

Atlanta Friends Meeting
2016 State of the Meeting Report
Approved 2/19/17 - February

This year has been one of community growth and loss. We are aware that we are a busy community with multiple opportunities on any given First Day. However, we are also mindful of the fact that this means we find ourselves with a list of tasks to finish during social hour instead of share in fellowship with each other. As our community grows, we continue to find new ways to welcome newcomers and to slow down to greet each other. This year our meeting retreat was titled “Spiritual Deepening” and offered those gathered the opportunity to explore a variety of ways to deepen our experience of community and worship. This year we made a second care quilt to circulate amongst community members as they recover from major life events. We are also grateful for the opportunities we have together during weekly First Day School, Bible study, and singing.

One of the major undertakings this year was supporting the leading of the Burundi and Congolese families in AFM to start their own Evangelical Friends Church. These families blessed our community for nine years, and in 2015 they asked AFM in a deeply spirit-led letter for support in reaching out to the Evangelical Friends Church-Eastern Region (EFC-ER) to start an Evangelical Friends Church. This year we continued to worship and support them as they met with EFC-ER and found themselves clear to found Stone Mountain Evangelical Friends Church. We are grateful for the friendship we have with them and have also found our community changed as we lost about a dozen children and a dozen adults at worship each week. We are thankful for the spirit these families brought to our community, and we bless and continue to support them as they move forward on their journey.

Another loss for us was the death of four members of our meeting community: founding member Elizabeth Hendricks, Britt Pendergrast, Frank Cummings, and recently, Terry Boling. Three of these members were elderly and the other one died suddenly. We are sad to lose them but are also grateful for the opportunity to grow and deepen our sense of community in our response and affirmations of their lives. Frank Cummings held a celebration of his life on his last visit to Atlanta and started talks about the large bequest to Atlanta Friends Meeting to continue his work in El Salvador. Processing and worshipping over how to accept and foster such a large bequest helped us deepen our sense of what we are called to as a meeting and what we are called to as individuals. The Sunday after Britt Pendergrast died his wife of 76 years couldn't imagine not coming to worship, so the whole family showed up and covered the meeting with a centered worship of remembrance. We are thankful for our elders and how they bless us and continue to support the growth of our meeting even after they have left this earth.

Our meeting has also grown in our anti-racism work, with more racism related messages arising in worship, energy from new leadership, and formation of stronger bonds with SAYMA and local racial justice groups. Within our meeting, we held 2 workshops on reparations and approved a minute of support for the Standing Rock Sioux and indigenous rights. We also supported a group of Friends in starting a nonprofit related to a ministry on racism in the criminal justice system. Discerning how much the meeting could do and at what point the work needed to be self-sustaining was painful, but rewarding in the long run. We continue our work of looking at institutional racism in both our monthly and yearly meeting. Atlanta Friends helped with program planning for SAYMA and offered 5 workshops on undoing racism. In the community, many Atlanta Friends have participated actively in town halls, rallies, and educational meetings for Create Community 4 Decatur: Black Lives Matter as well as in groups

such as End New Jim Crow Action Group, and Alternatives to Violence Project. The urgency of our times compels us to live our testimony of equality in our communities and ourselves.

Another way we continued to grow and support our community was in the creation of a sexual harassment policy which can be found attached below. A situation of sexual harassment was brought to the clerk, and a few elders in the community's attention, where swift and loving action sprung forth from. An ad hoc committee was appointed to lead the community through a time of discernment and reconciliation. The committee was clear it needed to inform the community that such a situation had arisen and to hear from the community. We held a forum where Friends responded to the following queries: "How can we make our meeting a community where we work together to create relationships of love and trust and address harmful actions of harassment? How do we take action in a loving spirit that prevents further harassment and restores trust?" We recognize that as a community we have responsibility to work closely with all of the individuals involved, to take action in a loving and prayerful spirit, and to not look away. We are growing into this rekindled understanding and seeking guidance in our way forward.

We continue to grow and struggle to find ways to be more transparent about the structures of Quakerism as a faith and a practice. We acknowledge there is always work to be done to educate newcomers. This work supports us in continuing to grow our spiritual depth with each other. We find ourselves yearning to know each other more fully. At the same time, we are frequently asked to host national committee meetings which offer us opportunities to learn about Quakerism outside of our meeting experience and reflect on our experiences together.

Atlanta Friends Meeting continues to support Quaker Voluntary Service spiritually, tangibly, and with a great number of folks who offer their time to welcome, spiritually nurture, and engage with these young adults. The Fellows have enriched our community by bringing numbers to our young adult community, energy in committees, and a clear outlet of support of ongoing Quaker Service in the wider Atlanta community.

Our community continues to have numerous children of all ages, even after graduating fourteen seniors and saying goodbye to the twelve to fifteen children to the new Stone Mountain Evangelical Friends Church. We send these Friends off on their journey and hope they will visit often. We are thankful for the growth and saddened by the losses of the year as they help us deepen our spiritual community and acknowledge the spiritual work we do together throughout the year.

Nurturing Trust in our Community and Addressing Harassment

Our Meeting is a community of people seeking to perfect their love of God and all living beings. We support each other in this quest through our silent worship together and in our relationships with each other. While we accept our human imperfections in interacting with each other, we are bound together by the trust that comes from our commitment to treat each other with love, compassion, and respect. Verbal, physical, and sexual harassment are actions which destroy this trust and require vigorous counteraction. We recognize that as a community we have responsibility to work closely with the individuals involved, to take action in a loving and prayerful spirit, and to not look away. If anyone in our Meeting feels harassed by another member or attender, the Meeting needs to be informed, usually through Care and Counsel, in order to act to support all concerned, prevent further occurrence, and avoid the isolation of any person. - Minuted by Atlanta Friends Meeting October 16, 2016