

STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT FOR 2011

The past year has been one in which it felt as though our community was disproportionately impacted by illness and death. Fear and sadness have come in the wake of these events. We have also found, though, that these challenges have drawn many of us closer to each other. The consciousness that death may be close helped us discover a new appreciation for the gifts of health and the joy we can find in each other. We shared rich worship, tears, and joy in hospitals, homes, and memorial services. We provided a stream of supportive services for each other and, in the process, grew to know each other better. These opportunities of being invited to be present to people opened many ways to become closer as a community and to be open to the Light in our community.

The Meeting continued to enjoy worshipping together. First Day Meetings for Worship remain well-attended. Newcomers often shared that they found the experience of worship with us very moving. The children joined the meeting for worship on fifth First Days for unprogrammed intergenerational worship. Other Meetings for Worship were regularly held on Wednesday mornings, on Wednesday evenings and on Thursdays at noon. The Meeting currently has 173 recorded members (37 of whom are inactive), 114 additional regular attenders, and 53 regular attenders who are under eighteen years old.

The Care and Counsel Committee ably coordinated ongoing care for many in our community during this difficult year. The committee has begun to hold joint meetings with the Ministry and Worship Committee in order to deepen the overlapping work of these committees. One of the issues these committees are exploring is how best to welcome children into our Meeting community, a concern initially raised by attenders from Burundi. Our efforts to find our way forward on this issue included a forum at which English/Kirundi translation was provided for the entire discussion. We found that the slower pace caused by the translation made our discussion more mindful.

The Ministry and Worship committee continued its efforts to enrich the spiritual life of the Meeting. It organized a well-attended workshop at which Valerie Joy of Friends World Committee for Consultation and Abel Sibonio of Evangelical Friends International helped us explore the theme of what it means to be 'salt and light' as we live 'the kingdom of God in a broken world.' The committee also organized both a forum on Vocal Ministry and a forum at which Peter Lang of Chatham-Summit Meeting spoke about the influence that Thomas Kelly's teachings have had on his own development. The committee shepherded the process of revising the sections in our Meeting Handbook that address marriage under the care of the Meeting. The committee also continued to wrestle with the perennial issue of latecomers, first proposing a policy of restricting tardy entry but later withdrawing it following discussion by the Meeting.

In the Meeting's Religious Education program young Friends are continuing to use the Godly Play curriculum. The curricular emphasis for their 2011-12 classes is on the Old Testament, while the theme is "Trusting God's Voice: Growing and Acting in the Light." There is monthly conscientious objector training for middle school students and

monthly environmental programs for pre-school and lower elementary classes. The number of very young children using the nursery has been growing. The middle school students once again organized a fund-raising bazaar, donating the money earned to PAWS Atlanta, a "no kill" animal shelter.

The Meeting has been very actively exploring whether to embark upon a Quaker Quest program in Atlanta. Some members conducted a sample session of Quaker Quest in February and around 60 people attended a full day Quaker Quest workshop in November. In addition, Quaker Voluntary Service (QVS) is working to launch a pilot project in Atlanta: its first service house in which six QVS interns will live and serve for one year. Meeting attenders have been supporting this project and are considering what role the Meeting may wish to play in its future.

A very well attended Gathered Meeting Retreat explored the theme of "Listening for the Movement of the Spirit" with facilitation by Pat Loring of Friendship Meeting. Adult Religious Education continued to offer rich spiritual autobiographies of our members and attenders as well as discussions of spiritual writings.

The Ferguson Cabin Committee made exciting progress in building a new, bathroom-equipped, cabin at the Lake Burton site. More than 15 Friends and other volunteers spent 8 strenuous but fun and companionable weekends working on this challenging project, managing to get the new cabin up and enclosed. While a lot remains to be done to finish the cabin, the steps completed this year left the group with a big sense of accomplishment. During the year 50 different people used the Ferguson Cabin site on 25 separate occasions. The committee held well-attended meetings quarterly.

Social Concerns worked to maintain the positive momentum from 2010 both within and beyond the walls of the Meetinghouse. The committee shifted from holding monthly meetings on Thursday evenings to a quarterly meeting schedule on First Days. This seemed to work well, with significant agenda items and better attendance. The concerns and activities supported by either committee members or committee funds included Occupy Atlanta, Georgia Peace and Justice Coalition, El Sitio Cenicero resettlement village in El Salvador, Poor People's Day at the Georgia State Capital, the Bible & Immigration Forum and the Angel Within prison program. With the assistance of ORAIARH the committee held a forum to discuss ways in which we as individuals may better address our concerns surrounding incarceration.

The committee supported efforts to roll back punitive immigration legislation and provided support for those who are incarcerated because of their immigrant status. The Meeting adopted a minute on immigration to spell out our concerns regarding both the consequences of recent anti-immigrant legislation and the attitudes reflected in such legislation. One committee member tirelessly advocated for attenders' family members and friends who are stranded in refugee camps in Tanzania. The Meeting continued to provide support for the Decatur Emergency Assistance Ministry's emergency pantry and other services, including the Hagar's House emergency night shelter.

Green Friends, a part of our Meeting since 1977, collaborated with wider community activists to spotlight issues of global warming and other environmental issues, first helping to organize a rally protesting the Tar Sands Keystone XL pipeline and later acting on the issue of corporate personhood. It conducted an LED light bulb sale at Meeting; convened a seminar using the Quaker Institute of the Future booklet, "How On Earth Do We Live Now?" moderated by the book's co-author; and sponsored the film *The Milagro Beanfield Wars* with the AFM Movie Night series. The Meeting obtained a matching grant of \$3,500 from Georgia Interfaith Power & Light, to be used to improve our building's energy efficiency. The Meeting provided support for one member's leading to travel to Africa to attend the COP-17 Climate Talks in Durban, to work with the African Great Lakes Initiative of Friends and to attend the World Conference of Friends.

Members of our Meeting coordinated local efforts on behalf of the Friends Committee on National Legislation. Many from the Meeting signed petitions and sent correspondence to public officials on behalf of Friends' concerns. They lobbied for passage of the new START treaty. They met with Senate staff members to lobby for cuts in the Pentagon budget, using a fruit pie as their visual aid. The Meeting was represented at the FCNL annual meeting. A Meeting delegation marched in the 2011 Gay Pride Parade.

The members of ORAIARH continued to support each other on concerns related to racism, staffing a weekly literature table with articles related to race and racism and helping to organize a discussion regarding racism in the justice system and mass incarceration. The Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting continued to work toward our goal of becoming a more multiracial, multicultural spiritual community by regularly providing a "listening ear" for concerns about racism, discussing the book *Black Fire*, teaching a First Day class session related to racism, and helping to organize Quaker Quest efforts in anticipation that the program may foster outreach to people of color.

The Administration Committee improved the building and grounds by upgrading fixtures and insulation to increase our energy efficiency. The committee made structural improvements to the sidewalk leading to the entrance and also to the play structure. An ever-changing array of blossoms lined the front walk and the building and grounds were well-maintained. Trees were pruned. The committee initiated the process of re-visioning the Meeting's grounds. The committee also adopted new rental rates, developed new legal language to be used in rental agreements, created building security guidelines, and generated plans for future permanent improvements. It checked on the adequacy of our insurance coverage regarding the activities of our renters.

Excellent efforts by Office Coordinator Jonah McDonald and the Friend in Residence John Roberts continue to yield a well-run building, a welcoming atmosphere, and increasing rental income. Aaron Ruscetta continued his service as Youth Program Coordinator, helping Young Friends coordinate gatherings with other teens in our Yearly Meeting as well as functions here. With the help of the Finance Committee, the

Administration Committee set up a Care committee to support the Meeting's custodian, Joe Clay, as he moved toward retirement at the end of the year. Meeting attender Dieudonne Ntibayazi began work as a cleaning subcontractor for the Meetinghouse and Meeting attenders Coryn Murphy and Wesley Morris, a wife-husband team, began employment as nursery caregivers.

Atlanta Friends welcomed another Burundian family who transferred from Arizona. The four Burundian families who attend AFM have become more independent and continued to contribute to the spiritual life of the Meeting. Attenders continue to gather each First Day before worship to enjoy singing together in Kirundi and English. The Refugee Support Friendly 8s group has found joy in blossoming friendships with these families.

The Meeting community continued to find more ways to gather around common interests. Groups of artists and photographers from the Meeting displayed their work in the Meeting House. There were monthly hikes. In addition, during the past year a group of attenders hosted monthly Movie Nights. These Movie Nights, which were open to the public, were attended by 12 to 40 people each month. Two of these Movie Night events served as fundraisers for the College Scholarship Fund, one was cohosted by Green Friends, and another was cohosted by the Young Friends.

Many attenders provide services to the Friends community beyond the Meeting. Several have very active travelling ministries anchored by the Meeting. Others are fulfilling responsibilities to the Yearly Meeting, to Friends General Conference, to wider Quaker organizations, and numerous local ministries.

Atlanta Friends Meeting finished the year with a financial surplus of \$13,484. The Meeting's rental income continued to increase, growing by \$12,125. The Meeting received contributions totaling \$120,166 and our expenses for the year ran approximately \$2000 below budget.

The Meeting continued to find it very challenging to fill all of the volunteer posts in our Meeting. We note, however, that although our grasp may exceed our reach the amount of work that is being done is exciting. Our difficulties in recruitment appeared to stem less from a lack of willingness to serve on the part of our attenders than the fact that these attenders had to divide their energies among competing worthy efforts.

During 2011 Dana Goldman, David Payne, and Alex Zinnes became members of the Meeting, as well as John and Diana Day (who have convened a Worship Group in Macon). David Foster transferred his membership to Atlanta Friends Meeting from North Hampton Monthly Meeting, Peter Sederberg transferred from Columbia Friends Meeting, and Laura Norlin transferred from Grand Rapids Friends Meeting. Pete and Renda McCaughan transferred out, changing their membership to Wilton Meeting in Wilton, Connecticut. We mourn the loss of Ceal Wutka, who passed from this life on February 26th, 2011, Ann Byrne, who passed from this life on November 11th, 2011, and

Miles Alexander Horsley, who passed from this life on December 1, 2011. We rejoice in the coming of two babies: Evan Wuichet and Arlie Rose Hallward.