

## **Second Reading: State of the Meeting Report Presented by Ministry and Worship Committee**

At Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, we live our Quaker faith in worship. Friends attend Meeting for Worship in person or on Zoom, at Fifteenth Street, at Pendle Hill, and other Meetings. We worship silently in the spirit of peace. Our choice to continue meeting in a hybrid format was a choice to be inclusive. Some emphasize the importance of their attending worship every Sunday, no matter what. Some noted a daily spiritual practice of regular silence, waiting worship, or prayer. Some report feeling more able to focus on worship now they are retired. One Friend reported, "I try to be open to messages both in Meeting and otherwise."

We spend time considering Quaker testimonies, advices, and queries, and reading Quaker-related books and materials. Some of us work on changing our habits to better adhere to Quaker advices. One Friend reads the advices and queries monthly, reflecting on them as an individual and for our meeting as a whole.

We serve on Quaker committees, do outreach, and carry out witness activities. One Friend on Nominating aims to introduce themselves to new members and attenders, in part to better carry out their committee's work. We take service seriously, and sometimes find it challenging. We acknowledge the difficulty of keeping a Meeting going during these exhausting times. We are a small group, and many are worn out. There are too many meeting functions and not enough people currently participating to fill them. A difficulty in staffing Meeting committees that already existed pre-pandemic has been exacerbated by a decline in participation. There is also now a split between those who can participate online vs. in-person, which means that there are fewer Friends to carry out service in-person, whether that means formal committee roles or informal roles like simply fellowshiping with our community and greeting and getting to know newcomers in the Meetinghouse. We are open to change, learning, and adapting, and at the same time, acknowledge the need for more support for one another and for the Meeting.

We try to educate ourselves and one another on how to care for the earth. Friends in Unity with Nature Committee seeks "to find ways to stay close to nature. We understand ourselves and all humans to be natural beings. We meet to share experiences, knowledge, poetry, and prose that deepens this understanding of our inner beings as both spiritual and natural. We also seek to encourage members and attenders to treat other creatures as kin and to be knowledgeable about crises involved in climate change."

We educate ourselves about and try to fight for social change. The Peace and Social Justice Committee educates the Meeting about issues concerning violence and injustice, including both domestic concerns such as guns, and the inequality and injustice of the prison system, and international concerns such as the conflicts and suffering in Yemen, Ukraine, Palestine, and other countries, bloated military spending, and the ongoing nuclear threat. In our Ad Hoc Committee on Racial Justice we discuss important and challenging readings, and attend exhibits and theatrical productions concerned with historical and present injustices. Peace and Social

Justice Committee writes, “We strive to walk cheerfully over the earth, grateful for our friendships, our animal companions, and our material comfort which we are always aware exceeds that of many throughout our country and the world. We acknowledge that some of this comfort endangers our precious natural world and all creatures, human and non-human, who inhabit it.”

For some of us, activism is a way of living our faith. One Friend noted, “I put my body in the places where wrong is happening. There is no division between the contemplative and the activist. It all comes from worship.” We participate in vigils with local, national, and international concerns, including our long-standing Vigil for Peace held on the first Sunday of each month from 1:00-2:00 at Washington Square Park.

We share our money, energy, and time with this community and with Quaker and other organizations. As a Meeting we gratefully support organizations related to our Witness Committees (Peace and Social Justice, Friends in Unity with Nature, Arts, and Shelter) using interest from an anonymous donation made long ago. As individuals, we also help other individuals, either Quakers or those in the community, by donating money, items, and time. We also carry out individual service in the interest of social change: one Friend “was part of a group that rehabbed a derelict building condemned by the city and transformed it into a viable self-managed urban co-op which has been functioning for nearly 40 years.”

We seek to create and foster the Meeting’s community through communication channels like the Communication Committee’s Newsletter. We build community by serving in various host functions in our in-person and Zoom Meetings for Worship. Friends also connect to share their faith and community via social media. We also connect with larger Quaker organizations and groups of Friends through Powell House, Pendle Hill, New York Quarterly Meeting, and New York Yearly Meeting.

We try to live our Quaker Faith in daily life. One Friend writes, “I listen; I obey; I connect with Friends and with those who are not Friends; I seek a way forward that preserves life and the sacredness of my fellow human beings.” Some of us use consensus or other Quaker practices in our work outside of the Quaker world, including workplace committees and with our students. Another notes they try to be patient with others and seek “That of God” in them.

We focus on care for ourselves also. One Friend mentions “Keeping a sense of calmness and stillness, attention on my awareness, and dedication.” Another mentions, “Keeping myself healthy, productive and in balance and then sharing with others.”

Some of us feel we are not fully living up to our Quaker Faith, in our interactions with others in the world, in our adherence to our Meeting’s advices. One Friend said, “I don’t know how to be a Quaker in an UnQuakerly world.” Another struggles to adhere to the Meeting’s advice about making dietary choices that reflect our concern for animals and the environment.

But ultimately, we are here, and we are persistent in this challenging world. A Friend writes, “I show up when things get hard. I listen to God. I keep moving. I have faith that it's possible for the world to be better. I am exhausted by the times. Just to keep the meeting going is overwhelming. Having a spiritual journey at all is challenging. It wasn't always that way. I reach out and build community.”