



Homewood Friends Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report, 2016

We held our annual specially called meeting to assess our spiritual state on 2/12/17. After a period of worship, 45 Homewood members and attenders responded to the following queries: *What are our strengths? Where do we need work? What do we envision for the future of Homewood Friends?* Our children also participated in the process, exploring similar queries in first day school, reporting back to the adult meeting regarding their deliberations. We then invited all who wished to gather for a group photo to send to our legislators. It shows us holding a large banner: “Ban Fracking in Maryland – Homewood Friends Meeting, Baltimore.” We celebrated afterwards with a special luncheon provided by the Meeting.

Below is our discernment on the spiritual condition of Homewood Friends Meeting. Statements in *italics* are direct quotes from participants at our specially called meeting. Different speakers are separated by ellipses (. . . .).

Worship

Average attendance at worship increased over the course of the year to approximately 50 persons per week by the end of the year. We are delighted with an increase in attendance of young adults.

Friends emphasize that our worship is strong. *I treasure the quality of our meeting for worship. It is our central strength. There is a good balance of silence and vocal ministry. ... Our meetings give me a powerful sense of communion.* A relative newcomer to Homewood said that *the collective shared seeking in meeting for worship is deep and powerful.*

One strength is the introductory statement that [continues to be] read near the beginning of meeting for worship that helps new and long-term attenders focus.* Each week one of several worshipers brings floral arrangements to place in the center of our beautiful meeting room; many comment that the flora help them to center in worship.

Another Friend commented that *a real strength here at Homewood is a deep tapping into the experience and inspiration of early Friends*. This has been nourished this year by Homewood's Quaker Book Club's reading of Doug Gwyn's *A Sustainable Life* and Marcelle Martin's *Our Life is Love*.

Community

Friends continue to experience a strong sense of community at Homewood, which our hospitality committee helps sustain by sponsoring a simple lunch following meeting for worship. *This is my treasured community [where] I share art, politics and social activism. [Homewood] is a wonderful place to be nurtured & connected. ... [Here we have] awesome continuity of people working together for a long time and a whole new group of young adults. ... People surprise me by their kindness, their reaching out, the expressions that I don't always expect. [There is] not much gossip or anger.*

In 2016, we created a working group for the arts, drawing on energy from both relative newcomers and existing interest. The working group has hosted several events, including an art exhibition and reception for a long-term member who was moving away and the showing of a movie about refugees that was directed by one of our members. The group also co-sponsored a concert/ fundraiser by Annie Patterson and Peter Blood.

It is noted that *we still need work in getting to know each other better, and to provide more opportunities for fellowship and worship.*

Children

Our nursery for the youngest children is a very special place, nurtured by a dedicated, long-time staff member and two teens from our Meeting. Our nursery is an embracing space filled with toys and books, love and limits.

Our first day school remains small, with approximately 5-8 children participating each week. We remain pleased by the work of our first day school teacher, a young adult Friend who grew up in Baltimore Yearly Meeting. During spring semester the curriculum focused on Quaker history and in the fall on the life of Jesus.

After their special meeting our children reported on the following:

- What do we like? *Simple lunch, service projects, art, meeting friends, helping people and playing*
- What do we want to change? *Try different foods, more diversity of people, and more craft projects*
- Vision for the future: *More outdoor activities, picking up litter, singing at nursing home, and ice cream socials!*

Business/Committee Work

Our meetings for business are conducted monthly in a spirit of love and respect for each other. Average attendance is 19. *The same relatively small group of individuals attend.* In 2016, we were the grateful recipients of two persons who transferred their membership to Homewood and one new member.

Our nominating committee is examining the health of our committees, carefully discerning needs of committees, and identifying individuals with the talents and temperaments that match those needs. It remains somewhat difficult to fill committees. Two committees were moribund for part of the year, and two more committees—trustees and stewardship &

finance—merged to good effect. We have attracted few new members to serve on the member-only committees.

One Friend commented that we *don't have ministers, believing that each of us can serve in ministry at some point. How do we learn of the gifts & passions of the persons who are new? How do we become even more flexible, to incorporate what God may be sending us through new people?*

Over the past couple of years we have developed a flexibility which Quakers aren't always known for, where people who have leadings can, after seasoning, move forward. Examples include our new working group for the arts, the Green Organizing Action Team (GOAT), and our adult religious education program. The flexibility allows us to live more easily in this fast-paced time and express the things we want to express in a timely way. One Friend commented that for us to move forward deeply in faith and action that *we should consider whether Meeting for Business is the best method to discern way forward for every issue.*

Our house and grounds committee continues to lovingly maintain our very large, aging and handsome meeting house. *The space itself, which is no small task to maintain, moves me.* We are glad to report that multiple groups are using the meeting house; it seems to be always bustling.

Our meeting administrator recently retired and we are delighted to have hired a long-time meeting member to serve in this role.

Work in the World

We continue to be part of the joint Baltimore Quaker Peace & Justice Committee with Stony Run. We are pleased to report that the Homewood portion of this committee has been more active this year.

In January, we sponsored a talk by U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings on “One Baltimore” as part of our response to the death of Freddie Gray and the unrest that overtook our city. Over 200 community members filled our Meeting House to hear Elijah Cummings’ view of the problems and what we can do singly and collectively. At the reception afterwards various local Quaker efforts were featured.

We continue our weekly vigil in front of the Meeting House, on Fridays at 5 pm, holding signs that say “Black Lives Matter,” “We are All One People,” and “Love Your Neighbor (No Exceptions).” Focused on solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, the vigil has drawn consistent participation since 2015, although sometimes just two or three people. Those passing by often seem grateful with enthusiastic honks and waves. One especially cold evening a thankful young woman stopped and brought us each steaming hot cups of coffee.

Stony Run and Homewood Friends participate in the weekly court watch and have shared their observations with the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform and an expert at the University of Maryland Law School. *Going to court has made me stronger and broadens peace and justice in our city.*

We offered “Peaceable City,” an 11-part series on causes and responses to violence that was attended by 2-3 dozen Friends and non-Quakers, newcomers and long-time-members. The week-night series made use of TED talks as springboards for discussion.

In November, Homewood hosted a well-attended viewing of a film on fracking in Maryland for Maryland Quakers. This resulted in the formation of an ad hoc group of Quakers from several meetings to advocate for a fracking ban in the 2017 legislative session.

One Friend commented at our meeting that it is *powerful to belong to a group that cares about justice and empowering those who don't have power*. Another described an *extraordinary individual and collective tenderness at Homewood, equanimity of taking in bad news as trivial as a hangnail or lost jacket and as magnificently awful as a war or personal calamity*. *Tender equanimity is not a familiar thing outside our meeting. We need to work on feeling that tenderness as a strength. Our city needs this strength from us.*

Outreach and Inclusion

*Several years ago, at the Spiritual State of the Meeting session we seemed to come to the conclusion that Homewood Meeting would die with us as we age because we were attracting so few new people. Recently, it has been amazing to see numerous young adults coming and some staying. It makes my heart sing to share what was so important to me as a young adult*One participant in our specially called meeting said, *As a newcomer I am grateful to feel so welcomed.*

Particularly since the 2016 election, we have had an increase in attendance at worship. This presents an opportunity and a challenge. Most of the new attenders are also new to Quakerism. We currently lack sufficient educational opportunities to orient newcomers to Quaker faith and practice. We also lack effective ways to incorporate newcomers into the life of our meeting. *[As a newcomer] who doesn't know much about all the committees [I need] to know how to plug myself in.*

We have a significantly improved website which may be helpful in attracting new attenders and is much more useful for regulars.

We remain a mostly white community. It seems that we attract some people of color to our meetings for worship, but few stay. To change this will require intention and creativity.

One Friend expressed an aspiration: *I hope that as we build our family, as we grow, that we become a little more bold, a little less shy, to be a beacon on the hill, to not hide our light under a bushel.*

Conclusion

Worship, the center of our community life, is grounded and deeply nourishing. Love abounds. We are acting more in concert to address concerns related to peace, justice and the environment. We envision our collective work in the world expanding in response to these challenging times. We are thrilled to see a growing new group of seekers at Homewood. We are also aware that it is critically important at this time that we develop and implement strategies to engage newcomers in learning about and experiencing Quaker faith and practice and involving them in the life of Homewood Friends Meeting.

* The following Introductory Statement is read at the beginning of each Meeting for Worship at Homewood: *The Quaker experience is that each of us has a measure of that radically loving spirit which guides us 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. Sometimes during worship, that spirit will lead one or more of us to offer vocal ministry. If you are so led today, please stand and speak loudly and clearly, allowing a period of silence after any previous message.*