

## STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT FOR 2021

Atlanta Friends Meeting

Lissa Place, Clerk

approved at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business on March 20, 2022

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If we thought 2020 was a year like no other, 2021 was a year that felt like it went on longer than any of us expected. With the pandemic raging through the country for most of the year, we have learned to function in a new way. We are holding the Meeting, and ourselves in the light as we consider a future that is different, but still maintains our core beliefs as Quakers.

We have worked hard to support one another through this troubling time and have done our best to remain a vibrant community despite these circumstances. Although we were weary from the pandemic and all the changes it has brought to our lives, we continued to be there for one another. We have reached out to members and attenders in need and when needed, we have provided financial assistance.

We have become more adept at technology this year, providing hybrid worship as well as many workshops via Zoom to continue our work in activism as well as grow as a Meeting. The decision to reopen for in person worship came from Ministry and Worship, Care and Counsel, and other committees. Ultimately, it was Ministry and Worship who brought the recommendation for a hybrid worship to Business Meeting, recommending separate zoom and in person meetings except for 3rd First Day. Ministry and Worship struggled deeply to come up with a plan that would meet the needs of our community. We learned that friends have different understandings of safety – what is safe? One friend made a distinction between connection and presence, zoom provided the richness of the connection, seeing each other's faces, but being in physical proximity in the meetinghouse provided a deeper sense of presence.

The Working Group on the Use of the Meetinghouse, the group charged with determining COVID safety measures for the Meetinghouse, planned how to create hybrid worship. They learned from a survey that Friends were interested in continuing a Zoom option even when we returned to in person worship. They charged Administration committee to develop appropriate technology to allow this to happen, thanks to the expertise of Aaron Ruscetta. The committee developed a protocol for safe attendance, and a protocol for what to do if one of our members tested positive for COVID after attending the meetinghouse.

We were all set to start, until the CDC changed its guidance in the face of the Delta variant surge, and the Working Group recommended postponing the reopening. Instead, we held a listening session on August 1 to share our thinking, and to hear the concerns from the community. Members shared very different opinions of what was appropriate and safe, as well as very real mental health needs in the second year of the pandemic. It became clear that the cost of not opening was greater than the cost of opening. Because of feedback it had heard about concerns that the Meeting would split into one Zoom and one In Person Meeting, Ministry and Worship changed its recommendation. Because our Meeting treasures community, Ministry and Worship proposed reopening on Aug 29 as a hybrid meeting for a one month trial period. When we started in person First Day Meetings, we laid down the midweek worships on Monday and Thursday, retaining an in person Wednesday morning meeting.

The hybrid meeting format has been very successful. We were surprised at how easy it was to set up and were able to use mostly donated materials to start our hybrid experiment. We approved Ministry and Worship's recommendation to extend our hybrid experiment until June of 2022. Our meeting for Worship now has a "tech table" where someone makes sure the Zoom screen functions properly. Our technology team is now working to make the sound in Meeting more easily heard on Zoom.

The Working Group on the Use of the Meetinghouse continues to monitor both the pandemic in the face of the Omicron surge, and changes in CDC recommendations, making changes such as providing N95 masks.

So many of the things we did in 2021 had to be done with the pandemic in mind, but despite that, we functioned relatively normally. Throughout the Meeting, all committees made the decision to meet in person or by Zoom, depending on the needs of its members. We have had hybrid Meeting for Business since September, and some committees have been using this hybrid option all year. Zoom continues to provide blessings as it welcomes Friends from far away, as well as Friends who are unable to get to Meeting under these, or in some cases, any circumstances.

Ministry and Worship found ways to provide opportunities to introduce and nurture our spirituality. In January, Ministry and Worship held a forum on Queries as a Quaker Spiritual Practice using zoom breakout rooms for worship sharing and reflection. Later Ministry and Worship held a forum on spiritual nurture groups, introducing the meeting to these practices and inviting those interested to join an existing group. In October, we held a forum on membership, exploring what draws us to meeting, hearing what membership means to two friends, and describing the process of membership. Our Adult First Day class continues to meet weekly and each month a Friend shares their spiritual journey.

Last year, Ministry and Worship began work exploring our understanding of reparations and right relations. We have been gratified with how this work connects with others in meeting, which led to the formation of The Ad Hoc Reparations and Right Relations group, started by Ministry and Worship with representatives from Friends of Color, Quakers for Racial Equality, and the Committee Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting. We have developed our understanding of this concern through a series of online educational forums with expert guest speakers. The first forum focused on historical foundations and the second on réparations efforts by a wide variety of groups. Atlanta Meeting has now approved a minute on Reparative Justice and Reconciliation, which is on the AFM website and has been sent to all the Meetings in SAYMA. We look forward to hearing how it is received by other members of SAYMA.

In this time of loss and isolation, treasured Friends important to the life of the meeting have died since our last report. We treasure the memories and witness of Tom Kenworthy (12/28/20), Suzan Kenworthy (9/6/2021), Gene Singletary (2/1/2021), Freer Jarvis (4/25/2021), Renda McCaughan (7/26/2021), Rick Martinson (2/8/2021), and Robert (Bob) Westervelt (10/2021). Due to Covid, only one Memorial Service was coordinated by Care and Counsel in 2021.

We welcomed one new member and have held the ministries of four members in the Meeting's care. They have asked for their ministries to be taken under the care of the meeting and anchored in our spiritual accountability practices. This comes from an understanding that Atlanta Meeting recognizes that all Friends are called to minister to each other and to the world. In southern Georgia, Macon Worship Group continues under our care. Holding virtual Meetings for Worship of a small group has created challenges, but Friends remain faithful.

For our youngest Friends, First Day School has continued throughout the year. Teens and Young Adult Friends have been meeting separately for zoom calls. In-Person Class was held from 10-11am from August to December. Families were encouraged to join the first 15 minutes of worship (on Zoom or In Person) as has been the practice in our Meeting. Themes and lessons included Trusting and Listening for God, Becoming Community, and From Darkness to Light. Teachers' lesson plans were focused on the Old Testament this year. In the Spring, a dozen families participated in zoom calls, averaging four families a call, and several families participated in the SAYMA Play care Junior

Virtual Spring and Yearly Meeting sessions. In the fall, several families attended in person. Twenty-Five children, ages two to late teens came in person, with an average of five families per week.

Religious education outlined guidelines used for childcare and First Day School [FDS] activities this fall, at the time when most children were not eligible for the Covid-19 vaccination. All children ages 2-11 were required to wear masks while in the meetinghouse and also while using the AFM playground, which they did successfully.

Adults in contact with children as teachers, doorkeepers, or childcare volunteers were fully vaccinated, and wore masks. Adults in the First Day School classrooms and nursery maintained a physical distance as is reasonable for the care of children. The AFM nursery was open weekly, and childcare was provided for committee meetings as well as Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, though few used the nursery. In zoom class and in person, children and families were gathered and centered in worshipful learning. Youth shared joyfully of their lives and connection to one another. Children made bouquets of flowers to give to adults during fellowship after meeting, and a service learning project of making wreaths for AFM community in exchange for donations and pledge of food donations to Casa Alterna guests at AFM.

Our quest for racial justice continued this year, as several groups in the Meeting were involved in this work. Quakers for Racial Equality (QRE) had a robust year. Monthly Zoom meetings became opportunities for having speakers from across the country to address topics in the areas of reparative justice, state and national issues, as well as support for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The Meeting enjoyed guest speakers from the Black Quaker Project, Housing Justice in Decatur/Dekalb, and Stolen Wealth Returns, an organization that paid off student loans for Black social justice organizers. We utilized experts from inside our community for talks on Racial Disparities in Women's Health, Educating Students about Systemic Racism: Truth Telling in Schools, Climate Change: Environmental Justice with Green Friends and QRE, and Asylum Seekers and Migrants in a Era of Mass Detention: A Georgia Perspective. We also learned about Voting Rights and its effect on Voter Suppression, and are preparing AFM to write a land acknowledgement to the Indigenous People who used to live where our building now stands.

In addition to all those programs, QRE staffed a weekly "Virtual Literature Table" as well as a monthly "Listening Ear," for concerns around racism. QRE also wrote two public statements and used them to educate and advocate for others on these issues. One of these statements was to support schools that are teaching about systemic racism, and the second one was to stand with Asian Americans, as there has been so much violence directed toward them. Links to these documents are at the end of this report.

QRE also collaborated with members of Social Concerns, Friends of Color, Ministry and Worship, and Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting on drafting two Minutes related to anti-racism that were approved by the whole Meeting. One was a minute on Reparative Justice and Reconciliation, and the other was a Minute on Hatred, Racist Violence, and Domestic Terrorism. Links to these Minutes are also at the end of this report.

Committee for Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting (CURAFM) was also very active this year. CURAFM focused its work on the Ad Hoc Anti-Racist Policies and Procedures Group. This Ad Hoc group was formed to write policies and Procedures to proactively address institutional racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting. We decided that the work of this Ad Hoc committee encompassed the goals of CURAFM, so we used our energy to organize the work for the Ad Hoc Group, rather than focusing on additional committee work. The Ad Hoc group was formed in late 2020 with representatives from Friends of Color, Care and Counsel, Religious Education, Social Concerns, Quakers for Racial Equality and Administration Committee. One of the representatives was also on Ministry and

Worship. Our first task was to review all policies in existence related to discrimination or anti-racism from our Meeting and some from other Meetings. We determined that there was no policy for adequately handling racist incidents between individuals at the Meeting, and so we set out to write one. With this goal in mind, we spent 8 months drafting a document which was then distributed to the wider community, including Friends of Color, for feedback. We want to be sure that we have accurately placed the needs of the person who was harmed by the racism in the center of the policy. The ad hoc committee looks forward to using the feedback to rewrite parts of the draft and will bring the final document to Business Meeting in 2022.

CURAFM also led Let's Talk About Race, a monthly forum to discuss race and racism that continued through 2021. They are now using Ibram Kendi's book, [How to Be An Anti-Racist](#) as a guide and source of prompts for their discussions. They plan to pick a book with a different perspective to follow once this one is completed.

In 2021, Casa AlternA welcomed 360 asylum-seeking guests into the meetinghouse! Here, guests were welcomed as friends and provided with simple but gracious acts of hospitality including meals, clothing, a hot shower, a warm bed, and a listening ear. This ministry is under the care of the Meeting and is stewarded by its Friend-in-Residence, Anton Flores-Maisonet. The ministry also has 501c3 non-profit status as Casa AlternA.

Scores of volunteers, both directly affiliated with the Meeting and beyond, offered accompaniment to people from over 50 different countries both at the Atlanta airport and at other major hubs of transportation. This work of welcome this past year involved over 30 members and attenders of the Meeting in both direct and indirect acts of service and solidarity. Additionally, for the past two months students from the Friends School of Atlanta have provided us with a weekly supply of sack lunches for our airport companions.

Thousands of asylum seekers have been assisted this past year at the airport with the 360 guests who stayed at the meetinghouse being the remnant who needed typically one night's lodging while awaiting their plane, bus, or ride to take them to their new home in the United States.

Social Concerns Committee was involved in many capacities this year. This committee includes several groups, such as QRE and Casa AlternA, as well as Green Friends, Women's Justice, and Alternatives to Violence Program. Here are brief reports from some of the other groups involved in the Social Concerns Committee.

Our Alternatives to Violence Program led a zoom workshop in LaGrange, Georgia, and is planning an advanced workshop there in January of 2022.

The Restorative Justice Committee works closely with the Restorative Justice Group of Georgia. RJGG had several educational programs this year in addition to working with Dekalb County officials to help establish restorative court and school programs.

The Banner Committee for Social Concerns made several professionally looking nonpartisan banners they used to encourage people in low voting and often low income areas around Atlanta to vote in the 2021 senatorial run off in January, as well as other elections. They also made a banner announcing the new solar panels that will be installed in the Meetinghouse.

The Green Friends group has been strong throughout the pandemic, both in spirit and in numbers. In addition to helping with the meetinghouse solar panel project, Green Friends sponsored several virtual forums, such as "Drawdown Georgia", which identifies ways to decrease the state's greenhouse gas emissions. The group's members also continue to work closely with Citizens' Climate Lobby.

In the area of Women's Justice, Social Concerns presented a letter requesting support for Women and Children to Business Meeting. This letter was distributed to the wider community to gain awareness of the worldwide strife that Women and Children face at this time.

Another group that worked beyond the walls of our meeting in 2021 was the Atlanta Advocacy Team of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). That group continued to focus this year on lobbying our Georgia members of Congress to support repeal of the 2002 Iraq AUMF (Authorization for the Use of Military Force). They were energized when our Congressional members all became co-sponsors and the House of Representatives passed the repeal. Next year they will lobby to end the U.S. involvement in the Saudi War against Yemen.

The Team grew stronger in several ways and is now a dedicated group of 15. They expanded their media presence, with postings on social media, a press release, a feature story and by developing a list of newspapers in major Georgia cities. They even had a team member write a song, "Get it to the Floor!" which they sent to both senators. FCNL loved this creative approach and opened the national TEAM SUMMIT with the song! Three hundred activists around the country from 127 Teams in 47 states were inspired by this song. We continue to lobby to shift foreign policy in the direction of greater reluctance to get involved in endless conflict.

Our Quaker Voluntary Service group had a good 2021. This is the 10th year of AFM's service as host meeting for a Quaker Voluntary Service (QVS) cohort. The Local Support Committee (LSC) is charged with helping QVS and the local Coordinator. The committee has progressed into active engagement in a set of queries focused on equity, and is committed to explore these conversations more deeply over time. Some important topics have been in consideration of race (implications of Whiteness), class (affordability of site placements and diversifying options), and gender (use pronouns).

The current residence of the Fellows continues to be in the Grant Park neighborhood. Meals and house maintenance are mainstays of support from the LSC, as is actively considering other opportunities to connect, build relationships, and provide essential QVS programming content. This year has included an increase in hybrid (virtual and in-person) occasions.

Nominating Committee worked hard to get back on its feet in 2021. With multiple changes in leadership, the committee struggled to get traction, but still got their work done with the committed work of many strong committee members as well as a past Nominating Committee Clerk's help. They look forward to a more stable 2022.

Our building received a lot of work in 2021. The shingles on the Meetinghouse roof were all replaced with new shingles in May, due in part to the planned solar panel array installation. The project, initially proposed by Green Friends, was approved by the Meeting, and installation is expected to begin as soon as possible. Other completed Meetinghouse projects included repainting of parts of the building, pressure washing of sidewalks around the building; playground mulch spreading. We also installed new metal furniture for the rear patio and the back door areas to allow for more outdoor seating.

Our Young Friends Program Coordinator (YFPC) since 2009, left their position this summer. An ad hoc group was formed to review both the current YFPC job description and the current YFPC Support Committee description before a new person is hired. We would like for that person to do more work with 3rd through 8th graders, in addition to SAYF .

Renters, including a school, gradually returned to the Meetinghouse in 2021. Our Friend-in-Residence agreed at the request of the Administration Committee to serve a 3rd year through July 2022.

The Landscaping Committee continued to work with others on the lower area pathway behind the playground to inhibit invasive plant growth, create a walkway and meditation area, and spread more mulch.

Friends continued to enjoy the Ferguson Cabins, a property in Northern Georgia, with record use again in 2021. The committee conducted regular maintenance and improvements to the property. The cabins committee asked the Meeting to support them in a legal issue related to a proposed commercial development of the property adjacent to the cabin. Meeting for Business approved signing onto this case to support our neighbors around the lake. The committee has been working with others in the Meeting to address legal issues and will continue to report to Business Meeting as there are developments. The Committee is looking into having an internet calendar set up so Friends can view Cabins availability with actual scheduling continuing to be made by contacting the scheduler.

Our community has survived and thrived in 2021. We have worked hard to keep our spirits up, and we have asked ourselves, how do we remain vital, faithful, and prophetic in these times? Even so, we are eager to resume Friendly Eights and Welcome Dinners, as well as coffee hour and potlucks. We can only hope that 2022 will bring these things.

Links:

**Quakers for Racial Equality Statements:**

**Supporting Schools Teaching about Systemic Racism (7/14/21)**

[http://atlantaquakers.org/\\_site\\_pdf\\_docs/QRE-SupportingSchoolsTeachingRacism-20210714.pdf](http://atlantaquakers.org/_site_pdf_docs/QRE-SupportingSchoolsTeachingRacism-20210714.pdf)

**Standing with Asian Americans (3/26 2021)**

[http://atlantaquakers.org/\\_site\\_pdf\\_docs/QRE\\_Stand\\_With\\_Asian\\_Americans\\_3.pdf](http://atlantaquakers.org/_site_pdf_docs/QRE_Stand_With_Asian_Americans_3.pdf)

**Atlanta Friends Meeting 2021 Minutes Related to Anti-Racism**

**Minute on Reparative Justice and Reconciliation (Minute 8/15/2021:03)**

[http://atlantaquakers.org/\\_site\\_pdf\\_docs/Minute\\_on\\_Reparative\\_Justice-20210815.pdf](http://atlantaquakers.org/_site_pdf_docs/Minute_on_Reparative_Justice-20210815.pdf)

**Minute on Hatred, Racist Violence, and Domestic Terrorism (2/21/2021-01)**

[http://atlantaquakers.org/\\_site\\_pdf\\_docs/Minute\\_on\\_Racist\\_Hatred\\_&\\_Violence-20210221.pdf](http://atlantaquakers.org/_site_pdf_docs/Minute_on_Racist_Hatred_&_Violence-20210221.pdf)