

Baltimore Monthly Meeting, Homewood Spiritual State of the Meeting Report – 2014

Homewood Friends continues to meet each First Day at 10:30 am for worship. We hold Meeting for business on the first First Day of each month at 12:30PM.

We held a specially called meeting for Worship in Second Month, 2015 to inquire into the spiritual state of our meeting. We posed and answered out of the Silence three questions: *What are our strengths? Where do we need to do work? What do we envision for the future?* Responses during this meeting form the basis of this report.

What are our strengths?

Overall, our Meeting brings a strong sense of worship to our meetings for worship and business and is a gathered community. These strengths are particularly meaningful in light of members' and attenders' concerns over the years that these qualities were not sufficiently present. That our Meeting has unified on reinforcing these foundations in response to concerns speaks to a willingness to listen to concerns and act to change them. This willingness is another strength.

During the specially called meeting for Worship, these messages were shared and speak to the statement above:

- I am aware of a deep wish on the part of many in this meeting to go deeper and deeper into faith together, deeper into community together, and a certain trust that in so doing it will carry us out into the world.
- The statement that we read at the beginning of each Meeting for Worship is an important touch stone to evoke and embrace us for our work in the world.

Quaker worship is based in Silence. It is our experience that each of us has a measure of that radically loving spirit which leads people to live justly and peaceably. In worship we enter into silence in order to feel that spirit of love within and among us, to give ourselves over to it, and to discern what it would have us do.

- The amazing capacity of the individuals in this community to express love and support has carried me through dark times. Love is perhaps our greatest strength.
- a lot of really nice people
- I have experienced both a very small meeting and a very large meeting. This small community is a real community..... less fragmented than a larger meeting.
- The outreach is wonderful, the welcoming is great, the support is there, and the peace is here. These are four areas of strength.
- To me one of the strengths of Homewood is Meeting for Business. When we are conducting business we are holding questions for business *and* each other in the Light. It is a process of divine discernment. It is a joy to watch it unfold.
- My perspective is one of a person who has raised children in this meeting. They identify themselves as Friends and a part of this community. Whatever we are doing here is deep and lasting. This place has given my children roots.

- I appreciate the opportunities in adult religious education to talk about Quaker writings and Quaker beliefs. These opportunities help bring Quakerism into our everyday lives. Experiment with Light is offering us an opportunity to explore together the worship experience of Early Friends. Adult Education leads to spiritual friendships that will ultimately underpin our next steps.
- One of the glorious strengths of Homewood is our glorious facility. Our House and Grounds Committee has lovingly tended our demanding building. It is exciting to see that the building is now in used by so many different groups each week.

Where do we need work?

Overall, our Meeting needs to continue deepening and strengthening our sense of community and to increase our engagement with the broader community in which we live. Our community's children tend to seek community of Young Friends outside of this monthly Meeting as they age. We want to welcome and involve new people in our Meeting and to act more energetically on peace and social justice concerns. People connect when they work toward common goals and projects and we are more visible when we participate in our broader community. So, outreach and action are intertwined. An ongoing challenge is balancing and integrating the work of the Meeting with the work and functioning of our lives outside of the Meeting.

During the specially called meeting for Worship, these messages were shared and speak to the statement above:

- One of the things that attracted me to Homewood in the 1980's was our strong Peace Committee. Now we have only 3 members on a joint committee with Stony Run. This makes me very sad because working for peace is the core of who we are.
- Our complicated building and the basics of running the community take so much of our time and energy. I wonder if we shouldn't stop doing all the work ourselves. Perhaps we should explore paying someone to do more of the work of the running the Meeting so we have more time to do the other things that we want to do.
- We could do a much better job explaining who are, what we are doing and what we believe in.
- We spend a lot of time recording reports in relation to the amount we are doing.

What do we envision for the future?

Overall, we see ourselves increasing the diversity – in age and race, among other qualities – of the active members of our Meeting and our activities around peace and social justice concerns. A common wish is for a larger group of children and Young Friends in our Meeting. We see this aspect of our community growing through programming, outreach and clarifying our sense of what it means to be a Friend and a member of the Homewood Friends Monthly Meeting. We continue to explore how we can and should increase our peace and social witness. Exploring new

ways to use our resources, whether they are the energy and activity of the Meeting community or financial, and clarifying what are the priorities of our Meeting may be ways forward.

During the specially called meeting for Worship, these messages were shared and speak to the statement above:

- People walking by have no idea this is a Quaker meeting house. I think we should find a way to communicate to those on the outside what we do on the inside.... that we worship in a different way than everyone else.
- I hope that we can share Quakerism with the next generation.....that we can welcome and nurture young adults and young families and encourage them to become part of our community.
- We are a very white congregation. We need to change that. We need find ways to embrace and include a more diverse group of people to Homewood.
- As one of only 3 small peace churches I pray that we give more time more work to the Peace Testimony.
- Perhaps social action should not be relegated to a few people but to the Meeting as a whole. Maybe we need a committee of the whole for an entire year.....to commit ourselves to what Quaker action really means.
- We took an important step by going solar with our solar panels. We are steadily divesting from fossil fuel companies. We are excited about continuing to work towards becoming a green congregation.
- Led by the Spirit, we hope to explore creative and bold ideas that will strengthen our outreach and social witness.

Conclusion:

Meetings for worship and business remain the heart of our meeting. Our worship is deep and centered and is enriched by a lively array of adult religious education offerings. Homewood is a small Meeting which many experience as a community in which love abounds. We have invested significant time and money into our beautiful, aging and challenging building, recently resolving some major structural problems and making significant progress in “greening” our building. We are glad to see our Meeting House used most days by multiple Meeting and community groups.

We also identify significant concerns about the condition of our Meeting. Each year this report reflects on the fact that we have too few people to fill too many committees. We are an aging group, having attracted few young adults and young families in the last decade. In comparison to our local urban environment - which is diverse in age and race, among other qualities - we lack diversity. We have identified some significant deficits in terms of our outreach and are finding it challenging to implement a stronger outreach program. We also struggle to provide a

vigorous religious education program for our small group of children. In addition, many of us mourn our lack of an energetic and unified service to peace and justice.

We have faith that as we open ourselves to the workings of the Inward Light that way will open. In the coming year we are committed to uplifting the sense of Spirit we experience in our Meeting, facing our concerns about our Meeting's condition, and exploring creative ideas to invigorate Spirit-led service beyond our doors. As our hearts grow, so will our community.