

ATLANTA FRIENDS MEETING

2010 STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT

Our Meeting is thriving. Although there are certainly concerns which need further attention, the connectedness of our community, our collective spiritual engagement, and our work outside the Meeting are all strong.

Meeting for Worship has continued to be well-attended, with over 100 adults attending on most First Days. Although Meeting for Worship provided spiritual refreshment and was not frequently beset by seemingly inappropriate messages there is a sense that our worship was often not as deep and centered as many wanted. Late arrivals and early departures seemed more common than ever. This issue may have been due in part to the number of attenders and visitors who were relatively new to Quakerism, as well as the difficulty of adequately addressing all of the spiritual needs of our large and diverse Meeting. Some continued to gather regularly for worship at the Meeting House on many weekday mornings and on the evening of fourth day, as well as at several weekly Meetings for Worship offsite. During 2010 Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business reflected an increased sense of worship.

The Ministry and Worship Committee organized several well attended programs. These included Silence and Speech (a forum for worship sharing about centering and vocal ministry) and a day retreat and a forum on Quakerism 201, Finding Our Way Once We Discovered the Path, led by Jay Marshall, Dean of the Earlham School of Religion. The Committee also distributed cards reminding attenders that their timely arrival at our Meeting for Worship can strengthen the quality of our worship together.

Other groups of Meeting attenders participated in additional spiritual enrichment programs, including a Spiritual Nurture group, The Circle, and two marriage enrichment groups. Adult Religious Education classes continue to meet weekly, as does a Bible Study group and a Hymn Singing group. Mary Ann Downey and Christina Repoley served as facilitators for a successful Gathered Meeting Retreat. In addition, many in the Meeting have become comfortable with both using and serving on clearness, anchor, and support committees and are increasingly turning to these processes for guidance and support.

At a worship-filled planning day the Religious Education Committee chose its school year theme of "Quaker Practice: You Belong". In adopting this theme the committee noted that a significant number of Young Friends in our Meeting were coping with divorcing parents or refugee status. Approximately 25-30 young Friends attended First Day School each week, on average. Most classes continued to use the Godly Play® curriculum. Green Friends continued to teach a monthly class on the gifts of nature. Young Friends raised money for causes important to them, with the Middle School

Friends hosting a second Holiday Bazaar. At the suggestion of the Religious Education Committee, Young Friends began remaining in Meeting for Worship for the full hour on Fifth First Days so that our community could enjoy multigenerational worship. One multigenerational Meeting included a story on Quaker worship from the Godly Play® curriculum.

The Youth Program Coordinator and the Young Friends Support Committee continued to offer youth programs for the Meeting. Our involvement in the SAYF program also grew, as several new Middle School friends from Atlanta Meeting began participating. Attenders of the January Atlanta SAYF retreat provided community service support for the Hosea Feed the Hungry and Homeless program despite the very bad weather.

The Burundi Friends' participation in our community continued to enrich us and lead us to many openings. Meeting members provided financial support for the construction of a Burundi Friends Church in Cene, Burundi, and then joyfully received pictures of Friends in Cene and the developing construction. The continuing plight of attenders' family members stranded in a refugee camp in Tanzania caused us grave concern. This perilous situation prompted one member to press local and national agencies to assist us in bringing these family members safely to the United States. The Refugee Support (Friendly 8) group provided 3-4 drivers every Sunday to assure rides to Worship for Burundi Friends. In addition, individuals have provided intensive assistance and guidance to Burundi Friends regarding jobs and education, have provided English lessons, and have joined with Burundi Friends to welcome three new babies into the community. American and African individuals from the meeting have supported the Urban Farm, coordinated by Refugee Family Services. In the fall, Burundi farmers practiced their produce-selling skills at a weekly Sunday morning market held within the meetinghouse.

Atlanta Friends Meeting was active in anti-racism efforts throughout the year. ORAIARH held 2 workshops on white privilege: one for Atlanta Friends Meeting and one for SAYMA. We improved follow-up by doing an anonymous online survey after the AFM workshop. ORAIARH members also wrote book reviews for the newsletter, staffed a weekly literature table, and continued to support each other in working against racism in ourselves and our communities. Several AFM members attended the worship in the manner of Friends at Morehouse College. CURAFM offered 4 workshops at AFM on sections of "Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice".

The Refugee Support Group and ORAIARH/CURAFM worked together to coordinate the week-long speaking tour of David Zarembka (coordinator of African Great Lakes Initiative of the Friends Peace Teams) and his wife, Gladys Kamonya. The speaking tour included presentations at a variety of venues and a radio broadcast, as well as meetings with representatives of the Carter Center, the King Center, and U.S. Senator Isakson.

Friends played the role of citizen lobbyists on a number of issues this year, some at the suggestion of FCNL, others as members of various advocacy organizations. Elected officials heard from us on health care for all, immigration reform, prison reform, energy and environmental concerns, ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the cluster bomb treaty, the New START treaty, gay rights, and decreasing the military budget. Friends made calls, sent emails and postcards, signed petitions, and witnessed at vigils and demonstrations. Some paid visits to state and national offices. One member continued his long term participation in a Monthly Peace Vigil in Douglas County, Georgia, as well as his advocacy for peace and racial justice in local political and advocacy organizations there.

Social Concerns had a reawakening of the Spirit in 2010, both within and beyond the walls of the Meeting House. As in prior years the Committee supported a wide range of Quaker and non-Quaker activities, sending funds as far away as a public school in Chicago and the El Sitio community in El Salvador. Social Concerns also took a hard look at its purpose and structure. To open the way, the committee held a threshing session and brainstorming sessions. These culminated in a "Gathering" that brought all the social concerns activities at AFM into the spotlight, with the hope of generating new leadings, participation and energy. With new co-clerks for 2011 and a more streamlined structure, the Committee plans to continue its regular work while creating a better vehicle for living in Spirit and Truth.

The Green Friends organized a well-attended study group focusing on the Quaker-authored book, "Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy," with the help of Judy Lumb. They also organized an outreach meeting of climate activists in preparation for the 350.org worldwide October events. They installed a rain barrel and several energy conservation displays at the Meeting House. A number of them attended a large Interfaith worship/rally in Atlanta and they lobbied on behalf of legislation seeking to limit carbon emissions.

There were exciting developments this year at the Ferguson Cabin. The Cabin Committee completed site preparation and foundation work for a long-planned addition to the site: a cabin that has plumbing and that is suitable for use all year round. The Committee found renewed commitment toward its service through its hopes for the future and its members' growing friendships with each other.

From a financial standpoint, contributions lagged well behind budget and expenses until the final weeks of the year, when a last minute surge in donations allowed us to unexpectedly finish the year in the black. The Educational Scholarship Committee awarded eight \$500 scholarships for the 2010-2011 school year to young adults associated with the Meeting.

During 2010 the Meeting often had difficulty recruiting enough volunteers to cover all the tasks that it felt needed to be done. This seems to have been a product of the number of projects underway and the sizeable number of children and other individuals in the Meeting who needed community support rather than any lack of vitality in the Meeting. In filling these volunteer posts the Meeting must strive to

remember both that, ideally, service comes from a place of spiritual leading rather than guilt and that spiritual gifts can spring from the performance of seemingly mundane tasks.

Another continuing challenge for the Meeting has been assuring that new attenders are truly welcomed and folded promptly into the Meeting community. Some can feel overwhelmed by the size of the Meeting. The number of visitors who come and go make it difficult to keep track of people who have started attending regularly, much less to aid them in making the transition from newcomer to member of the community. The Meeting held Newcomer Dinners every month in an effort to welcome new attenders. Although the Meeting has a lengthy Handbook intended to orient all attenders to its procedures new attenders often discover some of our customs only when they are informed they have violated one of them. This can leave them feeling alienated. It can also be challenging to distinguish between situations in which an attender has decided to pursue their spiritual path elsewhere and those in which attendance has ceased because of a problem which calls for the assistance of the Meeting community. The Meeting continues to seek more effective ways of fulfilling these duties.

The Meeting's office ran efficiently in 2010, providing vital logistical support for the Meeting and responding promptly to inquiries from prospective and existing tenants. The Office Manager's skill in addressing rental and usage inquiries has meant that the building is used more and that our rental income has significantly increased. The welcoming spirit of the Friend in Residence has also fostered greater use of the building. During this year he organized a forum on Quakers & Islam, in partnership with Khalid Siddiq, Director of Atlanta's Al-Farooq Mosque. He also became fully involved in the work of several committees.

The Meeting House was kept in good repair. The Meeting promptly and successfully addressed problems ranging from a large hole in the parking lot to mysterious bad odors to an uneven front walkway. Repeated efforts to provide sufficient nighttime lighting around the front entrance without wasting electricity were successfully concluded this year. Funds and effort invested in energy efficiency improvements in prior years began to bear fruit in the form of lower utility bills. The grounds have gotten increasingly appealing. Ever-changing rows of blossoms and well-tended bushes greet us.

The Meeting mourned the death of Jane Welborn. It welcomed new members Caroline Noyes and Al Natanagara and transferring member Marthajane Robinson. It held the marriage of Barbara Seal and Don Schreiber under its care. Two members, Loretta Lucy Miller and Anthony Smith, transferred their membership to other Meetings.