concern of the Meeting, and we are struggling to determine which committee or committees should have responsibility for it.

As well as spiritual resources, we have community traditions. The annual Strawberry Festival - an intergenerational enterprise generating both fun and revenue - retained its traditional place as our biggest community-building event. This year, it proceeded joyfully and successfully despite a major rainstorm.

Adelphi Meeting nurtures children and youth, in the Meeting community, in the Friends Community School (FCS), and through a tutoring program in the neighborhood Mother Jones Elementary School. First Day School continues to bring religious education and care to our many teens, children, toddlers and infants, thanks to the committed and dedicated efforts of our many adult volunteers, who in turn are nurtured by the joyful Light within all of our children. We encourage participation in BYM camping and other programs, and our youth greatly benefit from them.

Adelphi Meeting also nurtures its adults, through the caring wisdom of pastoral care, clearness committees, adult religious education, second hours, hospitality after Meeting, monthly potlucks; and an abundance of less formal support. The new Fellowship and Outreach Committee greets people as they enter Meeting for Worship, welcomes attenders and visitors, and offers

information about our Meeting and about Quakerism. Our men's and women's groups continue to be a source of deep, committed nurture and support to their participants.

Not everyone understands that Meeting for Worship for the Conduct of Business is an expression of commitment to the life of the Meeting and an opportunity to participate in a vital and challenging form of worship. Attendance at these meetings is not as large as we would like. Perhaps we have yet to fully grasp some important lessons in tenderness and reliance on spirit-guided discernment. We continue to season a number of proposals and issues, such as the meaning of membership, the memorial garden, finances and stewardship, air conditioning for the Meeting House, and our relationship with Friends Community School as it purchases property in Greenbelt.

The Takoma Park Meeting continues under our care as a Preparative Meeting, and prepares its own Spiritual State of the Meeting report. Adelphi needs to seek clarity about our role in relation to the Preparative Meeting, and concern has been expressed that there should be more meaningful interaction with Takoma Park.

Adelphi Meeting also enjoys a special relationship with Friends Community School, an elementary school that the Meeting founded 18 years ago. While the FCS community now operates legally separately from the Adelphi Meeting community, with its own Board of Directors, it continues under the spiritual care of the Meeting and all members of Adelphi Friends Meeting are members of the FCS corporation. We support and inspire each other in numerous ways. Many of our children attend FCS, and many new worshippers find their way to us through FCS. There exists some tension between the school and the Meeting, and some pain within the Meeting community concerning the school. As a Meeting, Adelphi continues to seek God's will for how we might best deepen and broaden our spiritual support of this vibrant example of Quaker values.

Adelphi Meeting looks ahead to a year of intentionally deeper grounding in our Quaker traditions, testimonies and practices, and to an ever more Spirit-centered worship experience.

## ALEXANDRIA

Our community has been blessed. Each First Day our meeting house is filled with over fifty Friends and newcomers gathered in worship. We rejoice in the presence and power of love which is present in our life together. We feel the love among us in ordinary meeting house tasks: working on old benches, refinishing the

floor, painting walls, washing down mold on the building exterior, maintaining the heating units, patrolling for raccoons and woodchucks, raking leaves, fixing coffee, sweeping the floors, and so much more. Each First Day our Meeting for Worship is extended and filled with fellowship in the Spirit by a shared meal. We joyfully joined together for a Celebration of Commitment and a Wedding under the Care of the Meeting. We are growing and have been blessed with fifteen new members who are already contributing their gifts in ways that enrich our life together.

Our educational programs are thriving. Attendance rises and falls but spontaneity and joy are evident in our Children's Religious Education. The teachers show enthusiasm as they work together in presenting the children with an innovative and challenging program. Adult Education has a weekly session with a well-balanced agenda. Attendance is such that we feel confident enough to invite speakers from outside organizations. We also enjoy many gifted individuals from our own Meeting in presentations of interesting and important topics, including a Quakerism 101 series based on Pendle Hill pamphlets. The Spiritual Formation Program, including retreats, has been conducted at our own meeting for several years; it continues to provide an important opportunity for members and attenders.

The addition of a Nominating Committee has proved to be helpful. Our standing committees all have clerks and sufficient members. The Peace and Social Concerns Committee has challenged us to move into social justice issues in our neighborhood and organized lobbying at the state and federal levels. All committees, including several ad hoc committees, are functioning in a helpful manner, frequently decreasing or refining work needed in the Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business.

We have had several notable special events and activities. One delightful event was an evening concert held in our meeting house by two of the meeting's professional musicians. Many of our members and guests enjoyed Ericka Ovette's beautiful voice and Jerry Allen's talents at the piano. The proceeds from the donations and matching funds contributed over \$5,000 to the FCNL. We were also pleased that one of our young Friends, Nick Nations, chose to do his Eagle Scout project at our Meeting. His work on the Memorial Mound and surrounding wooded area is a tribute to his good planning and hard work. Another activity of note is the Traveling Ministry of Deborah Haines. Deborah asked the meeting to approve her ministry among other meetings with an emphasis upon "rediscovering the power of early

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Quakerism.” In addition, she asked the meeting to provide spiritual support by means of a Care Committee that meets with her monthly. One or more members of the committee frequently serve as traveling companions.

In the new year, we have recognized two important challenges. The first is to follow the guidance of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s *Faith and Practice* about stewardship responsibilities concerning the care for members who are no longer active in our meeting—those who have moved out of the area or those who are no longer involved by necessity or choice. We acknowledge a lack of diligence in the past that has left us with over forty members on the inactive list. We have learned that inquiries can be sensitive or hurtful for inactive members. We are struggling to find a way with grace and love to make contacts that will be more caring.

The second challenge is that the size of our meeting has increased in recent years. Although we have many Friends who actively work to address pastoral needs in our community, we have been made aware of occasions when needs have not been recognized and gifts have not been embraced by the community. We are examining the manner in which we care for our community and are seeking ways that will help to nurture individuals and guide us all as we grow together in the Spirit.

Our Fort Belvoir address is a reminder that the location of our Quaker Meeting in the midst of a large military installation has with it responsibilities and challenges. We have grappled over the years with what our role to our neighbors should be. This year several of us were led to be trained in counseling military conscientious objectors and we are now seeking discernment on how that training should be used. This has also been a year when it has become clear that our proximity to Fort Belvoir may have a direct impact upon the worship of our Meeting. The U.S. Army Museum has decided to build a 200-million dollar, 55-acre “National Museum of the U.S. Army” close to our Meeting boundaries.

Because of publicized intentions to conduct combat demonstrations—utilizing helicopter landings, artillery and tanks—we have grave concerns about our ability to sustain an atmosphere of silent waiting on the Spirit. We are in the process of confronting elected and military officials seeking resolution to this challenge of our religious rights and the preservation of our historic property. However, as we challenge the decision on the location of the Army Museum, we are mindful of the need to keep our eyes open to the Light, and to accept with humility and grace what the future may hold.

## ANNAPOLIS

In silence we gathered, on the fourth First day of the Second month to reflect on our lives and our community. Who are we? How are we growing as a worshipping body of the Religious Society of Friends? Are we keeping faith with our Quaker foremothers and forefathers in this time of uncertainty? As we grow larger, we note with joy our new F(f)riends and celebrate that we are almost mortgage free. Careful stewardship has given us a surplus, but now we struggle with discerning the Divine Spirit’s guidance in our plans and dreams for the future.

From the silence, we moved into Worship Sharing, guided in our speaking by the following queries:

- Are we personally seeking the Spirit and working to deepen our faith, hope and love?
- Are our hearts and minds open to newcomers, seekers, and seasoned Friends in love and understanding, by which we can build trust and honesty with each other?
- Do we individually and collectively strive to make a difference, to make our world a better place?

In speaking from the silence, there was agreement that seeking the Spirit empowers us to be willing to “take risks”—to act and live in a manner true to the second and third queries. “Our primary purpose in gathering for silent worship is worship; next it is to reflect God’s love, and, finally, it is to help each other be true to God’s standards.” A Friend noted that honest answers to the queries build on each other; if we are personally seeking the Spirit and working to deepen our faith, hope and love, we will have open hearts and minds and we will strive to make a difference in our world. Yet another Friend said that the Meeting has become “my spiritual home since 9/11” allowing the transformation from being a “mere observer of the spiritual life” to an “active participant in it.”

Opening ourselves, with love and understanding was recognized as a vital component of our community and tradition but not easy. One Friend noted the American cultural context - a very individualistic society - and said that AFM provided the “messy, organic process of building family” in that context. Another Friend spoke a related message, saying that neither the process nor the community can be perfect - that perfection is, rather, an illusion; that in relationships people sometimes hurt one other; that forgiveness is necessary and required. “The Spirit is alive and well in AFM and is awaiting our personal responses.” A Friend said that there are always opportunities for practicing forgiveness in relationships, but that we should “give the Spirit credit for being here and available to help us.”

A seasoned Friend spoke of his personal journey, which involved early childhood exposure to the Quaker faith, then a long absence from Meeting, and finally a return to AFM where he has found love, realized that the process of loving is a “two-way street,” and knows for certain that “one is not alone.” A new attender found our Meeting a good place to grow in faith, hope, and love. One Friend reflected that years of being involved at AFM can make one feel part of an “inner circle,” but that thought causes concern. Although the hearts of seasoned Friends at AFM may be in the right place, all must strive constantly and mightily against the “appearance, as well as any reality” of clannishness.

A Friend noted that, in welcoming newcomers to Meeting, we are taking a step toward extending ourselves to the world. Yet another Friend described interactions among members and attenders at AFM as the process of building “trust and honesty,” as in a family, noting “peace must begin at home.” One newcomer was attracted to AFM because its participants seem to live their beliefs. A new member spoke about how Quakers at AFM seem to “live-out forgiveness,” which has taught, provided a foundation for, and strengthened their personal growth, helping this Friend to move beyond anger to forgiveness in the world. Friends noted that Meeting is proactive in welcoming newcomers and seekers, once they have taken the step of attending Meeting.

Two Friends raised queries of their own: One noted the low numbers of young adults aged 21-35 at AFM; why is that the situation? Are we not doing the right things to attract and hold people from that age group? Another Friend asked those present in the Worship Sharing to consider the evolution of our “prayer circle” at rise of Meeting when those present are encouraged to offer the names of people to hold in the Light. Is that the best way to ask for prayers for healing, or would it be better to know the practical needs of those whose names are being offered? A Friend offered a personal experience of being held in the Light, describing a sense of being embraced, experiencing goodness, and being transformed into a better person.

We look forward with enthusiasm to the challenges of the coming year and we mourn the loss of two dear Friends, Guinevere Scott and Elizabeth Jennes. Through the continuing revelation of the Spirit and our attempts, although imperfect, to respond to that of the Divine within us and in other people, we journey forward as individuals, as a Meeting, and with our brothers and sisters throughout the world. For the first time, Young Friends have joined the Meeting’s committees, bringing their own unique viewpoints to our deliberations. They are increas-

ingly active in caring for our property and buildings, during work days and as a special project in creating and maintaining a meditation path that winds through our property.

At a recent called “Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Discerning God’s Leading,” we perceived our immediate goals as being led (i) to continue our tradition of unprogrammed meetings, (ii) to support the spiritual growth of those within our spiritual community by fostering an understanding and appreciation of one another and the Religious Society of Friends’ history and testimonies, particularly the testimony for peace, and (iii) to progress in our service and socializing with the local non-Quaker community. Our longer range desire is to work within our spiritual community and the larger secular community toward a fuller understanding and acceptance of differences. We hope to foster stronger connections within Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Friends General Conference and Friends United Meeting.

#### **COMMITTEE WORK**

Children’s Religious Education offers a spiritual home for our young Friends, beginning in the nursery and progressing through elementary, middle, and high school. All children are welcomed and our diversity itself is reason to celebrate. The curriculum facilitates an experiential learning environment; young Friends are able to explore their own spiritual journey while letting their lives speak. We are active and enthusiastic yet balance our strengths with our limitations through gentle reminders to ensure no one becomes overwhelmed. Our program is fluid and adjustable to accommodate needs as way opens. This year the committee was led to focus on service projects, such as connecting with children in a Philadelphia school where there is great need. We seek adult Friends to journey with us, sharing their gifts with young Friends. Among many resources that guide us, one called “Opening Doors to Quaker Religious Education” by Mary Snyder has been a particular inspiration. She writes: “In our meetings and religious education programs, we communicate who we are as Friends in five ways: role modeling, storytelling, wondering, affirmation, and curriculum. These are the ways in which we invite others to walk through the door into that room where each person may meet the inward Teacher.”

Joyfully supporting one Friend’s leading, a new committee, primarily concerned with outreach, has been formed. The Outreach Committee held its first meeting in February of 2004. The clerk reported that at the initial meeting (which included a young Friend who will bring issues from a youth perspective and do outreach especially with the children of the Meeting) “Love for the

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Meeting and for Quakerism was evident, and members are very enthusiastic and eager to get started.”

Meeting House and Lands is striving to balance Quaker process with a busy schedule of practical concerns. The committee has worked, within the constraints of limited resources, to salve the ongoing questions as to whether Meeting should seek a larger “ultimate Meeting Room” or whether other improvements and changes in Meeting practices, including greater activism in peace and social concerns requiring additional expenditures, should take higher priority. While we are a spiritual people, we must operate, when miracles do not intervene, in a world of scarce resources and equally compelling requirements.

Stewardship and Finance actively invites the Spirit’s guidance in discerning use of our Meeting’s finances, welcoming participation by members of our community and appreciating differing viewpoints. Seeking to balance between current giving to Quaker causes and the long term needs of the Meeting, Friends are mindful that stewardship is a means to further the Meeting’s leadings, not an end in itself. Beyond our financial contributions to Quaker causes, local peace groups, the Lighthouse Shelter, and Conflict Resolution Center, we believe that investment in our active children’s religious education and camping programs offer opportunities to make a substantial difference as more young adults with Quaker traditions take their place in the world.

Peace and Social Concerns is experiencing a new openness, equilibrium and awareness of Spirit. Friends are called to be visible in the world: to “walk the talk” and to share with the wider community. Quakers are called to seek that of God in every person and to respond in concrete, tangible ways. AFM recorded a minute in support of those who choose to withhold taxes in opposition to military spending and of Friends who work for the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund. We need a mechanism for Friends to regularly report to each other the actions we have taken for peace. We would like to do so in a more structured way because so many F(f)riends are doing wonderful things that could serve as a source of strength and inspiration for all.

Ministry and Worship is striving to develop and present Meetings for Learning which both educate and refresh. As a community, we are largely convinced Friends, and our focus this year has been on exploring Quaker traditions. We have spent the past year in discovering our history and meeting our Quaker ancestors through study of their journals and writings—exploring our personal growth and understanding in light of these truths. Friends continue to develop materials for use by newcomers and

those seeking formal membership. Likewise, the committee is trying to re-energize the concept of clearness committees, as a living and vital resource to aid in the discernment of God’s will.

Pastoral Care notes that the pace of the past two years has been challenging, but as a result of initiatives and outreach efforts, Friends are now more thoughtful and mindful of how disparate activities fit into the overall purpose of pastoral care. We seek to serve both the spiritual and practical needs of our community and have been greatly strengthened by the addition of several new members on the committee. Community-building exercises have helped us focus on our purpose. Friends hope the creation of emergency and personal forms, including the memorial preparations, will enable our Meeting to more quickly serve those in the midst of grief. As we look ahead, we are aware that the peace testimony is important to our Quaker way of life. Peace should be manifest not only in our political philosophy but also lived through our relationships in Meeting. Given the present world environment, we are especially aware of any discord that may arise in Meeting as a result of members and attenders being in various places in their discernment of the peace testimony and of the need to seek accord and understanding among ourselves, as well as among peoples and nations of the world.

## AUGUSTA WORSHIP GROUP

Augusta Friends Worship group located in the Central Shenandoah Valley of Virginia continues to provide a spiritual home to 15 attenders. Our worship is centered in the Friends practice of silent expectant waiting. There are not many messages, but a sense of gatheredness is present on most First Days as we communicate with God. We are still meeting in homes and find this an enriching experience as we move from setting to setting. We understand that this can provide a stumbling block for new persons who may be interested in attending but feel it is right for us at this time in the life of our group.

We continue to explore what is required of us in this faith tradition as we use our time after Meeting to share on a range of topics as way opens. We are also challenged by the illness, injury and loss experienced by a number of our attenders. How do we understand loss and minister to those who have experienced it?

We meet together monthly for potluck. Our discussions have centered on the book *Plain Living* by Catherine Whitmire. It helps shed light on how each of us approaches the issues of life - where we differ and where we find commonality. We find these times chal-

lenging and beneficial to the sharing that can occur during worship. We also enjoy the company of one another in a social setting and the connections that can occur when we share about our lives from meeting time to meeting time.

We feel that we have a sense of connectedness to one another symbolized by our circular handshake at the rise of meeting. We feel cared for as individuals and derive support from that. Above all, we are kind to one another. We hope that this allows us to be caring individuals as we go about our daily routines. We continue to look for ways that we can share this connectedness with the community around us in more formal ways and remain open to the possibilities for this as a group.

## BETHESDA

In this year of war and its aftermath that comes on the heels of two years of alarms about terrorism, we find ourselves eager for the solace of Meeting for Worship. We yearn for the refreshment of a deep living silence and Spirit-centered messages. We yearn for a caring community, where we know each other well, can rejoice together, and provide help when needed. Some of us find ourselves looking nostalgically to the past when Quakerism seemed stronger, when roles were clearer, when people had more time, and sharing seemed deeper. But we live in a present where our experience often falls short of our hopes. We are aware of gaps between what we profess and how we behave, and the tensions between how we carry ourselves into meeting and into the world. We are working to diminish these gaps, starting by admitting, to God and to ourselves, our responsibility for dealing with them.

In an effort to assess where we are and where we might be led, a series of before- Worship forums delved into questions of why we do what we do – for example why we have the committees we have, and how we welcome and encourage newcomers. We have probed our practice, seeking to know it better and, in so doing, to transform it into a more God-led way. We have sought a deeper understanding of Quaker language — of words such as “The Light”, “ministry”, “oversight” and “pastoral care,” lest they become mere Quaker clichés.

In the past year, we have tried to deepen our understanding of Friends’ beliefs and practice in our worship. We sought greater insight into how to discern the Spirit leading us to speak in meeting and how to hear messages with greater understanding and acceptance. The Ministry and Worship Committee has followed the Quaker tradition of eldering with quiet, gentle guidance in private. The Committee seeks to close Meeting for

Worship with greater sensitivity to the Spirit rather than the clock, easing the transition from silent Friends’ worship through announcements to a noisy, friendly coffee hour.

This year we celebrated three lives in memorial meetings: Evelyn Bryant, mother of Ralph Bryant and aunt of Marion Ballard; Dorothy Akins, mother of Ronald Akins; and Earl Harrison, a much valued member of the meeting. We celebrated the living as we saluted the 90th birthday of our member Jean Jones at an after-meeting potluck lunch. We have delighted in our children, who led us in music and song on several occasions, including our annual Christmas pageant. We continue to be grateful to those among us who lead the children in First Day School. Also, as in the past, we continue to grapple with techniques to smooth the exit of the children for First Day School and to welcome them back with minimum disruption to Meeting for Worship.

We have recognized the scarcity of Friends of color among us. A Listening Project involving more than 30 meeting members has sought to raise awareness of racism and to find ways to encourage and nurture diversity in our meeting community. We mean to practice being more welcoming, not only to strangers, but also to each other and to the holy Spirit.

We sense a stirring within us as a community to examine the openings that we believe always to be present, if only we will discern them and pick ourselves up — lovingly — and trusting in God, follow them. As we try to live up to our understanding of what Friends believe, we mean to listen more deeply within ourselves, to take spiritual risks, and to let ourselves be truly open, vulnerable, and instruments of God.

## BLACKSBURG MONTHLY MEETING

The past year has brought with it many changes, but still much remains the same. Our attendance seems to be slightly reduced, but steady. We continue to offer religious education for both adults and children. Our peace and social justice efforts are in need of some more organization: Our meetings for worship with attention to business have been well attended and there is a lot of energy present in the Meetings.

We continue to seek for new Meeting space. Our serious pursuit of space in the last year has raised some difficult financial questions for our members and attenders. Our existing budget does not have room for a substantial rent payment or a mortgage. We have asked ourselves to reach deeper in our contributions to the Meeting in order to build a more robust Meetinghouse Fund and to assure any potential lenders and ourselves

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that we have the commitment to buy or build and maintain a spiritual home. The concrete consideration of a specific property has been helpful in understanding the local government's zoning regulations for, our needs from, and our unity in, seeking a Meeting space. Our existing space continues to serve us adequately.

Events around the world and in our own country have placed heavy burdens on our collective conscience. Our peace and social justice committee works to bring issues of especial importance to our attention, but it has been difficult to encapsulate and prioritize from all of the issues which are of critical importance. While recognizing these issues as important, we have also found that many of our members and attenders already have full lives outside of peace and social justice issues. We are trying to find ways to include peace and social justice activities into other activities, such as religious education topics. Still, we need to consider how to better organize our work in this area. It is essential to our continued health to find ways for us to contribute "enough" to peace and social justice causes. The needs appear to be sufficient to absorb anything that we can contribute.

One effort that we are making in this direction comes from our Hospitality and Outreach committee, which has proposed undertaking four projects each year - one in each of four categories: local need, feeding the hungry, peace and social justice, and AFSC relief effort. The first project was a local service project to help feed the hungry, undertaken by the First Day School, collecting food for a local pantry. It was a great success, and since the children enjoyed it so much, it has inspired the Religious Education committee to plan four youth-group-type events for this year, as well as more participation in these service projects within First Day School. We have begun our AFSC relief project.

We continue to provide childcare during business meeting and adult education sessions, freeing up some of the parents for more participation. The Religious Education committee has struggled some to provide meaningful and differentiated programs for children of different ages and to support its members during more stressful times. Toddlers and young children are a challenge because it seems that the parents are often left with the responsibility for taking care of them - leaving the parents somewhat disengaged from the rest of the Meeting. As a result, the committee has decided to provide a paid caregiver during First Day School. The committee is also creating a teaching information packet to encourage more members of meeting to consider teaching First Day School. Once again, we celebrated the advent season with a Waldorf-inspired spiral path. We celebrated

as a Meeting with song, transformation, and food together. Individuals showed innovation in adapting the ceremony at the last minute to compensate for new fire regulations.

Our Meetings for Worship are generally silent, but out of the silence we hear messages of poignancy and relevance. Vocal ministry is encouraged, and many people find the silence to be spiritually nourishing.

Our Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business have not been silent. They have been well attended, and full of ideas. In some cases, we have found that ideas are difficult to bring to fruition, but several committees have been quite active and we continue to seek new ideas and opportunities. In what is still a relatively small Meeting, we struggle with finding the energy to handle all of the tasks that we would like to see handled.

We held a retreat for the Meeting last autumn and all who attended enjoyed it immensely. We hope to continue to have a retreat annually as it provided the opportunity for us to share fellowship outside of the normal meeting times and grow together as a group in new ways.

As we noted last year, we need to improve in our attention to the people who don't make it in to Meeting regularly. While people have busy lives, we need to discern if there is more that we can do as a Meeting to fill the spiritual needs of those who choose to not attend for one reason or another.

We move into 2004 looking forward to both the challenges and opportunities that it may bring. We welcome visitors, and indeed, we hope for them as the preparations get underway for next year's return of FGC to Blacksburg.

## **CARLISLE MONTHLY MEETING**

Carlisle Friends continue to have regular First Day Meeting for Worship, First Day School and Monthly Meeting for Business. Wednesday Noon Worship was laid down for the present. Monthly First Wednesday Worship following prayer and fasting continues. A Spiritual Formation group meets biweekly on Sunday evenings, exploring God's movements in our lives.

Second hours included a presentation by Chuck Fager on the Peace Testimony and a consideration of school vouchers led by Fred Baldwin. Several women from the Meeting were refreshed by attending the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women's Retreat. And, Friends viewed Krzysztof Kieslowski's movie series "The Decalogue" on a few winter Saturday evenings, and found the fellowship and discussions enriching.

Friend Joan Anderson is very active in anti-death penalty issues and her group meets in our building also as well as a Peace College group. Young Friends minister to two local nursing homes in music and fellowship. They presented two music recitals at one of the homes. Tutoring is provided by dedicated Friends at Loysville Youth Development Center for adjudicated youth. This year's program has been revitalized by an increase in the number of tutors.

The Ministry and Council Committee initiated the idea of a monthly suggested reading to nourish and enrich ministry. Ralph Sloten gifted the entire meeting with a copy of his Quaker poems, *Children of the Light*, and this was one of the suggested readings. Ralph and the two other "Mermaid poets" gave a poetry reading at the meetinghouse that was enjoyed by Friends and the wider community. Also, the "Seeds of Silence" newsletter was published and distributed by Christine and Nathan Jefferson to the gratitude of Friends.

The younger children's First Day program has considered parables and famous Quakers. Older children have studied Old Testament patriarchs and memorized some Old Testament Bible verses.

The number of hospitalities and potlucks has increased in this past year and the presence of new attenders is very welcome.

Sadly, we have experienced the passing of three members in the past year: Stephen Davidson, Edith Brown and Edwin Siegel for whom memorial services were held. We also supported Friend Joan Anderson with a memorial service for her mother-in-law which was held at the meetinghouse. It seems that our memorial services have brought us closer as we reflect on these precious lives and the meaning of life for us all.

We are a small meeting and need to nurture our closeness and support one another along the journey. We do have a web site, [www.quakers-carlisle.org](http://www.quakers-carlisle.org), and we are continuing to consider how to attract persons of all ages to our meeting. One suggestion is to have speakers describe their Quaker experiences as young adults working in troubled areas and to include our 12 & up young friends in the discussion. We will also have a special celebration of children and of a new member and associate member.

## CHARLOTTESVILLE MONTHLY MEETING

2003 was, in general, a good year for Charlottesville Friends Meeting. We were blessed with growth in attendance at our First Day worship sessions, and in the way worshipping together centered our personal spiri-

tual lives. Many Friends felt a deep connection to our small community. We even began contemplating a major renovation of our meetinghouse. In the midst of all this, we welcome the opportunity to examine more closely our spiritual state. As we do, as we hear the word "community" again and again, we find ourselves asking, "What is the connection between spiritual life and community?"

If by community we mean support and love for one another, then in this area Charlottesville Friends Meeting abounds in strength. Members respond to issues as diverse as "can I have a ride home" to "I am going through a difficult time and would appreciate your holding me in the Light." We worked hard to make the BYM camping program a financially available option for all the Meeting's children. During 2003 we lost two cherished members of our meeting, and the strength of community was palpable as we worked together to strengthen those members and their families during their last days. Meeting members expressed gratitude for the ability to give back, and also expressed their deep appreciation at witnessing others give what they themselves could not. It is our faith that enables us to give support; it is our faith as well that allows us to trust that others will give. Our community, grounded in nurture and support, is strong.

If community means our neighborhood and civic life, Charlottesville Friends Meeting has been active this year. Certain social and political issues, prominently focused by the convictions of individual Friends, put Quakers in the local news now and then. Our Meeting sponsored a dialogue on the Middle East peace process, and was active in death penalty vigils. When US troops went into Iraq, several of us were arrested for civil disobedience at the local office of our Congressman. Friends were active too in quieter ways: Participating in community-wide talks on school board issues, traveling to worship in other areas, working to help find the local farmers' market a permanent home. Our work in the public eye has made some in our Meeting proud of our leadership and activism. Other Friends, however, wonder if our corporate activism has put personal urgencies before the leadings of the Spirit. As we grow more active and as our world grows to need a Quakerly moderating, thoughtful presence, we need to remain conscious that our social activism arises from our spirituality and not merely our personal convictions.

If community is a sense of gathering, perhaps "fellowship" names the connection between such community and our spiritual life. It is in our fellowship that Charlottesville Friends Meeting is feeling some chal-

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lenges. Although committee membership was thriving in 2003, the perennial problem of staffing our Religious Education Committee did not disappear, and for a time the Meeting seriously contemplated halting the First Day School program. Concern over relative lack of attendance at Meeting for Business reached a point at which the Ministry and Worship Committee was charged with attracting more participants. Why, at a time of increased attendance at Meeting for Worship, are we having such trouble getting people to take part in corporate decision-making? Are we growing so fast that we can't find the time to familiarize newcomers with Quaker process? The Finance Committee, noting that fewer families were donating financially, issued a Business Meeting-supported plea for donations. This Meeting needs the active, ongoing support of people who find it an important part of their lives. How can we encourage more of this support?

As members of a Quaker community, we hold that answers to these questions ultimately come, not from expedient decision-making, but from our attentiveness to the leadings of the Spirit. We seek the truth, regardless of the time it may take to arrive at that truth. As members of an increasingly pressured society, we must also struggle daily with finding time for all that is asked of us. A challenge for us is to make sure that the premium we place on everyday efficiency is not distorting our decisions at Charlottesville Friends Meeting by co-opting the way we make them. We need to remind ourselves that Quaker process is not only a precious practical instrument but also an invaluable spiritual exercise in itself. Ultimately, the community that is Charlottesville Friends Meeting is an ongoing expression of the will of God as we discern and try to enact it, and it is this community that we hold at the center of our spiritual lives.

## **DEER CREEK MONTHLY MEETING**

Members express a desire to attend meeting out of a sense of love for the group. There is a feeling of comfort and support that friends find within the Meeting at Deer Creek. However, this strength may contribute to what we feel is one of our greatest weaknesses. The satisfaction we find worshipping and working together as a meeting has allowed us to become somewhat isolationist outside of the Darlington Community. Members have expressed a desire to make more of a commitment to larger, more global issues. We look forward to meeting with the larger Quaker community by sponsoring the upcoming Interim Meeting.

The desire for companionship with others in the meeting has revived the Friendly eights program. Members

regularly express a desire to do more together as a group, including events such as Young Adults activities and the picnic at Henry and Brenda Holloway's.

A variety of topics continue to be covered in adult Sunday school that include both prepared lessons and discussions. There is a sense that controversial topics are sometimes omitted and that for some, the lack of discussing strong issues diminishes the passion that might otherwise be felt.

Friends express a general satisfaction with silent meeting and value the short silent meeting held with the children prior to Sunday school. The quality of spoken ministry remains inspirational, although the quantity may be lacking. Individuals sometimes struggle with silent worship when they arrive with everyday life issues on their minds and fail to be inspired by the particular lesson that day.

Attendance in meetings for business, as well as meeting in general, suffers due to members' involvement with other activities. Evaluating priorities and making a commitment to attending is an issue everyone in meeting feels needs to be addressed.

Participation in the committees has diminished in the past year. In spite of this, the group continues to be able to gather around a cause and achieve significant accomplishments. In 2003, Deer Creek Friends joined the efforts of a Harford County coalition of churches and civic agencies to provide shelter for one week to homeless neighbors. The required commitment of time and effort from all our members challenged our prejudices and rekindled the joy that can be found in personal service to those that need help. We are planning to expand our efforts to support the needs of these neighbors by offering Friends conflict resolution to address community concerns, which have resulted in opposition to several proposed locations for a permanent shelter.

Our meeting has successfully organized joyful events for fundraising to pay for our recent building addition. Our annual Blueberry Festival and Barn Dance have become popular community events. Additional member efforts include road cleanup, support for a member's job related conflict with the peace testimony, and support for the Harford Friends School project. We feel that to improve interest in the committees, each committee will need to set definitive goals and strive to achieve them. The completion of a significant task will help to reinforce the importance of each committees work.

We have identified several items that we feel can deepen the spiritual life of the Meeting and strengthen our witness on behalf of Friend's testimonies to the world.

We would like to develop a strategic plan to guide our committees through the year of 2004. We would like to sponsor an individual each year to participate in quarterly and yearly meetings in order to be a more viable part of the Quaker world outside of Deer Creek. We will strive to take on the difficult issues while not letting our individual differences interfere with the goal of being a part of the greater community.

## DUNNINGS CREEK MONTHLY MEETING

This has been a special year, one that brings awe to even the most staid of Quakers. We celebrated, were entertained, learned about our past, worked hard on the FGC, attended to our elderly members, and more fully realized that the co-clerk experiment begun by Holly and Joan has been a true success.

Don and Susan have done a super job co-clerking us. There is strength and vigor amongst us.

Nancy and Holly worked tirelessly on FGC. They represented Dunnings Creek Meeting in a most professional way. We are grateful that they are members of our Meeting.

The Young Friends of the Yearly Meeting stayed with us for a weekend in April and gave us the gift of their vitality, youth and moving sincerity, while we gave them respectful loving hospitality. We wished them well and look forward to their return.

We were entertained by the movie "The Pre-Teen Pirates and the Quest for the Golden Taco" shown to us by John Treber. While at Oppecquon Camp Silus Sterns-Bruner and John produced, wrote and starred in the movie that was later enjoyed by the Meeting.

The Meeting has survived good times and not so good times for two hundred years and we made an effort to recognize that fact this past summer.

There was much attention given to where our service funds go. A Sunday morning given to that discussion was laudable and the decisions satisfying. We feel good about that as a small Meeting with limited assets.

We look forward to the future continuing to search with expectancy.

## FLOYD MONTHLY MEETING

### Spiritual condition:

Meetings for worship are held each First Day with from two to seven in attendance. A spirit of faithfulness and loyalty binds together the few local members of our Meeting. We have two occasional attenders and are blessed with a new active attender who has just moved to our area. One member who lives at a great distance

has withdrawn membership. Some members continue to be distressed that we do not grow, but our loyalty to one another and to the Society of Friends sustains us. Our meetings for worship are typically characterized by an intense stillness with occasional spoken messages.

### Meetings for business:

We meet for business on the first First Day of each month, following meeting for worship and a shared lunch. Good attendance occurs, which is fortunate because there are so few of us to participate in making decisions and assuming various tasks. During the past year we were able to complete some final details in construction of the Meetinghouse. Individual monetary donations and contributed physical labor enabled us to install hard wood floors in the two uncarpeted main rooms in the Meetinghouse. The porch ceiling was painted by two members and gravel was added to the parking lot. The Meeting was gifted with a piano. Our clerk attended a week-end workshop on clerking at Pendle Hill, primarily supported by our Meeting and Pendle Hill. Three members attended Baltimore Yearly Meeting in Harrisonburg in August. Our building is occasionally used by community groups.

### Religious education

We meet for adult education on the third Wednesday evening of each month (except in summer months) following a potluck meal. We promoted an ambitious program for adult discussions this year as we focused on globalization and its spiritual dimensions. Different members made presentations using as our basic texts *Spiritual Perspectives on Globalization* by Ira Rifkin and *Globalization and its Discontents* by Joseph Stiglitz in addition to various related articles and current newspapers. We extended invitations to the community and to regional Friends Meetings. We will begin a study of the *Book of Thomas* and Elaine Pagels' *Beyond Belief*. We have no regular ongoing first day program for children since there are none in the Meeting, but we are prepared to share teaching responsibilities when needed.

### Peace and Social Concerns

Peace and Social concerns were exemplified in the various activities of our members. Our faith inspires members to various pursuits: two giving regular medical aid at the Free Clinic; one serving as volunteer on a fire and rescue squad; two serving on boards at Pendle Hill; one providing an example of simple living through a private business. In addition we made significant monetary contributions to AFSC for a water treatment program in Iraq and for aid to our local Free Clinic. Supplies for local elementary schools were donated as well.

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## FREDERICK MONTHLY MEETING

In 2003 Frederick Meeting experienced a year of intense involvement in matters of the world and of the spirit. We felt a growing awareness of both change around us and our need to change. Attendance at Meeting remained good. We welcomed new members and attenders. We celebrated for the first time the birth of a child, Grace Zimmerman, whose mother had been raised in the Meeting, and welcomed a child who joined her family and our community by adoption, Nora Clarke. We joyfully supported the marriage of Candace Younkins and Glenn Upton under the care of the meeting, and gave our blessings to Jonathan Willis and Tuna Chatterjee at their ceremony.

Many of us continued to be involved in local, regional and national peace marches and other activities. We encouraged press coverage of local peace events, which has been helpful in uniting activists from many parts of our Frederick community. Friends participated with the Peace Resource Center in ongoing weekly vigils against militarism outside of Ft Detrick and public forums on alternatives to war presented at Hood College. Friends also participated with Frederick Women in Black at monthly vigils and in hosting the Ibdaa Palestinian youth dance troupe from Dheishah refugee camp for a teen cultural exchange day in July. Members and attenders joined others in the community in standing witness at meetings called by the local FBI with representatives of the Frederick Muslim community and in presenting an alternative point of view for a resolution proposed by Frederick City aldermen in support of the war. In August we hosted a community forum on the conflict in the middle-east, and in early Fall a series of films and discussions based on the PBS series *A Force More Powerful*, all of which were open to the public and well attended.

First Day School continues to grow and thrive, and includes a number of first time teachers. We honored our graduating seniors in June, and welcomed 60 first day schoolers this Fall. Our Young Friends continue to work at the soup kitchen, and many of them started first day school in the Fall with a ropes course. We have offered the *Growing in the Light* curriculum this year. Attendance is consistent in some of the classes, which has allowed for a sense of community to develop, and longer-term projects to emerge. The older groups are challenged by demanding personal schedules, and we find we must be realistic in our expectations for community and covering class material. We have begun to develop a more comprehensive and formal child safety

program, which will be an ongoing process. A fruitful program for adult RE continues.

Our work towards deciding on a next step and vision for an expansion of our physical space has continued. We have now acquired additional parking adjacent to our property, and can begin the process of visioning how our space should serve our ministry and our community.

We had good participation at our annual spring retreat weekend at Catoctin Camp, and were pleased to see a number of young families experiencing the camp for the first time.

Our nominating committee has encouraged greater participation on committees through several activities that will better familiarize attenders with the work of the committees and helping people identify their strengths and gifts and needs. A number of individuals are assuming clerkships for the first time, and we are grateful for their fresh perspective and energy. A series of training sessions for committee clerks has been a helpful support. We are grateful to Darah Kehnemuyi for assuming the clerkship of Warrenton Quarterly Meeting and helping to sustain this important connection among Friends.

We have sought to build community through more frequent potlucks, as well as our traditional events such as Fall Festival and children's Christmas celebrations. A number of us have experienced serious illness, or have struggled to support family members who are ill. While we try to be mindful of the circumstances of Friends, we are not always sufficiently aware, nor have we always provided enough support. We seek ways to be more consistent in our response to need.

Much of the Meeting's energy at the end of the year was focused on our Prison Ministry. While the Prison Ministry has for many years been the concern of a few, it has not been generally embraced by the Meeting. Nevertheless, over a year ago, we approved a Minute concerning the return of sex offenders to the community, outlining procedures and communications. We found when we began the process of communication in anticipation of an incarcerated Friend's upcoming release, that this represents a significant and painful issue for many among us. We have struggled with the question of whether we really are open to all, and under what circumstances. We labored intensively for several months to find a way to hold the concerns and feelings of all. Finding unity has been very difficult. We have convened a support committee for the incarcerated Friend, to assist with the many challenges he will face. We have convened an oversight committee to address safety in the Meeting, to develop detailed procedures

and accountability, and most of all to listen. We have convened a series of Listening Groups and Meetings to establish a safe place to express concerns. We have discovered that we are no different than the rest of society in having a significant number within our community who are survivors. We have also discovered that the larger issues we are dealing with have to do with some members and attenders not feeling they are heard, not trusting that the meeting will follow through with safety procedures, and with long-standing interpersonal conflicts among some that make openness to the spirit difficult. These are all matters we know we must address; we pray we will do so with love and openness to truth. We have experienced moments of great pain, and moments of astounding grace in our work. We have made a great deal of progress and much work remains. We pray for light as we continue.

Throughout this year we have come to know again, the meaning and power of worship and of right process, and how difficult a place it is to hold. Living as a community from within that sacred place is miracle enough, even for a moment in time. We have also known it to be the source of other miracles for us individually and corporately this year. We remind ourselves that it is worship and the life of the spirit that informs who we are and all we do.

As we reflect upon this, our spiritual state of the meeting, we ask ourselves to hold these queries up to the Light:

*How can we help improve the quality of silence in worship? How can we help people to better understand the nature of appropriate vocal messages, and how to use silence between messages?*

*How can we better understand and convey the subtleties of good process? How can we make our business meetings less ego-filled and less frustrating?*

*How can we balance the need to remain patient with issues that will take a long time to resolve, with burn-out?*

*When interpersonal flare-ups take over our process, how can we deal with this, love people through it and re-center? How can we better understand and appreciate the differences in temperament that can lead to these flare-ups?*

*How can we use our peace testimony to help us deal with fear?*

*How can we address our twin roots in Christianity and Universalism in how we teach our children?*

*In what ways can we more effectively address the myriad needs of the community with so many people arriving, and some leaving?*

*How can we better nurture new families and attenders? What structures will help us do this more consistently?*

## FREDERICKSBURG WORSHIP GROUP

This is an attempt to provide an overview of the state of this group after over a month back in the Campus Christian Center, 1213 Dandridge Road, across from the Mary Washington campus. We began February first. Through March fourteenth, we have had as attenders seven different family units (a unit is anything from one individual up).

We have not really started outreach either with former attenders or in the Fredericksburg religious community. Notes were sent to the Free Lance Star and to BYM to change our listing on Web pages. Everyone in our guest book register received an invitation to our first meeting in February 2004, unless we already knew they had left our area. Some of these letters were returned by the Post Office, enabling us to update our mailing list.

We plan to make contact with the Interfaith group here, for which I was formerly secretary. That group meets monthly with perhaps 20-30 present, incidentally including both Catholics and Jews. They sponsor activities such as School Dressing Days in the fall before schools open, and a Community Assessment Program to which seekers for help are referred. The Salvation Army provided a professional staffer to interview people seeking need and tell them about a specific group suited to their needs. (The idea is to save needy persons from "shopping" around to various sources.) Minor costs such as postage etc. does mean that member organizations pay an annual membership fee; so full participation depends upon how successful Friends are in building income.

A question was raised about our having a telephone listed in our name. I argued against that, based on my experience when my telephone number was listed for our group, after the telephone was taken out of the Schiff

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home. I got several calls but most were simply looking for money. Nothing during that period led to new Worship Group members. By contrast our listing on the Internet has led to inquiries and possible new members.

I am now thinking about doing an article to send to everyone who has been with us over the years and who is still in the area. It will give the full history of our group, briefly. Then our present future plans can be described.

One relates to possible future plans for children under twelve. There is a small room next to the main meeting room at the Center. We checked and noises therein do not penetrate the main room except as very distant. (Reminds me of the lawn mower we often heard at the Unitarian meeting room, which was much noisier.) We would like to attract a few more young people, and have adults take turns working with the children for maybe 45 minutes after which they would rejoin the worship group meeting.

We still have a small amount of our former treasury that was transferred to Alexandria Meeting. It has occurred to us that we might spend this on some brochures to give out here; and might borrow some good books for reading to children. By the way, any way that we could be given help working with children occasionally would be much appreciated. The Society of Friends has much to gain from the many Society leaders who became staunch Quakers as children.

Also, I have thought about translating our modest needs for money into modest appeals. One hundred dollars a month could come from five family units each contributing twenty dollars. Or ten family units each contributing ten dollars. Other than that, we may contribute used goods to any community drives for goods to help families who have lost much through flood or fire etc. As of now, we have a large gray envelope marked "Donations" and some small white envelopes indicating that if a contributor wants a receipt for tax purposes, he or she should put name and address on the small envelope. We also ask each new visitor to sign name and address in our guest register. The large envelope sits on a table near the exit - as are some items belonging to others using the room.

I ever tell you about my brother who, when he was drafted into the Army before Vietnam, spent so long at Ft Devens in Massachusetts, waiting interminably for eventual assignment to a specific unit? Finally he went to the personnel office to ask what was the problem. And they told him that the psychological testing in his case said that he was a conscientious objector and they didn't know quite how to handle this. He then signed a statement that he was a CO and spent the rest of the

war years shaking down trains on the Texas-Mexico border. This proves that my family are essentially pacifist even if we don't always know it!

Perhaps we can develop some more CO's in spite of themselves in the Fredericksburg Friends Worship Group.

## **FRIENDS MEETING OF WASHINGTON**

As members of the only Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends situated within the borders of our nation's capital, members of the Friends Meeting of Washington are especially mindful of the importance of our historic Meeting House to Friends beyond our meeting community. In times of national crisis, the Friends Meeting of Washington has been a place where Quakers from around the world and members of other faith traditions have come together for mutual support and worship. Nevertheless, Friends Meeting of Washington is now faced with a financial crisis as it tries to keep the aging buildings updated to meet modern standards, and provide complete access for handicapped worshippers.

In our discernment process to address this problem, we have discovered that there is unease among FMW Friends, especially those active on Finance and Stewardship and Trustees Committees, that only a small number of our members provide over three-fourths of the financial support of the Meeting. Even though some progress has been made in the past few years, over 45% of our members still do not give even a single penny to the Meeting.

The Ministry and Worship committee selected Stewardship as the theme for the 2004 Spiritual State of the Meeting Report so that we could all focus attention on how this important problem impacts on our spiritual lives as Quakers. Many discussions have drawn attention to the severity of our situation. Young Adult Friends have responded with a commitment for 100% participation in annual giving to the Meeting.

We are continuously challenged to discern how to convey to members the responsibilities of membership of the Religious Society of Friends, as outlined in Faith and Practice and in our Meeting Handbook. In general financial responsibilities are only touched on lightly. When new members join the Meeting, our enthusiasm to appear welcoming inhibits our willingness to engage in lengthy discussions about finances.

It is clear that as a Meeting we have been uncomfortable with the subject of money and how it relates to our spiritual lives, but this began to change three years ago. FMW convened a "Faith, Facilities and Financial Realities Committee" to examine the state of our financial affairs and the Meeting's properties and to recom-

mend appropriate action. Although the situation has not yet been resolved, this intensive attention to many of the physical and financial aspects of the Meeting challenges us all to remain vigilant and to maintain focus on the spiritual as well as physical needs.

In the past, FMW was comfortable supporting many activities and lamenting that we could not do more. As individuals we willingly worked on projects, showed up for committee meetings, and [a few of us] made financial contributions to FMW. We seldom linked our activities and our stewardship responsibilities in a personal way. Happily, Friends now seem willing to undertake the important work of discerning how finances and spirituality are connected. We are asking ourselves, "How do I want FMW to serve its members and the world, and what am I prepared to give to support that?" This is a new sort of question.

Understanding the full meaning of what it means to be a Quaker, with all that it requires of us as individuals and collectively, is a life-long quest. We will continue to study, pray and listen for Way to open and strengthen the spiritual experience of everyone in the FMW community as we move forward.

## GETTYSBURG FRIENDS MEETING

The past year was not a statistically record-setting year. It was eventful, nevertheless, for us as a Meeting community.

Ironically, we at Gettysburg Meeting did more things together, as a like-minded group, than we have for a long, long time. "The spiritual growth of the Meeting is linked to its life as a community - and to its wider community reach, too," observed a longtime member at our evening meal and discussion to do our self-evaluation. She had personally taken three hours that day to reflect on how we were doing, and came well prepared.

We are not growing and we take that quite seriously. We did have several drop-in visitors, which was encouraging because we are difficult to find. Only the most determined find our door. The infant son of one of our most recent members began attending Meeting very early after being born. Even the parents are pleasantly pleased with his seeming enjoyment of the quiet. His presence is a spiritual vitamin pill for the Meeting.

What we have been able to do this year is worth noting. There are some things we feel are within our grasp to do. In the past it has been difficult to get agreement on collectively giving contributions, especially to "causes." We have very little to give, but when we need funds, everyone seems to rally to meet the need. At one of our business meetings we decided to open a restricted

fund for a future Meetinghouse that would be built, or rented or whatever. Contributions were made that very day to start it. Believe me, we also like our present rent-free arrangement. We also decided to send a sizeable contribution, for us, to help rebuild the Ramallah Meetinghouse. When the request came for additional contributions for the same purpose, we made a second gift. That courageous effort from far away caught our imagination and sense of hope against great odds.

Still another long-felt need surfaced during the year. It was difficult for us, but we realized that we were very uncomfortable and needed to write a minute regarding the handling of an incident involving Lamar Matthew, clerk of the Yearly Meeting and representatives of Friends United Meeting. We have asked Yearly Meeting that the portion of Gettysburg's annual assessment that goes to support FUM be withheld. In reality, it is a token gesture, but, for us, an important one. We are doing as much as we can with what little we have. We regret that it was necessary for us to take this position, but it simply felt "right." Often, the spiritual road is not clear, especially when the desired result is unity, not fragmentation and discord. We would have preferred a positive outcome, and would still hope that one materializes.

## GOOSE CREEK FRIENDS MEETING

*To everything there is a season,  
And a time for every matter under heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die;  
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that  
which is planted."*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-2*

As a rural Meeting whose roots for most of its history have been in a farming community, we are accustomed to observing the significance of the seasons in our lives and environment. In reflection upon recent changes in the number of persons attending Meeting for Worship and First Day School, we are reminded of the importance of discerning the correct season in the cycle of our Meeting's activity. If we expect to harvest in the planting season, we are doomed to frustration; even more importantly, we won't perform the work essential for a rich harvest in years to come.

For generations, we at Goose Creek have gleaned the wisdom of our older, experienced, weighty Friends. However, recently we have lost many of those members who constituted a living thread to our past as a Meeting; only a remnant of our current membership grew up in the Meeting. As the harvest enjoyed for genera-

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tions is no longer at our door, we younger members are now called to become the fountains of wisdom, sow the spiritual seeds, and nurture the fragile plants appearing in our midst. Mourning a lost past is not fruitful; on the other hand, understanding the requirements of a different season is critical. One season is not necessarily superior to another. We sense that we are in a period for deepening inner centeredness, discerning guidance, and moving as our path opens.

As we note the smaller numbers of children in our community, we are reminded of phases in the past when bountiful numbers of children suddenly diminished to handfuls. Our current situation is no different: some young Friends have gone off to college, other teenagers no longer attend Meeting but do attend camp, fewer members and attenders are of child-bearing age although we do have several young babies in the Meeting. On the other hand, some young people who left the area have returned to the county and to our Meeting. We are particularly pleased that many of our young Friends have chosen to attend Quaker colleges. Nevertheless, we are challenged to provide a coordinated, enriching curriculum for the children currently in First Day School. We need additional talented, spirit-filled leadership that can inspire youth struggling to make sense of the myriads of threatening forces at work in our world.

In some ways our Meeting seems to be in a quiet phase. Although some committees are flourishing, others seem to be less active at this time. These await new, energized leadership that can inspire other members to participate more enthusiastically. Goose Creek has a long history of older members mentoring younger leadership into positions of greater responsibility over a period of years. Perhaps this quiet nurturing of young plants into fruitful trees needs to occur in a more conscious and widespread fashion.

Despite the diminished activity in some areas, the Meeting supports a number of organizations financially; and several Friends serve faithfully on committees within our Meeting and in the wider fellowship of Quaker organizations, including yearly meeting committees, boards of Pendle Hill and a Friends' school, Friends Unity with Nature Committee on the national level, Friends General Conference Central Committee, the American Friends Service Committee Corporation, and Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology. In addition, many Friends in the Meeting participated in projects to send relief kits to Iraq through the AFSC and contributed to holiday drives for needy persons in the county.

As we consider whether we are growing deeper in the Light, reaching out to newcomers adequately, and

ministering to the needs of our community, we are reminded that many have found a spiritual home here, growing spiritually through our worship and times together. However, we sense a need to reach out in a more organized manner to seekers, perhaps through more informal shepherding, through more potlucks, and through more involvement in Friendly Eights. While we cannot expect all seeds to grow into plants, we can tend the seedbed more diligently.

Opportunities for fellowship and discussion were well received during 2003. Potluck dinners for new attenders with more seasoned members provided Friendly discussion and opportunity to become better acquainted. Monthly discussions on peacemaking and Quakerism have been informative and enlightening though we wish more persons had attended. An end-of-summer picnic on the lawn afforded an opportunity for informal fellowship, as did our traditional Easter breakfast and Christmas potluck and carol sing.

As we consider the change in our seasons, we are reminded of the change in demography in the Meeting. Once a community-based Meeting, we now have members traveling from far-flung areas. We face the challenge of providing opportunities for fellowship and corporate spiritual growth in a world that moves at a frenzied pace. Nevertheless, we experience unity and continue to be nourished by the Spirit as we gather weekly in silent worship. With Meeting for Worship at the center of our life together, we proceed in faith that way will open and that we can move more fully toward being a Friendly presence in a chaotic world if we continue to walk in the Light.

## **GUNPOWDER MONTHLY MEETING**

The Meeting is committed to centering in silence in meeting for worship, in monthly meetings for business, and as we meet together for other activities. We recognize that newcomers to the Meeting are enriching our community, and that both members and attenders are spending time getting to know each other while also struggling with some matters as we grow together. The Meeting is very welcoming and there is conversation and shared concern among all, whether they are long-time members, new attenders, chronologically older or younger, "empty nesters" or young families.

All are invited to participate in spiritual community through such activities as the annual Spiritual Formation Program, Bible study, and Quakerism classes. We hold a silent retreat day one Saturday a month for those who desire an extended period of silence. Participants in all programs include both long-term and new members and

attenders. The variety of activities encourages greater participation and attendance overall. Recent growth of the meeting has included individuals, couples and families who wish to experience the deep silence. The meeting is especially pleased with the growing number of children who attend.

An active ministry exists among the members and attenders in our meeting. The Spiritual Formation Program, for example, has nurtured a personal ministry among individuals. The meeting as a whole provides support for children and adults during times of illness or death, stays in contact with members who live at a distance, and provides gifts, cards and visits to local Friends who are not able to attend meetings for worship or business. Within the past year, three couples were married under the care of the Meeting.

There is a lack of unity within the Meeting over various issues, from support for same gender unions to how to preserve the historical integrity of our meeting room. We have approached these and other differences by holding forums and worship sharing, and by collecting and distributing educational material, especially on the issue of same gender unions.

Each First Day finds about 35 to 40 attenders at meeting for worship. Many, whether new or established in the Meeting community, often say they have a sense of the deepness of the gathered silence. The content and quality of spoken ministry is of a high standard, and one respected member has called it "rich and deep." We have elected to read the query of the month at the beginning of one meeting for worship each month.

Meetings for business are well attended. The range of concerns considered is broad, and important items receive appropriate time and worshipful consideration, largely through the loving discernment of our clerk and how she sets each agenda. We need to encourage more reticent Friends to participate vocally in meetings for business.

The Ministry and Oversight Committee recommended that their duties be split between two committees, one concentrated on ministry and one concentrating on oversight. The Meeting approved this plan for a one-year trial.

Several individuals are quite involved in a wide array of peace and social order work and invite everyone within the Meeting to join them. The Meeting participates actively in these kinds of issues. The Meeting continues to make contributions to the work of the United Churches' Assistance Network and a variety of other organizations and individuals.

This year our long time First Day School teacher stepped down and several parents and non-parents quickly assumed responsibility for children's religious education. They have approached this work with enthusiasm and energy. The Meeting has a concern, however, that those who work in children's religious education need to miss meeting for worship in order to be with the children. We hope to broaden the number of members and attenders willing to assist with the children's program on First Day. We continue to include all the children in the first fifteen minutes of meeting for worship. As one Friend has reminded us, "The Meeting's children are not just the future of the Religious Society of Friends; they are also the present."

## HERNDON FRIENDS MEETING

To assess the spiritual state of our Meeting we made special efforts to get comments from our members and attenders this year. We distributed a set of queries we composed and got written responses from some. Then, during a potluck lunch, the members of the Ministry and Oversight committee distributed themselves among the tables and took notes on a discussion of those queries. The collected comments give a general impression of a healthy Meeting.

In particular, the responses indicate that those who participate regularly in Meeting for Worship at Herndon Friends Meeting find that their lives changed as a result. Some describe these changes as being inspired, more centered, or refocused, and as having a different perspective. During Meeting for Worship they feel spoken to from within, as well as from the spoken messages that they hear during Meeting for Worship. They leave thinking about the spoken message and its meaning for their lives, and feel that they take the Meeting with them in their lives in the outside world. They describe a sense of community, which is caring, and in which they can more freely discuss their spiritual selves. During the week they continue to feel the presence of the Meeting community as they do work related to the Meeting and their other work. They describe a greater awareness of the spirit, and commitment to a life devoted to peace that comes in part from being refreshed by Meeting for Worship. This leads them to work on Meeting projects as well as to focus their efforts in life in ways they might have ignored had they not been attending.

We asked Friends, "How is your spiritual growth nurtured by Herndon Friends Meeting? In what ways does your involvement with Herndon Friends speak to your understanding of faith, religion, or spirituality?" Many responses mentioned the experience of sharing the si-

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lence, how it reinforces dedication, and gives one a calming feeling of community and connectedness. Some described how being with the children is energizing. Others credited the Meeting with introducing them to inspiring writers and described the influence that has had on them. We have many members who have converted from other religions; they expressed satisfaction in the contrast with their former religious experiences.

Our members see a reflection of our corporate spiritual state in our activities. We see ourselves involved in many kids' activities and efforts at Religious Education; this tells us that the Meeting cares about the children and their education. Friends felt that last year's response to the war in Iraq showed leadership in the community and demonstrated Quaker beliefs. Several mentioned that they were very impressed by the level of commitment to spiritual and social activities in the Meeting. We show a joyous frame of mind with our singing before Meeting for Worship. We take care to greet visitors and new attenders, answer their questions, and provide them with the new pamphlets we bought, which shows that we believe what we have is worth sharing with others. Our efforts to help others who are less fortunate show that we carry our Quaker values into the real world. Good turnouts for clean-up days at the Meeting-house show the commitment and giving attitudes of our members. Small turnouts at Business Meeting compared to Meeting for Worship is an ongoing concern, and we are not clear as to how this reflects our commitment to the work of the Meeting. Is it due to busy lives, discomfort with business concerns, or something else?

We also asked Friends what programs and activities, other than Meeting for Worship, specifically addressed a spiritual need in their lives. The most popular response was participating in the Friendly Eights discussion groups; we love our book discussions. Closely related to this sentiment and was the frequent mention of the satisfaction our people get from fellowship. Our members deeply value diverse interactions, including working together on committees or to set up potluck, calling one another during the week, and meeting socially away from Meeting. Many also find that working with our young Friends in First Day school fulfills a spiritual need. They mention with delight how interested and motivated our young people are and point out how remarkable it is to see such a high participation of teenagers. Interest in our annual retreat has declined over the last few years, but feedback from members indicates that much of the problem is the scheduling conflicts with that weekend, and we are investigating alternative dates. Finally, working

on death-penalty issues seems to fulfill a spiritual need for some members.

In response to our queries on changes we should consider, Friends responded in four areas:

*Further care and nurturing of our spiritual community*

*New opportunities for service in our home communities*

*The possibility of further outreach to organizations such as AFSC*

*Whether our new approach to retreats will be fruitful.*

Care and nurturing of our spiritual community might include calling people that have not been to Meeting in awhile, wearing our name tags and making ones for new attenders, perhaps at hospitality or potluck day, and social excursions for adults as well as children of the Meeting. New opportunities for stretching ourselves spiritually and monetarily could be in our own back yards working to solve local problems and cooperating with organizations that serve the community. Friends felt we should consider what we give organizations like AFSC and FCNL and that we might take a more active role in their financial support and work. We will have to look at what Friends think about the new venues and make up of our retreats after they have been held. The Friends of Herndon Meeting seem to be looking for more ways to extend their help, both spiritually and financially to the local and Quaker community.

## **BALTIMORE, HOMEWOOD**

The year 2003 challenged many of us at Homewood Meeting to examine our Quaker compass. Within the past year, attendance at Homewood has grown, as we have enjoyed an influx of attenders. Some have been drawn to the Meeting because of the war in Iraq, and some have been attracted by the presence of the Young Adult Friends under the care of Homewood. Complementing the new faces is our core of members and long-time attenders who provide stability. This exciting addition of newcomers has renewed the necessity to define both what it means to be a Quaker in the world and what it means to be a Friend within the Homewood community.

Committee work offers us the opportunity to renew and refresh these definitions. The various committees offer Homewood members and attenders, seasoned and new, forums in which they simultaneously become more intimate with each other and strengthen Homewood's capacity to fulfill spiritual and community needs. Clear-

ness and Counsel and Ministry and Worship attempt to address the spiritual needs of a growing group; in addition, they educate us about the Society of Friends. Trustees and Stewardship and Finance assess and protect the Meeting's financial assets so that these assets may continue to preserve the building in which we celebrate our faith and commitment to each other and to the greater community. At the same time they also seek to put our dollars to work to further our goals of social justice and provide financial support to Quaker organizations. Peace and Social Witness demonstrates our financial and moral witness in even more concrete ways and expresses the core of our testimonies. With the continuing war in Iraq, the Friday peace vigils remain a vital expression of the peace testimony. Religious Education nurtures our younger members, celebrating their lively role in our community and educating them so that they will understand their presence as Quakers within society at large. In addition, Homewood is re-establishing the Advancement and Outreach Committee to bridge the gap between Homewood and newcomers. Other committees also straddle the inner and outer worlds, as they work tirelessly to define and address their goals within the context of the Meeting.

Representatives of our various committees and others join monthly under the loving guidance of our clerk, Beth Edelstein, as we gather for Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business. A sober expression of our imperfect striving to fulfill our testimonies, Meeting for Business also celebrates community. Even with the hurried simple lunches before hand and the clatter of dishes, even with hot summer afternoons or glorious autumn days with deep blue sky, we settle into silence. Usually we conduct business smoothly, but sometimes, only after thorny discussion are we able to unite.

And finally, there is Meeting for Worship. This year (as in many others), we have encountered challenges as we sought to balance the needs and feelings of individuals with those of the worshipping community.

During many Meetings for Worship we have few or no messages, although during the period of Joys and Sorrows people frequently feel moved to share requests for prayer and short messages. We continue to struggle with the acoustics in our very large, simple Meeting Room. The Meeting room, built generations ago to accommodate a Five Year Meeting, seats 250, and while it is often full for weddings and memorials, weekly attendance for worship varies from 40 to 70. Repeatedly we hear expressions of concern and regret that worshipers do not sit more closely together as a worshipping community. Multiple committees have studied ways to solve

this problem, yet technical solutions are expensive, and Friends have not united around simple solutions such as sitting together, or removing, roping or reconfiguring benches. Many in the Meeting are attached to the room as it is, and speak of the comfort or relief they find in its spacious quiet. And yet not all messages can be heard. We have many latecomers, and outside noise in the summer competes with our seeking.

The Meeting continues to grapple with these issues. The space issues highlight the Meeting's renewed attention to vocal ministry among the kinds of ministry to which Homewood Friends are called. It has been difficult to discern what connections, if any, there are between the room's size, numbers in attendance, proximity and distance of worshipers, timely and prepared arrival, the frequency of Meetings with no messages, and the wide diversity of spiritual paths suggested by the messages offered in worship. These issues about the quality of Meeting for Worship suggest that we need sustained and patient dialogue about vocal ministry and silence in our corporate worship.

Additional forms of spiritual communion that include worship are proliferating within the Meeting. The Religious Education committee continues to offer evenings of intergenerational fellowship, with a worship sharing time for adults, and Family Worship in the library a few times during the year. A Meeting for Healing takes place each month. A Young Adult Friends group has formed among people 18-35ish, who share meals, book discussions, explorations of Friends' practices, and worship once a month. Homewood members participate with enthusiasm in spiritual retreats within the Yearly Meeting. A renewal has occurred in the First Day program for teens, led by Gary Gillespie, exploring ways Quakers walk the testimonies' talk.

Completing Meeting and committee business has become easier for all with the welcome addition of Administrative Coordinator Elizabeth DuVerlie. We are very grateful for all that she does, for the Friendly reminders that are woven into our days by her thoughtful emails and telephone calls. Her presence has enabled us to concentrate more deeply on the spiritual fiber of our work together.

## LANGLEY HILL MONTHLY MEETING

Meetings for worship have been well attended. Many found the silence deep and the messages meaningful. Some were concerned that a few Friends spoke too often and/or without proper seasoning. We seem to have learned to live with our differences and continue to

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struggle to improve the quality of messages and worship.

Meetings for worship with a concern for business have been skillfully and reverently guided first by our outgoing clerk and then by our new clerk. At times a fullness of Spirit facilitated our decision making. These meetings have been strengthened by instruction on the faith behind our practice offered by our new clerk as we reach decisions.

This past year our community was saddened by the deaths of four valued Friends. Through their openness, two of these Friends gave us the gift of participating in the process of their dying. The third died suddenly and the fourth, a founding member of our meeting, lived out of the area. There was rich sharing with the extended families during these times.

Preparations for the renovations to our meeting house have continued. We revisited our goals and plans several times to make sure we are moving together and in the right direction. We also are working to identify our financial resources to make sure we can complete the effort as planned with the improvements we desire for accessibility and to meet the needs of our community. There has been much inspired leadership and hard work from Friends involved in this effort.

Friends have been involved in many varied outreach, social justice, peace, community, and educational activities throughout the year. The Women's Interfaith Group, started after 9/11/2001 to bring together women in our area from Quaker, Muslim, and other religious backgrounds, has been particularly rewarding to many. Langley Hill women organized the 2003 Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women's Retreat. The weekly peace vigil on the west lawn of the Capitol, begun by our Peace & International Outreach Committee, ended the year under the leadership of a broader coalition. Other peace efforts have gone forward throughout the year. Work for Habitat for Humanity and with the Arlington/Alexandria Coalition for the Homeless has continued. The Northern Virginia Friends School opened its doors under the spiritual care of the meeting after many years of very hard work. The Library Committee has been active providing book reviews for the newsletter and announcing new acquisitions after meeting for worship, as well as reorganizing and recataloging the library.

Our First Day School has been well attended with some very creative activities. Our high school class is larger than in the past and has been quite active.

Various forms of adult religious education have helped newcomers and others understand Quakerism. We have also reached out to newcomers by writing notes of wel-

come to visitors and inviting them to share meals. Yet some long for a deeper sense of spiritual community in the meeting. We need to work harder at being genuinely interested in the inner journeys of those with whom we worship as well as other aspects of their well being.

Some of our committees have struggled with poor attendance and/or energy and leadership. Some of us find ourselves overcommitted, struggling with the Quaker leading to simplicity.

In the months ahead we expect to become more deeply involved in our efforts to renovate our meeting house. As we do so, we look forward to continuing the seeking of God's Truth and the building of a more loving community.

## **LITTLE BRITAIN MONTHLY MEETING**

Each year when we write the spiritual state of the meeting, Friends say recopy last years. That might indicate that our spiritual state is low. Looking through the minute book for the past year our business meetings are short, We did gain three new members at Penn Hill, but none are able to attend. They are all seeking to join a meeting of their ancestors. Penn Hill feels the void left by two members seeking AZ and NM as homes for most of the year. We are always happy when they travel east to rejoin us briefly before they return to where they feel a spiritual drawing.

About the time of the involvement in Iraq, Penn Hill was happy to find visitors at meeting. Somehow we did not have the spiritual strength to encourage them to continue to be with us.

Eastland often has just one person present for meeting for worship. A larger group has come for the discussion from the David Cook lesson leaf, but they do not feel led to stay for meeting for worship and quickly leave at the close of that discussion. Penn Hill has five on most Firstdays. We often combine programs between the two meetings, which means if someone comes to meeting and finds no one at the meeting house, it is assumed we have been laid down. When it snows, most choose to stay home. Some attend Oxford and enjoy the fellowship there.

Our annual question is how do we find the path of growth and change. Are we spiritually aware of the life beyond our community and able to grow? The query reminding us that our failure to act speaks loudly and might be considered. Eastland is diligent in collecting money to support the George Fox Friends School. Penn Hill struggles to maintain a large building and grounds and seldom feels called to give money beyond the immediate community. Quaker Ladies is a group that grew

out of Penn Hill's True Blue group. They meet monthly to make things for local nursing homes. They attract a group from both meetings and those who have roots at Penn Hill. They enjoy the fellowship.

### **LITTLE FALLS MONTHLY MEETING**

We continue as a small but active Meeting, close-knit in our caring and concern. We pull together well in a considerable variety of outreach projects and in enhancing the functionality and attractiveness of our historic Meeting house, schoolhouse and grounds. We find joy in the growth and enthusiasm of the youngsters in our first day school and much appreciate our intergenerational programs and our parent/teachers. We come together in worship and socially with a sense of real fellowship.

Assessment of the spiritual state of our Meeting has been the subject of two Adult First Day discussions, one in January and another in February. Partly due to the work we have done on reconciliation after not finding consensus on establishing a Quaker school two years ago, these discussions seemed unusually open and candid. There seem to be different concepts of what individuals expect from their participation in the Meeting. Corporate worship seems to be central for all. For some, this is a foundation that should translate into works that realize the Spirit moving in the everyday world. For others there is a thirst for sharing that nourishes individual spiritual growth. For most, of course, the combination is the ideal, but the felt need for each person may point one way or the other. A need for deeper spirituality has been expressed by a group wider than the current study group. Given these concerns we are re-establishing a Committee for Ministry and Counsel to address our situation.

Hurricane Isabel felled the two huge oak trees that stood in front of our Meeting house. Now that we are sawing them up, we realize that they have stood there for more than 250 years, since the founding of our Meeting and before the present building. We can learn from them. One growth ring after another – some good years, some bad, but always growing. We hope to grow in the coming year in spirit and in truth.

### **MATTAPONI PREPARATIVE MEETING**

Mattaponi Friends have experienced a deepening of our spiritual growth this year as we have grown substantially in the number of regular attenders for Meeting for Worship. By sharing our journeys in the presence of the Light in our community, we feel more sustained both individually and collectively. Our growing connectedness

has enabled us to deal more easily with the challenges of daily life and has also made the social witness of our community more powerful and effective. As we have sought to live in fuller harmony with each other and the natural world our faith has been increased that all things are ultimately sustained by God.

We strengthened our Religious Education program for adults and children. Adult education focussed on discussing Quaker witnesses and beliefs using a curriculum based on the pamphlet "Silent Worship and Quaker Values, An Introduction." This exercise helped us open our spiritual journeys to one another. Our First Day program for children balanced our desire for flexibility with more structure as we continued to study world religions. Religious Education for both children and adults was more engaging and vital.

Peace and Social Concerns has been an area of special interest as we have given thought to the meaning of the Peace Testimony in view of our country's military operations in Iraq. Given our need to deepen our witness as peacemakers, we increased our outreach to our local community. We wish to become more intentional about the ways we witness as a religious fellowship and seek guidance in our times of worship.

We are very grateful for the blessings of our Meeting and feel encouraged that our presence in the larger community will continue to grow.

### **MAURY RIVER FRIENDS MEETING**

As Maury River Friends have considered the Meeting's spiritual condition and needs this year, the undeniable fact of war has loomed large, and Friends have found their faith tested by world events. We have looked within and among ourselves for spiritual sustenance, and we have found that Meeting continues to speak to our condition. But the result has not been a retreat from the world; rather, we have found ways to make our witness a tangible presence in the world.

Already at the beginning of 2003, Maury River Friends found themselves working for peace in several ways. We held weekly prayer vigils for the first four months of the year, gathering in front of the county courthouse each Thursday from 5 to 6 p.m. Many Friends participated in a community meeting which was the beginning of "Rockbridge Response to the War on Iraq" and Friends continued to lead this group after the war began in Third Month. An interfaith peace service and candlelight vigil at First Baptist Church in Lexington brought our light to Main Street.

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Meeting welcomed Chuck Fager for a day-long Saturday workshop on the Peace Testimony, and in his follow-up second hour Chuck spoke to over 40 attenders. Chuck's core message was that the best way to work for peace is to have a strong meeting. Here again, a Quaker voice spoke to our condition. When three Friends engaged in civil disobedience by staging a prayer vigil in Representative Goodlatte's Roanoke office, Maury River Friends had a range of responses to the issue and to the action itself. Worship sharing helped us work through our responses and come to unity in supporting our three Friends. Indeed, one of the three Friends noted that without Meeting he would not have engaged in the action, and he believes that Meeting gave him the strength to make a statement about a larger truth with a basis in Christianity and Quakerism.

Clearly, the sense of community has been a major issue for Maury River Friends this year. After several years of growth, this year attendance has dropped off somewhat, and Friends express sadness at the loss of both new and long-time attenders. We see two issues that Meeting needs to address—how Quakerism relates to Christianity, and how politics relates to religious belief. We are open and willing to thresh through these important concerns together, and are involved in a productive process, but we are also sure that the process is never complete. We recognize that Maury River Friends is still a relatively young meeting, with few seasoned Friends. The gifts of vocal ministry are growing and deepening over time. Even though overall attendance has dropped, second hour attendance has grown, and this fall Patricia Loring's Listening Spirituality gave Friends many personal spiritual practices to explore and develop. The influence of meeting for worship is subtle, the experience "incremental," as one Friend puts it. And yet we see many tangible signs that the spiritual life of the meeting continues to grow. Friends find safety, openness, and acceptance within Meeting, and we continue to strive to provide opportunities for deepening spiritual connections with one another.

Tangible signs of our maturing meeting can be seen in the work of committees:

Peace & Justice has led us well throughout the year, keeping up a steady current of action and reflection. Friends sent health kits and infant care kits to Iraqi families, made contributions to AFSC for mobile water purifiers, and sent phone cards to US soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. We hosted Mark Lancaster of AFSC-MAR to educate us about programs and projects in our own area. Our yearly participation in the Lexington

Christmas Parade brings peace cranes to the citizens of the community, and this year young Friends built a truck-peace-crane float as part of the parade, a very tangible sign of our peace witness.

Religious Education continues to develop our First Day curriculum along a seasonal pattern, though losing several families with children has been disheartening. While we do not know the specifics of some of these decisions, we feel that Meeting must continually ask whether there is more that we can do to encourage young families to attend.

The Young Friends Service Committee, begun in 2002, has had a fine year, providing older children with a meaningful way to learn Quaker business process, interact with Meeting adults, and connect with the wider community. Likewise, the BYM Camping Program continues to play an important role in the spiritual life of our children, and one elder notes that the influence on the wider culture, while subtle, is evident.

Care & Counsel finalized the "Procedures for Clearness Committees," that has already been helpful, and has held six clearness committees this year, one for marriage and the others for personal concerns.

Introducing the use of name tags to increase community and equality in Meeting brought both discomfort and relief. The committee is now adapting and expanding Charlottesville Friends Meeting's booklet, "Planning Ahead: Meeting Our Responsibilities for Planning the End of Life."

In many cases, committees coordinated their work, and that spirit of cooperation is also a tangible sign of growth. The tangible work of both the Library Committee and House & Grounds has led to great improvements in the use of our meeting house. Religious Education and Worship & Ministry worked out a new sequence for rise of meeting, allowing time for the personal sharing that deepens our sense of connection. Along with its regular duties, Fellowship helped organize a floriferous summer wedding, and worked with Worship & Ministry to coordinate Friendly 8s and the Christmas Eve celebration, all of which contribute to the deepening of our spiritual community.

In her discussion of *lectio divina*, Patricia Loring adds a step in the process, a step she calls "embodiment." For Maury River Friends, this step of embodiment has occurred not only in our personal spiritual practices but in our work together as a spiritual community. Our many actions radiate from a spiritual center. The tangible signs point back toward an intangible source. And they point also toward an as yet unknowable future.

## MENALLEN MONTHLY MEETING

Menallen Friends Monthly Meeting continues in its tradition of silent Worship. Through our silence we listen carefully for the Inner Light within ourselves, and we rejoice in the spoken truth as it is revealed through others. In these times of uncertainty, unrest, and war, the diversity of several manifestations of Inner Light gives us strength as individuals and as a community; we seek to stand in this Light to seek clearness regarding the many difficult issues facing each one of us, and our Meeting.

We have been blessed during the past year with numerous new and periodic attenders, and we hope that some will find a permanent home at Menallen. These new faces augment a core "Stone Soup" of dedicated members and attenders, each of whom brings variety and a different insight to the Meeting. It is of concern to the meeting that the numbers on any given First Day are low, although our fellowship is always strong. We are further encouraged that Chris Fee and Dave Garretson have joined our roll of members during the past year. Moreover, we look forward to the rebirth of First Day School at Menallen, complete with a small but vocal and joyful regular contingent, and we have hope of more children in the fall.

As a Meeting we are extremely concerned with how our spiritual values as Friends resonate with those of our larger community, and we wish to find ways publicly to celebrate our heritage of tolerance and non-violence without alienating or appearing to preach to our reasonable brothers and sisters with whom we disagree on some points of vital importance to us all. We find that we are doing some things already to address such concerns, and we seek consensus regarding potential activities which may lead us further towards our goals. Our greatest challenge as we face an uncertain future is to embrace our values and to articulate and live them in such a way as to be true to our traditions at the same time that we attract vitally needed new members and attenders. We are attempting to meet these goals in many ways, some of which are detailed below:

Our activities which reach out to the broader communities of Adams County include the Menallen Pre-School, which we support through the use of our facilities; the school continues to be successful. The students at Menallen Pre-School prepare for structured learning in the beauty and serenity of our Meetinghouse's surroundings; we have been very fortunate in having a dedicated teacher, assistants, and parents who support education

and help to make it fun as our pre-schoolers begin their life-long understanding of the world around them.

Other ventures at outreach have included opening our Meetinghouse for an early music concert again last summer (now a regular practice scheduled to continue this coming summer) as well as for a lecture on war, conflict resolution, and art in Sri Lanka by Professor Rajmohan Rarnanathapillai of the Peace Studies program and Philosophy Department at Gettysburg College. Deb McCauslin, a regular attender and local historian, has given talks on Friends' associations with the vanished Yellow Hill community of African-Americans in various venues throughout Adams County.

Our Meetings for Worship with a concern for business are held on the Second First Day of each month, followed by fellowship and a potluck. These are especially convivial occasions full of love, laughter, and lively discussion, and we welcome any and all interested to attend, whether or not they bring a covered dish!

Menallen Friends continue to oversee the upkeep and maintenance of Huntington and Redlands Meeting Houses and their cemeteries, along with cemeteries at Newberrytown and Friends' Grove. Meetings for Worship are held at least once a year at Redlands, and once a month - during summer - at Huntington Meeting House. At times our resources are strained - the Meeting's 2003 expenses exceeded revenues by nearly \$4,000 - but we feel an obligation to those Friends who preceded us and provided us with this bounty.

The Meeting was grieved to lose long-time members Virginia Parry, Gay Patterson Tilton, and Francis Worley, and asks for all to join the Meeting in holding their families in the Light. There has been no significant improvement in the health of our members William Wright and Roseanne "Posey" Wright. We encourage any of their friends to visit them, and ask all to keep them in their prayers.

We extend to all an invitation to visit us at the Menallen Meetinghouse for silent worship each First Day at 10:30 AM. We as a Meeting feel strongly that our silent worship is a vital respite from the cacophony of voices and onslaught of images that bombard us as we live our daily lives and try to reach clearness as we stand in the Light. We feel that the truth that is spoken in profound silence achieves a special clarity that we value highly. We hope to take the focus we achieve through this clarity with us from meeting and to use it as a means of discernment as we face complex realities.

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## MIDLOTHIAN MONTHLY MEETING

This report on the spiritual state of Midlothian Friends Meeting draws from our vision statement that was drafted nearly a decade ago. At this time we looked at our ideal in the following areas: spirituality, community, religious education, peace and social concerns and commitment to Meeting. This report revisits these areas.

### **SPIRITUALITY:**

Although our Meeting is our oasis from the world, we are also aware of our responsibility to the world, especially in light of the war in Iraq. Meeting is a place we can go for a sense of peace, belonging, and spiritual nourishment. It is a sanctuary from the challenges of the secular world.

The process of securing our Meeting House and the secular concerns surrounding that process have been challenging to our spiritual process as Quakers. As a community, we have learned lessons on the importance of adhering to Quaker process. Although these lessons have at times been difficult, we have ultimately grown as a community. Now that we have settled in, we are finding ourselves unwinding from the exhaustion of purchasing a new home, and settling into the depth and richness of worship. We continue to work on the quality of worship, which has been challenged occasionally as newcomers learn to seek their inner light. The silence of meeting for worship is meaningful to Friends, and continues to draw new people into our spiritual community.

### **COMMUNITY:**

Although we have spent enormous amounts of time and energy in securing a new meetinghouse, we recognize that we are more than a building. Our community continues to be a place where we can feel secure in exploring our spiritual journeys.

We are excited about providing a spiritual home for the next generation. With a place to call home, we look forward to growing as a community, and offering a place for others to discover. A monthly newsletter, monthly potlucks, and programs offered by our Spiritual Nurture committee help facilitate a vital sense of community. The unconditional acceptance of one another is strong in our community, and provides a strong base from which we can individually and collectively grow in our spiritual lives.

### **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:**

Some young adults who have been raised at Midlothian Friends Meeting report that they grew up aware of the abundance love that was there for them and that the teachings of Quakerism have impacted their lives. Meeting provides an anchor for them in their adult lives. We

need to be attentive that our current young ones are afforded the same opportunities.

With only one small room in our new facility to house nursery through Young Friends, our physical challenges are enormous. In addition, our teachers are tired because the task of administering Religious Education to our young Friends is not evenly distributed. Attendance at First Day School has significantly lessened.

Despite the significant challenges, the quality of Religious education has been good, and we remain committed to providing our children with a strong sense of community and a safe place where they can learn about their spirituality. Acquiring an outbuilding to house Religious Education will be one of our biggest challenges, and an ad-hoc committee has been established to rejuvenate this vital program.

### **PEACE AND SOCIAL CONCERNS:**

The Peace and Social Concerns Committee has increased its activity level, and has been exploring ways to make even more contributions to the community. The Thrifty Quaker, a thrift store operated by Midlothian Friends meeting, continues to be an important vehicle for community outreach, and has made a significant impact in the community as it continues to share its proceeds with the private non-profit sector.

The volatile situation in the Middle East has given us reason to look at how we appreciate differences of opinion. As Quakers, how can we be tolerant of Friends who have difficulty embracing the Peace testimony? This dialogue has just begun and our hope is that we will grow from this issue, as well.

### **COMMITMENT TO MEETING:**

Although we have experienced a collective fatigue with the purchase of our Meetinghouse, our committees are paradoxically stronger and more active than ever before. Having a permanent home has brought a renewed commitment and vitality.

At the same time, we are needing to be aware of our individual and collective energy levels, and be attentive if we need to pause and rest from Meeting commitments.

With the purchase of a new meetinghouse have come increased financial obligations.

(How is this going?)

## NOTTINGHAM FRIENDS MEETING

The Year began with a realization that two valuable members of our Meeting would be retiring and moving out of the area. This left us with a sense of

impending loss and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the responsibilities we would now have to undertake.

One of the first things we had to resolve was finding a new clerk and when no one person was willing to step forward, the Nominating Committee condensed committees and came up with a plan of rotating "clerk of the month". This turned out to be a very good exercise for the whole Meeting as everyone became more aware of all of the responsibilities which clerking entails.

As we prepared to honor our long-term members who were moving, we were faced with an unexpected death of a beloved member which intensified our feelings of grief and loss. We then put a lot of energy and support into nurturing this young family.

Shortly thereafter, we were approached by Head Start to use our facility to assist underprivileged children for the fall. The details of this commitment brought us to a realization that the Meetinghouse needed much work with limited resources both in funds and people to handle the tasks.

We had not had time to recover from the recent losses and were overwhelmed by the decision-making and responsibilities. This brought us to a decision to have a Threshing Meeting where we considered the health of the Meeting and the possible changes our smaller size might suggest. >From that meeting, we have again connected with a spiritual bond which led us back to the real reasons we want to be part of the Meeting. It has renewed our hope for the future, our love of each other and strength to abide. And from that session, someone was led to offer to be clerk of the Meeting. We are drawing together under the Spirit and individual members are working together to meet the obligations and responsibilities of running the Meeting.

## PATAPSCO FRIENDS MEETING

Friends planted PatapSCO Friends Meeting seven years ago in the spirit of George Fox's early and persistent advice to meet together everywhere. We were led to provide for ourselves and for others whom we did not yet know an opportunity to experience the preemptive love of God, which speaks to us out of the silence. In meeting together we are practicing something old, walking a path well-worn, yet the mystery is that each meeting is new, surprising. We are in unity that the work of our meeting is to create a safe space where any who meet with us can stand in the Light, to see and share what God wills for each one of us in our measure.

Early in 2003, in First Day discussions and worship-sharing, we explored the Inward Light through the writing of George Fox and Rex Ambler's Light To Live By.

These meetings raised the question: How does a faith that began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with "Christ Jesus has come to teach the people himself," formed by a profound but surely heretical reading of the Christian scriptures, speak of Christ Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Is there a place in our meeting for the Christ-centered Friend among Quaker Buddhists, Quaker Jews, Quaker agnostics. And what does "Christ Jesus" mean to the refugees in our meeting from Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and other "Christian" churches? To begin to address this question our First Day explorations continued with worship-sharing centered by Thich Nhat Hanh's Living Buddha, Living Christ. Since that time a group has been meeting on First Day evenings to study the Gospels using Records of the Life of Jesus. In the Fall, our explorations continued with a series of Pendle Hill pamphlets chosen to explore topics relating to Quaker spirituality and our personal spiritual journeys.

For some of us to sink permanently into these tender and spirit-led conversations would be our heart's desire. Our fellowship asks more of us. Through grounding us deeply in the Spirit it prepares us to meet the demands of our life together and of the wider world.

We are called to be tender to those in our meeting who are struggling with the diminishment of aging, who are being tested by the needs of children, aging parents and friends, who themselves suffer with physical or mental illness or care for afflicted loved ones. As we support Friends in these difficult times we ask, "How can we better prepare ourselves to meet these challenges in our own lives and to support others who face these challenges?"

We have an on-going concern for our children. First Day School was held year round and the children enjoyed a number of extracurricular activities. On Easter Sunday, they helped assemble personal hygiene kits for citizens in Iraq and they collected gifts for a needy family at Christmas time. A holiday sleepover was held for the middle school aged kids at the Mt. Hebron house in December. The Meeting has included in the annual budget funds for assistance with camp fees with the goal of encouraging every child in the Meeting (4th grade and older) to attend camp. We are thankful for our Religious Education Committee and First Day teachers. As our children grow we are concerned with how to best nurture their spiritual development.

We have witnessed to the wider world our concern for peace and social justice. A silent vigil to remember the victims of September 11, 2001 as well as those of the subsequent wars continued each Saturday for most of the year. It was difficult to sustain the vigil in the

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months that followed the onset of the Iraq war and it was formally laid down in October after two years. Our Meeting was among the founders of the Howard County Coalition For Peace and Justice and through this group, the Howard County Council was petitioned to pass a resolution against the war in Iraq. The resolution was not passed but we felt God's spirit at work in our community by so many silent and vocal testimonies to peace. In response to the despair that many feel during this frustrating and tragic period, a meeting for worship was called on March 21<sup>st</sup> at the onset of the bombing of Iraq and a Spring Retreat was held with the theme "Finding Inner Peace in Times of Turmoil." The day included quiet reflection and worship sharing along with chanting and Dances of Universal Peace. The following day after Meeting for Worship, a walk was held at the Bon Secours Spiritual Center Labyrinth.

Patapsco Friends continue to prepare a meal once a month for twelve men living in a shelter for the homeless. Many Friends in our Meeting work with other organizations that need support. These organizations were introduced through a series of short talks during our monthly potlucks. One presentation described the Mediation and Conflict Resolution Center at Howard County Community College that mediates neighborhood, victim/offender, landlord/tenant, and similar community conflicts. A representative from Cease Fire Maryland was heard. We also learned about the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) that is trying to organize a new political/social advocacy group in Howard County comprised of a broad spectrum of religious and neighborhood groups. The final presentation was made by BRIDGE, another social advocacy organization similar to IAF.

From our small beginning we now have 30 to 35 regular attenders and 12 to 16 children in our First Day program. A Patapsco Friends Email Group was established through Yahoo to keep us connected and current. We are aware that not everyone has the Internet and that there is the need to communicate in other ways as well. Personal testimonies and spiritual understanding are shared through periodic publication of *The Quaker Heron*, the Journal of Patapsco Friends Meeting. Committee meetings, simple meals, monthly potlucks, Friendly Bunches, and picnics help build the interpersonal relationships so important in nurturing and strengthening our community. Patapsco Friends Meeting's members and attenders are rich in gifts of the Spirit. We know no better way to be welcoming than to share our gifts with those who are seeking and those who have found a home in our meeting.

## PATUXENT FRIENDS MEETING

This has been a year of spiritual evolution, as Patuxent Friends have had to deal with some very difficult issues. Death, separations, illnesses, and the challenges of maintaining our meetinghouse and tenant have deepened our respect and trust with each other. With true "waiting for the way to open," we have maintained our faith community and a clear sense of doing good in the world.

Usually an average of 22 people gathers for worship, with an occasional fourth Sunday potluck still enjoyed in Friends' homes. Meeting for Worship inspires personal positive change. Many Friends, but not all, feel that worship is so important and central because it is a quiet place to gather in comfort and safety. It provides a trusting circle, a love-filled component of our lives. For many, other than our families, this is our primary community.

Friends' reflections identified how the first 20 minutes of our sacred Worship is interrupted by a flow of latecomers and sundry commotion. Some people speak of difficulties in centering. A Quakerism 101 course, Friendly 8 gatherings, a Women's retreat, and breakfast discussions were offered to deepen our understanding of Quaker faith and practice.

Friends have felt that Meeting for Worship with a concern for Business has been an area of significant growth. With an average of 15 people in attendance, we responded to challenges, as one member states, "in a true Quaker fashion of love, consideration of others, and respect for the Quaker process." Friends have appreciated the Clerk's ability to enable Friends to focus on the worshipful aspects of the business meeting and to be sensitive to leadings of the spirit. Another Friends notes, "We seem to take seriously the leadings that achieve spoken form." We have arrived at unity on some very emotional and potentially divisive issues. Our meeting community has grown spiritually as we struggled with those issues. For this we are very thankful.

Providing a First Day School program has been an on-going challenge because of the diversity of ages, varied attendance patterns, and organizational challenges. We have centralized materials, created an attractive location, and developed team teaching. As we strengthen our ties to Meeting, our children learn it is a safe, central part of their lives as well.

A vibrant expression of our spirituality lies in the quality and diversity of our contributions to our broader com-

munity. Patuxent Friends did an incredible amount of work in the community and touched many lives, including our own. Through our coffeehouse evenings, we raised funds for four local non-profit agencies and highlighted the work they do to make our community a better place to live. We connected with the African-American community in a rousing night of gospel music at our of our coffeehouses. We held five Peace Vigils. We deepened our connection with the Southern Maryland Islamic Center and the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. We joined with the Unitarians for an inaugural Christmas eve event at the meeting-house. Friends and Unitarians desire a continued relationship. Meeting continues to sponsor the St. Mary's County Community Mediation Center. Our outreach strengthens our connections within the Meeting, enriches our lives individually, and enhances our community.

Our spiritual state was captured in the following, "I am constantly rewarded by the love we feel for each other and our willingness to see and face our challenges with optimism."

We have 17 members and 7 associate members.

## QUAKER LAKE FRIENDS MEETING

In considering what to include in this report, we focused largely on the question of how well the Meeting has served our needs. This elicited much fruitful discussion with both positive and negative feelings expressed:

- "Meeting is the highlight of the weekend for me."
- "I sometimes feel as if I'm just here if there is only silence during worship."
- "I feel as if I'm treading water, not growing."
- "The Meeting has provided spiritual bonding and nurture for me."
- "I have felt loved; this has enhanced my self-worth, which had become low because of guilt feelings with regard to my sexual orientation."
- "I want to recover my childhood sense of love before cynicism about the world set in."

While we expect to report more fully next year on the fruits of this self-reflection, we can say at this point that the discussion and our participation in FUM's Chain of Prayer have prompted us to extend our worship to 1-1/2 hours with the first half hour consisting of singing, chanting, and intercessory prayer focused on a specific trouble spot or situation around the world.

Toward the end of the year we had a couple of threshing sessions to consider our ministries. We seemed to be led to two new possibilities, after-school tutoring and a vigil on the values we want to see fostered in society, which we hope to initiate in 2004.

Our other ministries, an Amnesty International group, death row correspondence, execution-night vigils, administering the Virginia Death Row Prisoner Support Fund, advocacy, letters-to-the-editor (*Farmville Herald*), our newsletter *Peace Seeds*, and supporting a child from Burkina Faso, continue.

Our discussions during 2003 included the meaning of sense of the meeting, the importance of church-state separation, the erosion of civil liberties, and, of course, the war against Iraq. A potluck meal follows Meeting for Worship and the discussion hour each week, and this, given our small size, provides a lively forum for the sharing of personal concerns.

During the last months of the year, we began to meet in Hampden Sydney at the home of a member. This is a more central location for present attenders and may, it is hoped, attract new attenders from the surrounding community.

## RICHMOND FRIENDS MEETING

Richmond Friends Meeting (RFM) continues to reap enormous benefits from changing the meeting time for its monthly meeting for worship with attention to business to 11 a.m. on each 3rd First Day. The change has facilitated decisions on plans for the R.E. building renovation, on interactions with the community on the future of Jacob House, and on changing the committee structure to provide continued stewardship of The Clearing, all without sacrificing a sense of expectant waiting on the Spirit. Attendance has soared. Conducting the business of meeting seems more worshipful and better seasoned, with increased communication, a greater awareness of committee work, and collective ownership of that work.

The decision to renovate the religious education building was a difficult one and continues to stretch us as a community. The challenge of raising \$600,000 has forced us to talk about finances, to gauge our personal commitment to RFM, and to take financial responsibility for our participation in the life of the Meeting. The committee charged with fundraising launched the "Joining Hands" initiative with a community celebration followed by personal contacts and visits with almost all households of the RFM community. Teams of volunteers visited friends' homes, explained the building project and fundraising projections, and answered any questions people had about the project. Friends reported a greater sense of community, connectedness, and shared purpose that has energized our meeting.

There is continued concern over spending so much money, time, and energy on a building, when so many

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social and political needs demand our attention. The tension between internal stewardship and external calls to action continues to ripple within our meeting. It is encouraging that “we have more in common than divides us” as one friend has said. It is our hope that struggling with each other and listening to one another will make us a stronger community.

Many reported a sense of their spiritual faith deepening in 2003. More than 25 people attended the Quakerism 101 program in the spring; their energy, enthusiasm, and hunger for the spiritual spilled over into the meeting. Bible Workbench continues to attract people interested in Bible study; in the fall, seven members and attenders committed to the Education for Ministry program, a four-year curriculum equivalent to seminary training. The BYM Spiritual Formation program continues to be an important resource for spiritual growth.

Regarding vocal ministry, some have expressed concern that political and self-help messages may have at times overshadowed the spiritual. Others have thought it most important to allow friends full authority to speak from their experience wherever it may be. We recognize we are all at different places in our spiritual journeys yet we wish to work for deeper process. Are we properly prepared for meeting for worship? Are we aware of how our actions and words affect those around us in worship? Do we hold in the light those in our Meeting who struggle with political and personal issues that are not our own? Are our political or personal messages grounded in the spiritual? These are queries we want to ask ourselves in 2004.

The activities of the History and Archives Committee brought an increased awareness of the role of Quakers in Richmond’s history. The informal committee prepared 50 years of records for placement in The Library of Virginia permanent archives and staffed the Jacob House Citizens Commission to select the new owner for this historic Quaker residence. Having two parks in Oregon Hill named for Quakers, and learning about the role of Richmond Quakers in the anti-slavery movement and in the early penal reform movement has been encouraging as we face many changes. The committee was made official in January 2004, and RFM honors the efforts of our past historians working to preserve our past and bring it to life.

The preemptive war in Iraq brought many new folks to RFM in 2003. Friends reported that the support of Meeting helped them feel less isolated in a national atmosphere eager for war. Friends found ways to witness their peace testimony, including an active participation with the Women in Black. Meeting reached out to the

people of Iraq by sending them health hygiene kits.

An ad hoc committee, working since November 2001, brought its recommendations for the management of the Clearing to business meeting. The ad hoc committee proposed a restructuring of the management of the Clearing into two separate committees, Building and Grounds and Promotion and Usage, both managed by an Oversight Committee. Meeting accepted the proposal and, in the fall, both committees held their first meetings. The Clearing Building and Grounds Committee found the Clearing in excellent condition and the Promotion and Usage Committee expressed much excitement for their work. It is exciting to see this new committee structure in action.

The Clearing was the site in May of a joyous reunion Homecoming weekend attended by about 75 adults, Children, Young Friends, and returning members from afar. The event celebrated 20 years of RFM’s stewardship of the Clearing with dance, songs and storytelling around the campfire, as well as our treasured traditions of worship, swimming, games, activities, cooking together and enjoying being together in nature.

RFM acknowledges the work of individuals and committees on peace and social justice issues, including work with refugees, advocacy against the death penalty, protest of the School of the Americas, work with the Quaker House in Fayetteville, a commitment to feeding the homeless a home-cooked meal six times a year, and organizing a work camp in a predominantly African-American community at least once a year.

RFM also acknowledges the “stewards of the internal” - those individuals and committees who nurture and support the RFM community: caring for the buildings and grounds, preparing and mailing the newsletter, caring for and teaching children, maintaining the library, organizing and facilitating a monthly shared meal, and recognizing and encouraging the spiritual gifts of members and attenders.

Most friends report that RFM has been a nurturing and loving community, providing them with the support they needed in 2003. Friends were impressed that so many with special needs were provided support. Some are concerned that not everyone is cared for; reaching out to those less vocal about their needs or their family’s needs remains a consideration.

Care and Counsel Committee recommended seven new people for membership, assisted with one marriage under the care of the meeting, and assisted with another marriage in the manner of Friends. Over \$4500 in camp scholarships was distributed, six clearness committees were held, and numerous Friendly 8s were formed in

the fall. Most importantly, the committee provided support and organized support for a large number of RFM families and individuals.

RFM continues to have a large religious education program, serving about 75 children and teenagers. It continues to be a challenge to meet the needs of so many children and families. Most parents report how “Quaker” RFM youth seem to be, and they credit the dedication of the R.E. committee, as well as the BYM programs and the camping program with helping parents raise Quaker kids.

The Young Friends continued to adapt and develop the BYM conference model for their R.E., which means the teenagers have their own business meetings and set their own agendas for what transpires from week to week. The Young Friends program has grown to more than 35 young people, many of whom have not grown up at RFM.

## SANDY SPRING MONTHLY MEETING

Celebrating 250 years of practicing being a settled meeting, we rejoice in knowing our core values, deep spirituality and callings still resonate. As our lives, community and world change, we find ourselves both blessed and challenged. Our once homogeneous rural Meeting is now large and suburban with members and attenders drawn from many traditions. We continue to welcome seekers and search for ways to bring each of us from a sense of aloneness into Oneness. Seeking guidance from the Light within, we carry both the joy and weight of this discipline. Through the years, our Meeting has been held by deeply spiritual people who shared their visions of truth and we strive, albeit falteringly, to be sensitive and supportive of our differences. Any splintering or fraction of our Meeting holds a part of the truth, and we seek to honor discernment and understand each other as well as issues. Working to put faith into practice in our Meeting as well as in the world, we find ourselves called to consider a query older than our gathering: “Are love and unity maintained amongst you?”

The spiritual state of our Meeting and of ourselves ebbs and flows. The eleven o’clock First Day Meeting continues to draw new worshippers and vocal ministries, while steadily endeavoring to be gathered; others among us seek out the nine-thirty Meeting and the few messages that flow from its silence. Wednesday noon and Thursday evening Meetings serve those gathering for prayer and sustenance midweek. Under our care, about 50 worshipers meet in the Miller Center at Friends House and a small unified core collectively tend to the Seneca Valley Preparatory Meeting. We continue to

weigh authentic leadings to speak, search for ways to encourage and mentor both new and familiar voices, nurture our children at First Day School, and try to prepare for Meeting early and welcome the late arrival within calm. Bible studies, the Course in Miracles, and Spiritual Formation are vital to many. Monthly round table explorations of new queries lead us to examine the quality of our worship, vocal ministries, faith and practices.

Some of us are very comfortable with our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business. Others, who over the years have tried to participate, come away troubled and hurt. Within the Quaker faith there is a necessary balance between process, procedure and Spirit that can elude us, and we are reminded that procedure misused can exclude and divide. Participating responsibly in Business Meeting can take more preparation and serving on committees more time and patience than it seems we have. Other times, we are so eager to serve and our committees so busy with details long tended that we do not listen for what we are now called to do. This year conflicts have arisen between committees that test our understanding of Quaker process. Sometimes we forget that it should not be the Meeting making these decisions, but Divine guidance. The more we have to do and the more difficult our task, the more we must worship and seek direction. Realizing, as Quakers, the need for each of us to be God’s hands and that our Meeting could not function, as we know it, without the faithful service of those tending these duties, we express gratitude and ask all to ponder these concerns in our hearts. We ask, too, that the part of each of us that turns away remembers grace often involves acceptance of human fallibility.

In a time of confusion and war, stress and conflict test our endurance, faith, and the peace within our souls and Meeting. More significant issues lie before us than solely what our funds, time or human vision might achieve. Aware that we speak not only through our actions, but also through our failure to act, we seek to heed Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s *Faith and Practice* which asks us to “consider openly matters at, issue, seeking a loving resolution of conflict, rather than preserve a semblance of community by ignoring issues.” Remembering the decisions that shaped our Meeting House, Meeting and lives took not our, but God’s time, we remain steadfast in our commitment to Quaker process, trusting that, when our process seems to fail us, something more and different yet needs to occur within us, so Way opens. Our practice and faith call us to honor, not our agendas, but God’s will.

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## STATE COLLEGE FRIENDS MEETING

We are a large, active Meeting that is blessed to have the State College Friends School and the Cooperative Playschool under its care, and Foxdale Village, a Quaker-directed continuing care community, close by. Whether it's the wisdom shared by a senior member who once marched with Martin Luther King or the contribution of an infant gurgling during worship, our lives continue to be enriched by our membership. State College Friends Meeting is a vital and diverse, yet cohesive, religious community, and it is instructive to consider the ways in which we have grown collectively during the past year. Our reflections begin with an overview of the Meeting's experiences, followed by more specific information related to the work of several committees.

### Overview:

Last year we invited Arlene Kelly to guide us through a self-examination program "Deepening and Strengthening Our Faith Community". Members and attenders completed an in-depth survey regarding how well, and in what ways, the Meeting meets the spiritual needs of its community. There was a very high response rate, and in subsequent gatherings, we reflected upon members' perceptions of State College Friends Meeting and considered ways in which the Meeting can grow and deepen as a faith community. There was a high level of unity that our Meeting for Worship is central to the spiritual life of the Meeting, that the Meeting nurtures the spiritual development of its children and young people, and that we demonstrate a concern for issues and problems existing in the surrounding society. The report highlighted three main areas which might be further addressed to enhance the well-being of the Meeting: 1) Approaches to conflict within the Meeting, 2) Opportunities to deepen members' spiritual lives, and 3) Strengthening the infrastructure of the Meeting. Each area is explored in further explored below, along with the action steps which we hope will catalyze our growth as a Meeting.

**Approaches to Conflict:** The Meeting has a strong sense of identity in being active in the wider community on issues of peace and justice. Yet we, like other Meetings, need to make our Peace Testimony real in our day-to-day relationships within our community. As one member stated, we are great at going out to tell others how to resolve conflicts, yet we are not very good at it in our personal relationships. Efforts to improve conflict resolution within our own Meeting include the new practice of listing contacts for the Care & Concern Committee in the weekly Bulletin, and the Worship Sharing sessions which were held in an attempt to air issues

affecting members of the Meeting and Foxdale Village community. In addition, the Worship & Ministry and Care and Concern Committees met jointly to consider approaches to conflict and recommended a written guide which an Ad Hoc Committee is currently drafting.

**Opportunities to Deepen Members' Spiritual Life:** Some expressed a longing for deeper, more sustained study in regard to Quakerism and/or the Bible. A Quakerism 101 course was taught in the fall, and four attenders have applied for membership as a result. Friendly Forums are held weekly, focusing on the writings and lives of Friends, other religious texts, and diverse spiritual practices and paths of members and attenders of our own Meeting. Others wanted the opportunity to work in small groups, and the Advancement and Outreach Committee has several workshops planned to meet this need. We have yet to discover a method to sustain small groups.

**Strengthening the Infrastructure of the Meeting:** We could strengthen and make more visible our communal foundation by communicating specifically what membership entails and inviting attenders to become members. We are preparing a Meeting Manual and considering a threshing session regarding our Meeting structure, participation, and committee work. The Nominating Committee has encouraged all members and attenders to complete a brief written survey about how they would like to contribute to the Meeting.

Input regarding the spiritual state of State College Friends Meeting was sought from all members and attenders, but the majority of comments were offered by individuals active in the work of the Meeting. The insights and experiences of several Meeting Committees follow below.

### Care and Concern:

Care and Concern Committee continues to wrestle with how to best provide pastoral care to a Meeting as large and diverse as our Meeting is. We are aware of considerable need for visitation, and other forms of outreach to the members and attenders of the Meeting. We attempt to meet those needs; but are not confident that we are fully successful. A number of clearness committee meetings have been held, and responses from those requesting this have been quite positive. We also have begun the first support committee with one of our members. The request was to provide career and personal support and the initial response to this has been positive. We are grateful to have been busy dealing with the substantial numbers of requests for membership. It is a joy to see the Meeting growing in membership. It seems at times that the resources of the committee are badly strained by the needs of our com-

munity. It has been suggested that we need to meet more frequently and maintain better contact with each other on the committee and with others in the Meeting. This seems difficult given the demands on all of us from employment, family, and a host of other demands. We are experimenting with maintaining closer contact through electronic means. Perhaps this will improve the effectiveness of the committee's functioning.

Worship and Ministry:

The committee has focused on reviewing the results of the "Deepening and Strengthening our Faith Community" program, and how best to translate these findings into new and productive spiritual growth for the Meeting as a whole. Working in conjunction with several other Committees, several workshops have taken place or are planned to offer opportunities for individual religious exploration. As a large Meeting, we are also challenged to creatively nurture our corporate worship such that our diversity of worship styles and preferences is enriching rather than divisive. In response to unease regarding the contributions of silence vs. vocal ministry within our Meeting, a Friendly Forum was held to address Friends' experiences with the 'calling' to speak. This discussion was well attended, offered an opportunity to share our spiritual understandings with others, and seems to have helped with a sense of balance in our worship together. Lastly, a small mid-week Meeting for Worship has begun to meet regularly on the Penn State campus, and is attended by several Meeting members, students, and faculty.

Religious Education:

Although our numbers of infants and toddlers has declined, perhaps with the ending of the second baby boom, we are delighted that our high school class is better attended than ever. Many members of this class are part of the Young Friends for Peace group, which has been very active. The Yearly Meeting as a whole had a chance to experience the energy of the Meeting's youth when the high school aged Young Friends for Peace provided lunch for Interim Meeting in October 2003, while the middle school class of the State College Friends School provided dinner on the same occasion.

It is challenging to integrate our many different age groups so that we can get to know each other. One of our senior members from Foxdale Village noted that some young people may be deterred by the "gray hairs" among us, and suggested that "perhaps we should dye our hair orange one day...."!

Advancement and Outreach:

State College Friends Meeting has begun sharing joys, sorrows and concerns at the rise of Meeting for Wor-

ship, and we find that this practice brings our large group together and makes us aware of individuals' needs. Many individuals have received personal support from the Meeting in this manner while they are struggling with family issues or grieving.

We are a long way from Philadelphia and other communities that have a longer history with Quaker practice. This has challenged us to find ways of communicating information about membership, committee work, and appropriate vocal ministry to our attenders and members. A new worship brochure has been developed and notices put in our weekly bulletin and monthly newsletters to help address this challenge.

Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns:

While this committee has served our Meeting since 1988, it has struggled in the last year. For lack of a clerk the committee was almost laid down; but Care and Concern committee felt strongly that we need to support this committee. Fortunately, a member came forward to co-clerk FLGC. FLGC continues to bring issues of equality before our Meeting; our Meeting is currently considering a minute in support of the legalization of same gender marriage and in opposition to the proposed constitutional amendment. Our meeting also has a representative in the local Gay Affirming Interfaith Network (GAIN), which sponsors educational workshops, speakers and panel discussions.

Peace and Social Action:

The Peace and Social Action Committee has been working actively to make our world a better place, with its members serving on five focused subcommittees. The committee has developed two minutes which the Meeting approved, one on Advancing Global Security and one regarding the former School of the Americas. Our subgroup working on the reduction of dependence on oil has submitted hints to the Bulletin for the last several weeks. The group working on legislative issues had a meeting on February 12 with Mike Oscar, an aide to Senator Specter, in which eight of our members participated. Mr. Oscar listened sympathetically and promised to take our concerns back to the senator.

Building and Grounds:

This winter has been environmentally challenging with extreme cold and heavy snows throughout the winter, as well as difficulties with a somewhat antiquated heating system. Those who have attended workdays have been very helpful and skilled in their activities - most of the work has been maintenance and repair in nature. Spiritually, we see more clearly the need to be environmentally conscious, so that waste and use of nonrenewable energy sources is kept to a minimum. We have

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been resolute in reducing our heating costs, and to this end have installed heat-conserving blinds in the Meetinghouse. We look forward as a committee to emphasizing the use of renewable and recycled supplies, and environmentally friendly practices in the years to come. The Meetinghouse was made available to the Village Acres Food Coop for locally grown food distribution, and Meeting youth created a Peace Garden to grow food for the Food Bank and flowers for our members in continuing care facilities. These efforts, big and small, help unify us with our Maker and His/Her precious creation.

Program:

The Program committee has had a successful year covering various topics which have been well received. The programs have covered a variety of topics, including a monthly book discussion of Meeting Jesus Again For the First Time, by Marcus Borg. We have had full cooperation, both from the committee members and those giving the various programs.

The program which was most well attended by a larger variety of age groups throughout the Meeting was the one concerning 'Speaking at Meeting', for which there was a lively exchange of conversation and input from many of those attending. There was a request to have a follow-up discussion of this topic which will either be sometime in May or at the beginning of next September.

## **BALTIMORE, STONY RUN**

Stony Run Friends Meeting has been especially vibrant during these troubled times. Our members and attenders—from youngest to oldest—are working on many fronts to put their faith into action. We collect and deliver food to CARES, a local food pantry for the poor; our First Day students took pledges for reading books over the Christmas holiday, with proceeds going to the Heifer Project; and our Spiritual and Intellectual Nurture and Peace & Social Order Committees are organizing informational programs and First Day Forums, during which participants and panelists explore issues ranging from various aspects of spirituality to Iraq, Islam, the Middle East, the USA Patriot Act, and the Project for a New American Century.

During the colder months, we have been holding our Monthly Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business after Simple Lunch on the first First Day of each month. This has resulted in increased attendance, and the general response thus far is that this may be a better time slot than first Tuesday evenings, which had been our previous practice.

Our Ministry and Counsel Committee has been con-

sidering the Meeting's current shared fiscal support of both Baltimore Yearly Meeting and Friends United Meeting, in light of the latter's unfavorable stance on issues related to homosexuality, and the Meeting as a whole will soon be taking up this concern. The Meeting's healing prayer group and its book discussion group are meeting regularly, and our Friends in Unity with Nature Committee is striving to make the Meeting more aware of its activities by, among other events, holding vegetarian cooking classes and preparing vegetarian simple lunches on a periodic basis. New this spring will be a series of "Fireside Chats" during which esteemed elder Friends will share their personal experiences as Quakers. Our Information Technology Subcommittee has refined the Meeting's website and is working toward streamlining the Meeting office's use of computers. We welcome all Friends to visit if they should be in the area. Please visit our website at <http://stonyrunfriends.org>, or write us at [stonyrunfriends@starpower.net](mailto:stonyrunfriends@starpower.net).

## **TAKOMA PARK**

We successfully integrated changes last year including searching for a different worship space and the decision to move into it, selecting co-clerks of Meeting, adopting a simplified structure of officers and committees (shifting responsibilities to the M&O committee), adding the role of childcare by volunteers to open way for attendance of families with children and once again offering children's religious education, changing the start of worship from 10 to 10:30 am, sponsoring booths at all three Takoma Park festivals to shine a light on our existence (which contributed to our four-fold increase in attendance), and experiencing budget surpluses. We share a trust, and contentment with these many changes. It seems the new organizational elements are working; they are flowing smoothly.

Despite these changes, the core of Meeting is steady in values and visions, with worship that provides deepening spiritual succor and grounding, acceptance and invitation. We know, the importance of attending to that core. These shared values draw and continue to attract attenders and sharpen their personal identities. Significantly, this deepening has occurred within some newer attenders as well.

Deeper worship parallels a sense that we've found a better space in which to worship (in particular, space with wheelchair access and lots of light). We look forward to what this space, 'Sangha', opens up for us. The name means "spiritual community" and the store proprietor practices this concept with us and others. She has

been flexible, embracing, and we feel sure will feed our spiritual depth. In other years, a move to a new location has created uprooted feelings; this one seems to have done the opposite.

When smaller, we turned inward, now we focus more on the wider circles of Friends and our testimonies to the world, intent on a sustained engagement. For some the focus is on wanting more social justice and service out-reach, whether related to Quaker testimonies or to helping one another in life transitions such as a new baby. For another it might be wanting a midweek meeting for a member in pain; or wanting to learn more about Quakerism; or wishing for a return to community potlucks and games nights; or wanting to support individuals in their unique outreach callings. The theme is the wish to give more to the world/individuals in crisis/war/disparity or in time of personal need; evidence of this is the two year sense of the Meeting to use surplus funds for out-reach.

We share a sense that our corporate service project, taking unsold goods from the Takoma Park Farmers' Market to Shepherd's Table, was more effective than in the two previous years.

We conducted a popular second hour adult education series on Quaker history and practices and used these principles in meetings for business that, year after year, bemuse and amaze us by drawing larger attendance than the preceding and intervening meetings for worship. This practice instructs us on how to act in life, listening and leaving quiet spaces, being inclusive and respectful, giving and letting go.

Ongoing is our tension between the wish to be quiet and small and yet to share our gift. Our worship sharing, 'Afterthoughts', affords us sharing, a strong sense of community and mutual support even as it promotes the silence of worship. In our core is a spiritual community, a settled calm that is growing, a deepening experience of gathered Meetings and connection with God within each of us and within one another.

## VALLEY MONTHLY MEETING

Members and attenders consider Valley Friends their spiritual home, and meeting for worship to be the touchstone of their spiritual life. It seems that Meeting also enriches the spiritual journeys of those within our community.

Personal experience, expectations, and context impacts perceptions of the quality of meeting for worship. While worship is generally described as satisfactory, all realize that it could be deeper. Some find certain types of messages more meaningful than other types. There

is a sense that our spiritual community would be deepened by greater awareness of and familiarity with Quaker tradition, and unprogrammed worship would be enhanced. Those in the meeting also continue to feel and struggle with the ever-present tension between collective and individual religious experience.

Members and attenders find meeting for worship with a concern for business to be generally worshipful, and resulting in decisions that reflect the sense of the meeting. Despite positive feedback on the new, shorter format, there are some remaining perceptions that business meeting is unduly long and too focused on unimportant details. There is also concern that, despite format changes, attendance remains low.

Valley Friends would like to see growth in both Meeting attendance and in membership in Valley Friends Meeting. Many spoke to the need to increase outside awareness of Quakerism in general and Valley Friends specifically.

A new second hour format featuring a mix of outside speakers, social activities and group discussions on the queries has received favorable response. However, there does not seem to be an ideal mix of these activities that would suit all preferences, and there continues to be a need for a variety of second hour activities,

Potlucks continue to be an important intergenerational social activity. However, members and attenders expressed a desire for additional opportunities to connect more deeply with others in Meeting. This is tempered by the realization that the majority of those in our meeting community are often hard pressed to find additional time and energy for activities outside of family and workplace commitments. Although not always well-attended, special activities such as the women's retreat, Friendly 8's, and 5th Sunday breakfasts were deeply appreciated by those who participated.

After an intense burst of activity in the wake of 9-11, there is a general sense that the meeting's corporate peace and social concerns efforts have fallen somewhat by the wayside. Instead of collaborating on one or more concerted efforts, Friends and attenders are apparently devoting time and financial resources to selected concerns in response to personal leadings. Friends also express the importance of corporate peace and social concern endeavors in life of Meeting. An example of this is the effort to help young friends develop personal responses to the Quaker peace testimony and related issue of conscientious objection.

There is no single perception as to how well Meeting responds to the needs of all parts of our community. For example, some Friends and attenders perceive the need

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of more adults to work with youth. However, sporadic attendance and a wide range of ages among participating youth can make this a challenging and sometimes frustrating experience for others involved. Friends and attenders express feelings of loss regarding our elders' reduced ability to participate in Meeting and social activities. Perceptions vary as to the adequacy of Meeting's response to our elders' changing needs. Friends and attenders are also unclear about the most helpful way to respond to our elders' various situations, and this will continue to be an area requiring awareness, action and clarity.

Friends and attenders are grateful for our Meeting community, but at least some express a desire for closer connections among us. One member has suggested that perhaps the absence of commonality, purpose and unity in worship affects the quality of our community life in ways we do not fully understand. Friends and attenders long for a deeper sense of community. Yet we must acknowledge that community is only generated by life together its a result of self-investment and involvement. We see this awareness as a challenge for those in Valley Friends Meeting to examine possible discrepancies between our wants and actions.

This report was prepared by the Valley Friends Ministry and Worship committee. In February, the committee solicited feedback from members and attenders concerning the spiritual state of the meeting. Questionnaires were generated and made available via E-mail and at meeting for worship. Six responses were completed and returned, and they were used as the basis of this report. The report was read and approved during the March 2004 meeting for business.

## **WILLIAMSBURG FRIENDS MEETING**

Friends of Williamsburg Monthly Meeting have labored together in self-examination to report the spiritual state of our Meeting for the past year. We have found both strengths and weaknesses in our activities together and strive to report accurately on both.

Our most important fundamental activity, that of providing spiritual support and refreshment to all members and attendees, proceeds regularly twice weekly on each first day and each fourth day, though the midweek Meeting is typically less well attended than the first day service. Our members struggle with issues of time and commitment restraints that appear to be more and more a part of our national culture, though we recognize that the tension between material and spiritual activities has been an eternal human dilemma, and we strive to resolve these issues in favor of our spiritual development,

with mixed success. Overall, we feel that we successfully provide our members the balanced opportunity to worship in both powerful silence, but with the benefit also of appropriate and meaningful vocal ministry. We all agree that the presence of prayerfulness in silence is the foundation of our worship together. We feel fortunate that our Meeting does not at this time suffer from inappropriate vocal ministry.

Our Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business is typically well attended, has good participation and thanks to some very committed, experienced and talented leadership, proceeds in good order. However, members note that follow-up is often faulty, due primarily to issues of understaffing noted below.

Our Spiritual Formation Group for the year has been small in number (5 members), but a powerful source of spiritual guidance and development for those participating. It is hoped that the Meeting as a whole has also benefited from these members' increased spiritual awareness and commitment.

Members have made a conscientious effort in the past year to extend a welcome to newcomers, while at the same time taking care not to convey any kind of pressure, being mindful that some who come to Quaker Meeting for the first time may have had negative experiences in the past with pressure to join other religious organizations. A particular practice that is helpful is to ask everyone to identify themselves after the first day Meeting for worship if anyone is in attendance who is unknown to members. Fortunately our Meeting is small enough to make this feasible. Another way that our Meeting reaches out to potential new members is through its website, designed and maintained through the dedicated solitary efforts of a single member. Several new members have come to the Meeting due primarily to information posted on the website, which includes Meeting times and locations, second hour program content, statements of Witness, links to other Friends sites, and driving directions to the WFM Meetings.

Although the Meeting provides regular members not only with the opportunity for corporate worship but also for social contact, some members caution that outreach to new members during the social time immediately following the Meeting for worship is also important. Friends are aware that the temptation to catch up with old friends can sometimes preempt the responsibility to reach out to new ones. The time allotted for social contact between second hour and the Meeting proper has been extended and now allows more time for both activities.

We are still blessed to have the use of two members'

house in which to meet, in a hushed and comfortable room set aside for the Meeting. However, members feel they have perhaps become too comfortable in this arrangement, with the consequence of not having devoted enough time, attention and resources recently to look for other accommodations when this temporary arrangement is no longer available.

Our Meeting has suffered from the loss of many core elders over the past two years, but we have also been blessed with some new members who bring serious spiritual commitment to the Meeting. Although we feel confident that in time there will be an experienced new “crop” of elders, meanwhile there are tasks to be done by elders but with too few elders to accomplish them all. Members feel that the Meeting is chronically “understaffed.” A number of elder members serve on multiple key committees, making committee meetings difficult to schedule and resulting in tasks taking longer to complete.

Some members are distressed that our regular first day second hour activities are not better attended. The feeling is that these activities represent an opportunity for members to interact with one another verbally concerning social concerns and corporate issues, thus expanding and strengthening our corporate identity. Related to this is the perception by some members that although individual members engage in various important social witness activities, that as a Meeting we do not seem to have a cohesive corporate social witness. This is an issue that Williamsburg Friends will attempt to address more completely in the coming year.

#### Adult Religious Education:

Except for those second hours cancelled due to major weather events (notably Hurricane Isabel and winter ice storms), a second hour forum or community building social activity was scheduled every first day. In the process, the WFM adult RE program covered a wide spectrum of leadings and foci. Given the events of the world, attention to the Quaker Peace Testimony was uppermost in our consciousness. Forums were presented that had to do with the historical roots of this testimony, initial efforts toward drafting of our own Peace Minute, and a guest speaker who educated us about the psychology of peacekeeping in this world. Racism was the focus of another major forum, with a series on the topic offered by Friends well versed and active in the field. Public funding of education K-12 was also addressed. Forums about spiritual practices were offered on lectio divina and spiritual journaling, and in another activity Friends shared with the Meeting their most treasured spiritually themed poetry and prose. Finally, second hour

offerings specifically targeted to nurture the growth and development of the Meeting included reading and discussing Thomas R. Kelly’s The Gathered Meeting, informative presentations about the workings of Quaker worship and WFM committees, procedures of Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business, the nominating committee, and religious education.

#### Child Religious Education:

WFM is blessed by the presence of many members’ children in attendance, as well as by the attendance of adults who are committed and experienced in their religious education. Weekly First Day school is typically well attended and the children participate enthusiastically in activities ranging from education about Quaker history and practice to athletics and art projects. Four children participated in the BYM Camping Program as campers, four high-school and college-age members worked as counselors or staff, and two adults volunteered in the kitchens. They enthusiastically reported on the joyful sense of community of the experience, and most have made commitments to attend again.

#### Peace and Social Concerns:

Given the small size of our Meeting, the peace and social witness of Williamsburg Friends is remarkable on many accounts. The commitment of individual members is all the more remarkable when the social witness of our members’ vocational choices is taken into account. Work toward advancing the Peace Testimony, improving educational opportunities for the youth of Virginia, eradicating racism and domestic violence, addressing economic inequities and providing basic necessities such as shelter, food, clothing, health and child rearing, and offering compassionate care to animals are some activities in which individual members are engaged.

For all the gifts and strengths of individual Friends, however, the Meeting as a whole continues to lack a corporate commitment to the Peace Testimony or to any other single witness. This fact is highlighted in this report to emphasize that not only would there be synergistic benefit to the specific focus if we were to undertake a concerted collective effort, but there would also be a spiritual blessing bestowed upon the Meeting as a whole. While several factors undoubtedly play a role against a group effort (for example, the Meeting’s size, geographic dispersion, political heterogeneity, socioeconomic factors, and the developmental evolution of our 23 year old Meeting), members of the Peace and Social Concerns Committee will identify a specific witness that will engage the participation of more WFM Friends.

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### Overseers:

Overseers has continued the work of caring for WFM members and attendees. In 2003 there was one wedding held under the care of the Meeting and several people requested clearness committees to deal with personal and spiritual issues.

Because we are a small Meeting, and all members and attendees are known to each other, Overseers is searching for ways to communicate personal needs of members so that the Meeting community can respond more quickly to those needs. For example, when one of our attendees was ill, most members did not hear of it until he had recovered. In the effort to prevent such situations arising in future, we have instituted a "Joys and Sorrows" book that Friends can use to communicate their needs to the community. We are also considering a phone tree. We are aware that we all lead busy lives and that we must be mindful to remember those in need.

### Ministry and Counsel:

Our Committee hosted a day long program at one member's house on crocheting and knitting for the benefit of Warm Up America, facilitated largely by one member.

### Conclusion:

Although members and attendees of the Williamsburg Friends Meeting struggle with ongoing issues of too many tasks and too few resources (and sometimes, it seems to some members, too little commitment), our community feels grateful and blessed for the opportunity our Meeting affords us for spiritual guidance and inspiration, as well as a strong sense of caring community support, in a world in which there appears to be less of either. As a result of being together in the presence of the Holy Spirit each week, we all look forward to the coming year with love for our lives together, and the hope that our spiritual commitment to help each other to be peaceful and loving, will also benefit our world to do the same.

## **YORK MONTHLY MEETING**

York Monthly Meeting is a healthy Spiritual Community that is growing. There is a sense of connectedness within the Meeting. We have added five new active Friends to our membership.

Each 1st Day at the 11th hour, Meeting For Worship continues to be attended by 20 to 35 Friends and attenders, and the shared meal afterwards brings us closer together as a loving community.

Meeting for Business on the first 1st day at 9:30 AM is well attended.

The 9:30AM discussion group on First Day has been a blessing for Members and Attenders who find it a safe place to speak freely about issues.

The meeting continues to attract attenders who for the most part join us for meeting only one or two times. Occasionally a seeker finds the meeting a place that speaks to their condition and becomes a welcomed participant in our activities.

The problem with the use of the graveyard and grounds by the homeless and vagrants has taken a turn towards improvement. A committee meeting which was attended by three of the homeless people added input to help in our decision making. A program of incremental steps to address the problems has been put into place and has been successful. The meeting has grown spiritually in this process.

A project for beautifying the grounds and gardens with the thought of creating a Peace Sanctuary has brought attention by the larger community with offers of help.

The Meeting building is small and continues to inhibit first day programs that would attract families with children. Working together on improving the interior of the building has drawn us closer together. It also has been frustrating for some who are impatient over the lack of movement to complete urgent building repair projects.

A Spiritual Formation Group has concluded and it is hoped that it will be formed again as the way opens. This year there has been a renewed interest about Quakerism and our Meeting from other churches and groups.