

Atlanta Friends Meeting
2018 State of the Meeting
submitted by Bill Holland, AFM Clerk

This year, SAYMA Ministry and Worship has asked us to consider the queries about our dream for our faith community and how we are living into that dream in our life together.

Seventy-five years ago a group of Friends and seekers first gathered in Atlanta to seek the Light. Coming together in a time of war and racial segregation, they sought to create a small island of holy silence and to live faithfully into the world. Early on, Atlanta Friends envisioned a spiritual community where people of all races could worship together. We articulated a vision that we could balance being a school for nonviolent revolutionaries as well as a center for contemplation.

Our meetings for worship are well attended. Visitors from the community and from afar join us regularly to experience Quaker worship. When we moved to the “new” meetinghouse we made a conscious choice to be visible and this visibility has invited many inquirers. We continue to struggle with how best to welcome newcomers and invite them to share in our community life. Our new brochure and Care and Counsel’s newcomer’s table are being well used and provide a focus for inquiries.

The many young Friends and their families who actively participate in our life together bless us. Our nursery is often filled to capacity. Fifteen regular teachers and many regular doorkeepers support the first day program for young Friends. The careful preparation and planning by the Religious Education Committee has created a consistent programming that welcomes the Spirit of all young Friends. These young Friends are a vital part of our meeting. They join us in the first fifteen minutes of worship. Occasionally, the whispers in meeting provide the source of ministry and levity. The return of the young Friends at the end of the worship period creates a different energy.

The Atlanta teen group has been active with Southern Appalachian Young Friends, attending regular retreats and providing leadership. These teens are impressive, a source of creativity, spiritual vitality and contribute greatly to our meeting.

We are in our seventh year hosting a cohort of Quaker Voluntary Service Fellows. These young adults have enriched us. Many members of the meeting are active supporting their spiritual and material needs. The local support committee operates under the care of the meeting.

The vision of racial justice and of racial equality continues to be the central animating concern for many of our members. Drawings on our testimony of equality changes are pursued at the personal, institutional and societal level. Quakers for Racial Equality and the Committee for Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting offer ongoing education and awareness to the meeting through literature tables, listening ear, workshops, forums and sharing resources. These Friends are under the weight of a concern to expand active participation by more members and attenders in the work of eradicating institutional racism. A new book discussion group and new affinity groups have formed to support Friends with new concerns.

Green Friends have maintained an active network and meet monthly to consider visions of a Green future. We receive regular ministry on the care of the Earth. Green Friends have held 4 forums, hosted educational videos, and highlighted the linkages between racism, global inequality and the climate.

Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns raised the concern that meeting insure that genderqueer/non-binary people knew they were welcomed at our meeting. Small transflags were made available for nametags. In collaboration with Administration Committee, signage for restrooms was developed and approved by meeting: "Atlanta Friends Meeting welcomes everyone to use the restroom that most closely reflects their gender identity."

Some in our meeting question whether we do enough for women's rights and ask us to consider doing more.

Members of our community have worked to prepare revisions to queries being proposed to SAYMA Faith and Practice.

Our meeting continues to grow. We welcomed seven new members by application, and four new members by transfer. Four young Friends joined us by birth. Eight of our members have transferred out joining meetings from Ireland to Hawaii. We have held one marriage under the care of meeting and held one memorial service for long-time member Perry Treadwell.

In 2018 we recorded six Friends with leading for ministry. We supported these Friends through appointed anchoring committees.

The Macon Worship group continues under our tender care. We rejoice with them on the growth of their group. They recently began meeting 2nd and 4th first day in a space rented from a downtown Unitarian Church.

Care and Counsel committee continues to provide structure to our pastoral responsibilities. We are now contacting newcomers who sign the guest book with follow-up emails. Using online apps we have become better at coordinating meal assistance for those with health issues and those with new babies. We have provided financial assistance to members and attenders who need short term support. To fulfill our mission of holding our members and attenders under our care, the two Care Quilts have been provided to seven individuals in the last year to feel close during times of illness.

For many years we have been blessed by individuals gifted in service who have fulfilled paid staff roles in the meeting. Both our Friend in Residence and Office Manager are moving on to new opportunities. This is a time of transition as we seek how best to meet the challenges of today.

The creative tensions we continue to feel in the meeting are a sign of spiritual vitality. New concerns and the animation of long-standing concerns provide a source of vitality, stretching the edges of growth.