

Atlanta Friends Meeting State of the Meeting Report 2012

Spirituality/Faith/Worship

The quality and nature of our worship and our vocal ministry continue to be evidence of Atlanta Friends Meeting's spiritual state. The Meeting's spiritual growth is nurtured by our religious education programs and through our community involvement, as well as by the presence of weighty friends who anchor our worship. The Meeting is a place of solace and worship and our striving to become a more welcoming multicultural community remains an important spiritual objective. As one Friend noted, "In a world where believers are sometimes roundly condemned...it is a relief to be in the presence of people who quietly accept God without feeling they must be all-knowing experts on all aspects of God in order to accept that God exists."

Religious Education

First Day School was enriched by visits from Green Friends and members of the Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting (CURAFM). Green Friends worked with the students to further develop their appreciation for the earth and its inhabitants by providing lessons about the natural world. These lessons spoke to the children's innate sense of wonder, and allowed the children to see, touch, and learn about things from places they may not have visited. Members of CURAFM and Social Concerns spoke with the young Friends about issues related to equality.

Once a month, Friends continued to share their spiritual journey with the Meeting during Adult First Day school. Their journeys are recorded and serve as a record of our collective and individual spiritual paths. Members of CURAFM coordinated with Adult First Day School to increase awareness of African-American Friends/friends of Quakers by selecting readings from *Black Fire: African American Quakers and Spirituality and Human Rights*. Members of Ministry and Worship, the Adult First Day School, and CURAFM worked together to organize a forum on the writings of Howard Thurman with a noted Thurman scholar as a guest speaker.

Social Concerns

Members from AFM joined with others from the Atlanta community in a prison concerns group that meets quarterly. In addition, Meeting members worked on voter registration projects which were of particular concern during this election year.

Green Friends continue their work with respect to informing Friends about issues related to and possible solutions for current climate change challenges. For example, Judy Lumb reported on the progress of sustainability efforts in Africa and other nations, while Green Friends active support of the Citizen's Climate Lobby is seen as a way to join with other area groups to effectively work toward legislative changes related to climate change.

Longstanding members of Green Friends report that the challenges to sustainability and climate change efforts over the years can result in frustration, sometimes depression, especially for those who have worked over many years to address the impact of over development on the global climate. Green Friends, as a

group of supportive, like-minded people who continue to try to address global warming and its effects, has lifted spirits and renewed faith.

Building Community

Welcoming New Young Friends: We were inspired by the tradition of Friends in our community from Burundi when they asked for a special meeting to welcome newborns and infants. Care and Counsel and Ministry and Worship collaborated to hold a special meeting for welcoming all AFM children for this year, with the intention in future years of welcoming new babies/children. We hope that the certificates signed for the children by those present at this welcoming will be meaningful to families and children for years to come.

A Greater Sense of Meeting: Community grew around individuals facing various medical and personal challenges. This sense of community was exemplified by our supporting the long-term hospitalization of a meeting preschooler and her family through a coordinated effort of other children and adults and the committees of Care and Counsel and Social Concerns.

Quaker Quest: Based on extensive groundwork done in 2011, AFM approved in February 2012 the holding of a series of eight Quaker Quest public sessions during autumn 2012. In all, at least 25 Quakers planned, participated or offered presentations during the public sessions. Many hands and minds contributed to the development of the outreach and awareness campaign, with a special concern for reaching as diverse an audience as possible. Quaker Quest brought in 41 relative newcomers to the afternoon sessions, at least four of whom now attend meeting regularly. The impact of Quaker Quest has been much larger than recruiting new members. The presentations were transformative. Each set of speakers prompted individuals in attendance to think and feel more deeply about faith as both an individual and as a corporate experience. There seems to be general agreement that continuing the momentum from Quaker Quest would contribute to the further spiritual growth of the Meeting.

Community Nurture: Wedding celebrations, long and short-term health concerns, and memorials have also brought us together. We find that concerns about our abilities to address these concerns have been met in each instance with the meeting community coming together. The members of the Care and Counsel Committee have worked hard over this year in coordinating these connections. However, concern continues to be felt that members and a continual recruitment effort are important to the ability of Care and Counsel to address the many needs of the Meeting. Friends also joyfully came together to furnish the Quaker Voluntary Service (QVS) house in anticipation of the first volunteers. Community is also continually built through the smaller gatherings of Friends through informal gatherings, clearness committees, committee meetings, potlucks, and welcoming dinners with their opportunities for one-on-one conversations.

Landmarks

Quaker Voluntary Service (QVS): 2012 brought to Atlanta Friends Meeting the inaugural group of QVS volunteers. This group of seven volunteers added depth to the meeting as they engaged with and got to know people in the Meeting. Our new Friend in Residence Erica Schoon came in 2012 and has as her primary ministry the

promotion of the spiritual and “Quakerly” development of these (and future) QVS volunteers.

Infrastructure: The Meeting’s recognition that the building and grounds were in need of renovation led to the development of an ambitious plan to improve the building site, which was initiated in conjunction with a long-term maintenance plan and forecast. These plans will lead to better usage and a re-design of the outdoor spaces. The master plan carries its own lessons of waiting with expectation for the future. Lessons of cooperation with the City of Decatur as well as our local neighborhood were seen as opportunities for growth.

Births: The Meeting was enriched by one birth this year: Nahayo Eddy Dieudonne (1/6).

Marriages: The Meeting was enriched by three marriages taken under its care this year, together with three joyous Meetings for Worship with attention to Marriage held under the care of AFM.

Sally McEwen and Aaron Ruscetta (3/11)

Lissa Place and Glen Satell (5/12)

Christina Repoley and Dean Leeper (10/6)

Transitions: We were also deeply touched by the deaths of four people – two very active members and three others connected in a variety of ways to the AFM community. The Meeting hosted or participated in memorial meetings for each of them, celebrating their lives and marking their passing. Deaths and Memorial Services: Sally McEwen (March 15th); John Morris (March 24th); Nancy Smith (January 27th); Don Bayliss (August 5th); Janet Ferguson (October 1st)

Membership transfers out: Mark Wutka (3rd Month)

Challenges and *Opportunities*

Strengthening Worship: We continue to be challenged on how to best support and nurture deep, centered worship notwithstanding the many possible disruptions to worship (e.g., greeting room noise, late arrivals, the presence of disruptive visitors).

Inclusive Worship: Members of both Ministry and Worship and Care and Counsel continue to work to find ways to incorporate Young Friends in the life of the meeting, and to help them feel part of the Meeting’s decision-making. Our K-12 religious education program continues to struggle with a need for volunteers and finding ways to involve Friends who are not parents with our youth continues to be both a short- and long-term goal. Such involvement offers the opportunity for Friends to better understand youth program structures and to better identify the skills and gifts that young Friends have to offer.

Work of the Meeting: Friends have expressed the feeling that they are stretched very thin, and as a result, there are insufficient members to fill many vacant committee positions. Additionally there are insufficient numbers of volunteers to help with weekly tasks, religious education, and hospitality. While we are interested in sustaining and expanding our community’s benefits from Quaker Quest, we are left with questions about what form that should take and in what time frame. The Meeting may need to thoughtfully consider the long term sustainability of the many obligations that have been undertaken. There is a sense that because there is so much going on simultaneously that our busyness reduces our spiritual center and reduces our genuine connections, particularly with newcomers.

Conclusion

This year 2012 was marked by broader cooperation within AFM on both internal and external goals related to becoming a more welcoming spiritual home for all and there is a deep desire to faithfully discern a spirit-led path toward making this an ever increasing reality.

Approved by Atlanta Friends Meeting on March 17, 2013.