

Atlanta Friends Meeting
STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT FOR 2022
as approved at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business on March 19, 2023

Dear Friends,

The past year has felt to many like a year of recovery. After two years of pandemic restrictions our community slowly began reuniting in the Meeting House at the end of 2021. As Friends felt ready and able to join in-person worship our numbers shifted from more appearing on Zoom to more appearing in the Meeting room. Our faithfulness to one another throughout this long transition was held in tender care by many committees and individuals working together to attend to our physical and spiritual health and wellbeing. We thank the Working Group on the Use of the Meeting House, Ministry and Worship, Care and Counsel, Administration, and Religious Education committees, and our Friend in Residence and Office Coordinator.

Attending in-person Meeting at the start of 2022 required masking and contact tracing sign-ins. Over the year, following guidance from the CDC, this shifted to optional masking, the reintroduction of coffee hour in April, and potlucks in October. We had new attenders at almost every Meeting for Worship who were welcomed by greeters and an updated information sheet. A new informal group of Young Adult Friends is endeavoring to build community through monthly get togethers. There is tangible joy in our spiritual fellowship with each other. As with all joys, there come challenges and we recognize with our growing numbers in worship, we can be challenged with our different understandings of vocal ministry. We hold this challenge among others as we strive to be sensitive to the promptings of Spirit.

In May, on the recommendation of Ministry and Worship we agreed to extend the hybrid Meeting format, which had been working well, for the foreseeable future. This format has allowed homebound and distant Friends to continue worshipping with us. With this approval comes our commitment to attend to challenges related to the use of technology during Meetings for Worship.

While First Day School [FDS] continued all year, the Religious Education committee kept a close eye on the wellbeing of young Friends. RE guidelines required volunteers in FDS to be vaccinated and mask throughout 2022, as well as maintain a significant separation between young Friends and the large Meeting for Worship as a vaccine for children aged 6 months to 11 years was not available until June. It was a joyful celebration to see families with young children returning to meeting in larger numbers in the last months of the year. We also celebrated the addition of three children to our community, one by birth and two by adoption. With the return for families we are faced, once again, with a need for more adult volunteers to walk with our youngest Friends as they seek Spirit in their time together during First Day School.

We also deeply feel the loss of our teens who, many of whom are currently active in Southern Appalachian Young Friends [SAYF] programming, have not returned to Meeting for Worship yet. This absence offers a significant challenge as well as an opportunity to identify the spiritual and social needs of adolescent Friends and their families. We are hopeful that with the hiring of a new Young Friends Program Coordinator and re-starting the AFM Young Friends Support Committee we are building the foundation for a youth program that was too seriously challenged through the pandemic years.

Our spiritual lives were deepened and nourished through the work of Ministry and Worship. Through them we welcomed eight new members by application and one by transfer. Our community is enriched by the recognized ministries of four friends each of whom was supported by an anchoring committee. Our connections were deepened during Adult First Day School and through the ministerial leadership of Mary Ann Downey when eleven Friends shared their Spiritual Journeys and joined our hybrid gathered meeting retreat.

We remembered and were enriched by the lives of Friends who passed. Memorial Meetings for Worship were held under the care of the meeting with the support of Ministry and Worship and Care and Counsel for John Stabler, Cindy Berg, Bruce Burton, Bette Turlington, Peter Schantz, Beth-Ann Buitekant, and Muireann Brennan.

We were surprised in 2022 with the announcement by the national Quaker Voluntary Service [QVS] that they would, “enact a sabbath for the Atlanta QVS program.” We finished

out our 10th year, providing support for the cohort of QVS Fellows. As a community, we mourn this loss while holding the incredible gifts we have received and given in our decade of fellowship with QVS.

We continue in the spiritual work of addressing racism in ourselves, our institutions, and our society with guidance and support from Quakers for Racial Equality [QRE], the Committee for Undoing Racism in the Atlanta Friends Meeting [CURAFM], the ad hoc Committee on

Reparations and Right Relations, and Friends of Color. This year we saw the fruits of this labor in monthly collaborative forums, meetings, and conversations, and after almost 2 years of work, the Meeting's approval of AFM's *Interpersonal Racist Incident Policy*. The ad hoc Committee for Anti Racist Policies and Procedures, that completed this monumental work, was composed of Friends from many committees and was supported by Friends of Color.

We also endeavored to strengthen our spiritual lives by examining our deep history with the enslavement of African American and Indigenous People and the displacement of those Indigenous People from the lands on which we reside. The ad hoc Committee on Reparations and Right Relations along with QRE developed programming this year that supported our continued growth in understanding our varied positions and responsibility to this history.

We see that this work is no longer singularly located in one or two committees but has become central to the life of the meeting through the work of many committees, collaborations within the Meeting and the wider community, the ministry of Casa Alterna, and the work of individual white Friends and Friends of Color. Friends are engaged in conversations through the book group reading books by and about People of Color, the CURAFM monthly dialogue "Let's Talk about Race" and, and SAYMA sponsored racial justice training affinity groups. AFM continues to support and encourage Friends to attend conferences related to recognizing and undoing white supremacy and living into anti-racism as we seek to become an anti-racist, multicultural Meeting.

While we are experiencing a year of recovery and building our spiritual lives with each other, we recognize that the world around us continues to present challenges that pull deeply at our core values and move us to action in ways that often feel urgent. We are living out our Quaker testimonies through the ongoing works of many committees and Friends.

We maintain relationships through committees and individual Friends with organizations and movements doing the work of peace, equity, justice, and stewardship in the local and broader community. Friends can be found serving in the Quaker Religious Education Collaborative [QREC], Friends Committee on National Legislation [FCNL], American Friends Service Committee [AFSC], Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association [SAYMA], Alternatives to Violence Project [AVP], Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights, Decatur Cooperative Ministries, and the Atlanta Forest Defenders among others.

The Social Concerns Committee [SCC], which coordinates the outreach work among many Friends and committees of AFM, recognizes the increased need for action on issues relevant to women and indigenous communities as well as the continued need to counter the national and state movements to disenfranchise voters in 2022. They invested heavily in local groups and activities that lifted up the needs of those most affected by these concerns. With Green Friends they supported a forum as well as the very successful voter access banner-making project. They focused on international concerns related to the wars in Ukraine and in Yemen collaborating with the Atlanta Advocacy Team of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, supporting interstate travel for lobby visits as needed. We approved a minute, presented by SCC, of support for the expansion of medicaid in Georgia.

Casa Alterna, a ministry of radical hospitality welcoming asylum seekers from all over the world to the meetinghouse, continues to minister to those ensnared by a broken U.S. immigration system. With the support of the Atlanta Friends Meeting, and the ministerial leadership of Anton Flores-Maisonet, guests are received as friends and offered accommodations, meals, and other simple necessities. In 2022 over 70 asylum-seeking guests from 13 countries were welcomed into the meetinghouse.

This year we welcomed back meeting groups and renters into the physical space. This return to the week-day bustle in the Meeting House has added to the sense of recovery and renewal for many. As we transitioned back to daily use of our Meeting House, we have invested in our physical home with a much needed replacement for the front doors. After 10 years of work by Green Friends and supported by the Administration Committee solar panels were installed on the roof. We spent much of the year waiting for them to be connected to the power grid which did not happen in 2022. We have held landscaping work days, continuing to build out the trails and spaces in the land behind the Meeting House. We hired a new Property Coordinator who began his work at the end of 2022.

The Ferguson Cabin has continued to be a place of retreat for more than 100 individuals in 2022 and is cared for by a dedicated committee endeavoring to maintain and enhance the physical space and the scheduling system to foster Friends comfort in this important AFM resource. This year AFM supported the community of Murray Cove in its opposition to the commercial development of property adjacent to ours. Ultimately the commercial development was allowed to proceed while maintaining a green buffer between our property and theirs.

In 2022, as in years prior, a common wish arose among Friends as we sought to deepen our spiritual community and address the social, political and environmental challenges of the world. We seek more robust participation in the committee life of the Meeting. We are grateful that the Nominating Committee was fully functional in 2022 helping to match the gifts of many Friends with the needs of the community. Nominating offered a committee fair in the late fall in hopes of engaging more friends in the work of the Meeting. We recognize not all Friends are called to work within AFM's organized committees and we hope that recent attenders as well as established Friends will feel welcome to share their gifts in meaningful ways, offering new perspectives and creating a new generation of leadership within our Friends Meeting.