



Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends

Caln Quarter: State of the Meeting Reports Received

Written on: JULY 27, 2021

Chambersburg Monthly Meeting

Chambersburg Friends Meeting is a small meeting placed a fair distance from Philadelphia. Up until the pandemic we have had a core of members and attenders, birthright and convinced, old and a few middle-aged, and several children who make rare appearances with parents. If any of us attend a Quarterly or Yearly event, numbers present on a Sunday are diminished. Yet the Spirit of the Meeting holds in its mysterious ways.

This pandemic has challenged us to continue by taking advantage of virtual opportunities with zoom. Nearly 1/2 of regular attenders took that advantage. Others preferred to wait. We have been fortunate to have new faces who have found us on our website and have been present on Sundays including a Worship Group in Perry County and a Friend in Boyertown. This has to do not only with technology but with a desire to be present, to learn about Quakers, nourish spirits, and to find that quiet place within. As several of us were vaccinated, the need to be back together with those “left out” became essential. We called upon talents within and outside our meeting to initiate Zoom meetings and more recently hybrid meetings.

Several who found Zoom difficult now can come to meeting provided they have had vaccinations and continue to mitigate Covid with masks and distancing. We await a greater population of people vaccinated to override some of the hesitancy toward attending.

We have maintained a connection to the Mennonite community by volunteering at a relief center preparing health and hygiene kits for other troubled countries. Four years ago an organization was formed named *Community Uniting!* Its mission has been to bring differences of ethnicity, race, and religion together and have conversations to reduce tensions and promote understanding. Out of this endeavor, there has been: showing up at protests; joining racial reconciliation forums; having booths on Market Day; and recognition of businesses and social agencies for their kindness and service to the community. We have had a walk through our black neighborhoods and learned of their struggle in this above the Mason Dixon line town. A SHARE (Supporting Healthcare and Restaurants and Education) system is set up to donate meals through restaurants to health care workers and teachers and custodians. Over 2 thousand meals have been distributed. Some Meeting members have added to these efforts. “The pandemic has made me appreciate that spirituality resides both in my heart and the shared space between me and my fellow humans.”

There is no escape from how the pandemic has devastated communities, altered how we attend religious service, and made us more desirous of being together. A survey from our meeting shows that a meeting together provides more of the Spirit than being apart. “I feel more disconnected from the Meeting and the world”. “...we roll with our spirituality in all environments.”

An offshoot, however, has been a mid-week meeting (now zoom) where Spiritual literature is discussed. Along with the discussion is a bond of friendship and community and a nourishment of the Spirit within. “Some feel there has been a growth through quiet reflection at home”. “Others see that the zoom meetings (physically and electronically) have been an outreach because of illness or distance”. “I’m interested in trying out in person, partly because I’ve never been to the meeting house and have only met those who worship via zoom”.

“[This] will touch each person in a different way according to how they feel about the virus, how they feel about zoom and technology, how they feel about the importance of gathering together, and what their spirituality means to them. I do not think these are easy answers”.

Downingtown Monthly Meeting

Due to the pandemic, we had to collect answers to the queries concerning the Spiritual State of the Meeting virtually. This impacted the response rate and resulted in a much lower number of responses than we have received in previous years.

We presented the three queries given to us by PYM to our monthly meeting via a survey to our Google Group. We asked each person to reply to the queries and one additional query asking 'If there is anything related to the Spiritual State of our Meeting that you feel was not addressed in the Queries below, please include that also.'

We received 18 responses. Not everyone answered every query. The first query received 17 responses, the second query received 16, the third query received 17, and the final query received 7 responses.

Query #1: What have been the joys and the learnings of this past year and where have we encountered challenges?

This query received 17 responses. Most centered around learning how to be together virtually. That was listed as a joy, as a learning and as a challenge. Some felt that having a divided meeting for worship reduced our coherence as a meeting; others were happy that we could meet and were surprised at how effective a zoom meeting for worship could be. One person discovered that they love meeting outside and found it "transformational, learning to embrace the physical elements rather than brace against inclement weather." (The outdoor meeting for worship continued all winter; it ended early one very sleety morning.) Several lifted up having members from afar rejoin us virtually and having new people find and join us. Several celebrated that we could continue many meeting traditions via zoom: sewing group, book group, our Christmas program and others. Our meeting for business has continued on zoom with no diminution of attenders, although it's a little more difficult for the clerk to see everyone and to make sure all voices are heard.

One person found the loss of hugs to be very challenging. “It was so very difficult to see someone hurting and not be able to embrace them.” A longtime Friend found the phrase “covenant spiritual community” unfamiliar and irritating. Another challenge was “our lack of one corporate worship session each Sunday and the loss of the spiritual energy of those not immediately within our chosen worship group.”

Overall, “We continue to hear the heart of love and concern come through vocal ministry. And there is a palpable sense that nascent ideas, revelations, and connections are taking place.”

Query #2: How has our faith supported our social witness?

This query received 16 responses, the second-lowest response rate of the four queries. The responses to this query fell into three categories: social witness in the larger community, ways we sustain our spiritual community, and confusion about the question.

The social witness in the larger community responses referenced our Black Lives Matter vigils after Meeting for worship, Salvation Army meals that we collectively provide, and Meeting’s donations to a local food bank.

The responses that fell into the category of sustaining our spiritual community mentioned hope, faith and love in five of the responses and a willingness to wrestle with big issues (one response).

Two responses expressed confusion over the query.

Query #3: How have our community members supported one another?

This query received 17 responses. It appears that everyone has felt and continues to feel part of the DFM community, especially through the contacts with people in Pastoral Care.

Through the online connections, whether it is online Meeting For Worship, or other virtual events within the Meeting community like Sewing Group, Book Club, or Young Friends, people are still feeling connected to our community. Friends appreciate the various modalities of Meeting for Worship – online, outside the Meeting House, and inside the Meeting House. Friends also are grateful that other Friends are reaching out and connecting to one another through phone calls and emails.

Query #4: If there is anything related to the Spiritual State of our Meeting that you feel was not addressed in the Queries below, please include that also.

There were seven responses to this query. Many addressed Meeting for Worship: gratitude for multiple ways to worship (1), happiness that people from afar can join (1), concern over lack of attendance at Monthly and Quarterly Meetings despite the ease of joining via Zoom (1), and worry about the impact that Zoom Meeting for Worship will have on the Spiritual and financial health of the Meeting after the pandemic is over (1).

Other issues expressed were that the Queries were poorly worded (1), and a concern over how Meeting has been wounded by recent events. One response expressed excitement over new technological changes instituted by our Meeting.

Conclusion: Overall, Downingtown Friends Meeting has found exploring being together virtually as a joy, a learning, and a challenge; we are very grateful for the outreach of our Pastoral Care committee, and are glad that our usual activities of Social Witness have continued throughout the pandemic.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Downingtown Friends Meeting,

Cheryl McVickar, Clerk

Harrisburg Monthly Meeting

How have we sustained our commitment to be a covenant* spiritual community during this past year?

- Corporately, we have been meeting virtually by Zoom and have not missed a single First Day worship since the beginning of the pandemic.
- The Committee on Worship and Spiritual Growth has worked to be sensitive to how our virtual offerings can help us to be in tune with the Spirit to nourish the community.
- We are responsible individually to be present on a regular basis. It helps when those who can't attend worship let others know their circumstances and if they are in need.
- *Women's Group* continued in a virtual setting and has served as a vehicle for social connection.
- We've held a nightly 7 to 7:30pm worship which has helped to maintain and perhaps build social connections for the few who regularly participate. The nightly check-ins are reminiscent of traditional faiths that hold a mid-week service. The conversations we have afterward are valuable. If we live alone, that bit of communication may be the only one in a 24-hour period.
- Some Friends participate in the Pendle Hill daily worship group which may have 90 to 175 people. Steven Riddle (karmically gifted) gives wonderful messages during these. All these virtual offerings both from within and outside our Meeting allow us to dip into the Spiritual waters much more often than before.

What have been the joys and the learnings of this past year and where have we encountered challenges?

Joys

- We can be innovative in how we use Zoom: For example, instead of shaking hands, we can put our hands out to the edges of our screens and hold hands virtually.

- Zoom has been a wonderful tool: Friends we haven't seen even before COVID now join us regularly through Zoom. Zoom allows us to see each other's faces in a way that we can't when we are in person. We did not shut down. It's a joy the way our Meeting has adapted. Zoom allows us to meet even during bad weather in the winter and we can worship with people outside the immediate area.
- Despite the stress of the pandemic, there has been a lot of kindness and giving going around. Impressed by showing of love received from this community. So much gratitude. It's difficult to express and it is un-ending.
- Worship and Spiritual Growth developed an Adult First Day School series called Points of Light that was offered regularly on Zoom through the fall and winter. It has helped us to get to know each other better. Learning more about each other has worked to deepen the connections in our community.
- When the shutdown first started, it was powerful and comforting to use the technology to connect. Friends were feeling raw, fearful, and uncertain. As time has gone on, we may feel less connected using Zoom. The social aspect is more difficult virtually. One solution would be to do a rise of Meeting voluntary sharing.
- Sitting in the Meetinghouse, even just dropping in when no one is there can be comforting. Although it wouldn't be the same, one virtual solution could be to maintain an open zoom link with the Meeting House as the background. An online calendar could be used to show when the Zoom room would be occupied for committee meetings.
- Friends want to continue a discussion on offering a hybrid meeting once we are in person again. A few hybrid worship sessions in the Meeting room and Zoom have taken place and were successful with the updated internet system. A hybrid Meeting can allow people who can't come in person (illness, weather, etc.) to participate. We can meet outside in warm weather and use internet outside to continue with Zoom.
- Pandemic has highlighted certain words: "Breath" good reminder to be in the moment. "Agency" Zoom has allowed us to have agency in some of our relationships and not prevented us from social involvement. "Kindness" poem

by Naomi Shihab Nye. We have felt the kindness from one another. Kindness has ripple effects. We tell others to pass on the kindness that you receive.

- Now I realise I am about to be able to start a programme of helping other's psychoses to develop into a balanced mystical state and along with ex-prisoners and ex-addicts to provide the ideas for others to transform society.
- Use of Zoom and earphones enables those with impaired hearing to listen and understand messages.

Challenges

- Missing being in the physical presence of Friends.
- We are not addressing the needs of those regular attenders who came in person but are not able or comfortable to meet via Zoom. We are missing their presence. In the warm weather, we've held outdoor Meeting, but this stopped with the winter. It may be time to consider opening the worship room with social distancing. It is important to recognize that because the Spiritual experience of meeting via Zoom is different than in-person, some simply won't choose to meet virtually.
- Screen fatigue for those teleworking every day and attending to family needs can be barriers to participating in all the virtual offerings.
- Being at home has been getting harder – particularly those who live alone – however, time with family has deepened relationships. Zoom doesn't replenish or feed our souls the way physically together doing. We miss the playfulness, discussions, and sharing of food that happens in person.
- It is both a challenge and an opportunity for discussion and brainstorming as to how to convert the Meetinghouse so it is safe to meet in person: installation of a ventilation system, setting up fans, run several portable HEPA air filters, open windows when weather is better, retrofit the ventilation system, continue with masking and social distancing. Consider how many family units/individuals can occupy the Meeting room with social distancing.
- Our outreach has suffered as we are missing the casual dropping in of visitors.

How has our faith supported our social witness?

- We've continued to work on advocacy in collective ways through smaller groups that can connect with each other. The next challenge is how do we take small groups and work in much larger collective ways? Need to hear stories of marginalized people.
- The Harrisburg Friends community has been a calm haven as we've witnessed the different tumultuous and upsetting political events in 2020.
- FCNL committee gathered regularly in person before COVID and the shift to Zoom went relatively smoothly. Zoom allowed more people to join. Confident that we can continue to work on peace and social concerns both inwardly and outwardly. Reasons for meeting will continue even if political situation is slightly less stressful. Issues continue
- Advocacy Team and Clerk of Wider World – Center for Peace and Justice – even when pandemic started, work was able to continue – needs were still there. Through support of the Meeting and additional contributions from members and attenders, we've been able to use our community service fund to help those in need. Being able to use the Meeting's copier helped many clients send necessary paperwork for bills and services.
- The coming together of the meeting under the leadership of Worship and Spiritual Growth, Wider World and a Friend who has made a career in eco-justice and caring for the earth to create an eco-justice minute and plan that will shape our direction as we move forward.

How have our community members supported one another?

- Friends expressed such strong gratitude for the virtual meeting while in quarantine.
- Despite not having a paid pastor as with a traditional church, we have been doing a fairly good job of providing support for each other during this time.
- The year has been a struggle, but some expressed that they didn't think they could have made it through without the support of this community both with tangible support and with virtual connection.

- Couples group has met regularly on Zoom. For these 5 couples, the regular monthly Zoom meetings have helped to deepen this group. It has also allowed families with children to participate without needing to procure babysitters.

Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is

you must lose things,

feel the future dissolve in a moment

like salt in a weakened broth.

What you held in your hand,

what you counted and carefully saved,

all this must go so you know

how desolate the landscape can be

between the regions of kindness.

How you ride and ride

thinking the bus will never stop,

the passengers eating maize and chicken

will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness

you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.

You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone

who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.

You must wake up with sorrow.

You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say

It is I you have been looking for,

and then goes with you everywhere

like a shadow or a friend.

Naomi Shihab Nye gives voice to her experience as an Arab-American through poems about heritage and peace that overflow with a humanitarian spirit.

Lancaster Monthly Meeting

This report is based on two sets of queries, one set considered by Friends in a threshing session, the other set considered by our committees. Friends in the threshing session responded to these queries:

What have we learned about ourselves as a spiritual community in 2020? What do we want to keep? What do we want to reclaim? What do we want to let go?

Committees considered these questions: How did the work of your committee contribute to the spiritual life of the Meeting? Where do you see room for growth?

Our website, Facebook page, weekly e-news, and monthly e-newsletter have helped us stay connected to each other and to the wider Quaker community. The big thing is that for most of the year, with the guidance of Worship & Ministry Committee, we held our meetings for worship via Zoom, with the smaller 8 am meeting continuing to gather in person at the meetinghouse and a new Wednesday evening meeting held at the request of Friends. Attendance at meetings for worship has been consistently high, and we have been joined by new attenders and Friends living elsewhere. We have also appreciated having young Friends join us during meeting for worship. However, while our meetings have been rich worship experiences, we realize that we need to reach out to Friends who cannot use Zoom for technological and other reasons such as having difficulty with hearing.

We were surprised by Zoom. We learned that what seemed an unlikely way to hold meetings for worship and meetings for worship with attention to business in fact enabled us to stay connected in ways that are rich and meaningful, that enabled us to share and support leadings, and that encouraged a strong sense of community. We learned that we deeply need each other, that Spirit can be present in a Zoom meeting, and that we are a resilient community.

The big thing we want to keep post-pandemic is Zoom, even when we can again be together in our meetinghouse. We like that Zoom makes it possible for people who can't otherwise be with us to join us in meeting for worship and other activities.

Zoom works well for small groups like the Racial Justice groups. It is a way for our youth to meet youth from other meetings. Some committees and other groups may want to continue to meet via Zoom. We might want to continue the post-meeting breakout rooms. We like the distribution of materials before Meeting for Business, done via our newsletter, so there can be less reading of reports during the meeting. It would also be good if we were not as busy as we were before Covid.

Worship & Ministry honored one Friend's leading to include a half-hour of music before silent worship. This was a pivot point with Spirit nudging us about what our souls needed. Music is community building and opens up a way to worship by making a heart and spirit connection with others. We want to continue the singing before meeting for worship.

Care & Counsel Committee has continued its pastoral work, helping to keep alive the connections within our community, connections which foster and deepen our spiritual life. They see room for growth in helping the community through the coming transition to worshipping in person, including finding a way to continue to make worship available to Friends who have been joining us through Zoom but cannot be with us in person.

We have become more aware of shared concerns to extend a clearer welcome to LFM. To this end, Outreach Committee initiated a monthly virtual "Coffee Chat" for casual conversation about Quakerism and our Meeting, with all Friends - newcomers, attenders, and members - welcome.

We have also become more aware of shared concerns to speak the Quaker voice in the wider community. In ordinary times our meeting has a challenge of pursuing many things at once. With other activities curtailed by the pandemic restrictions, we have rallied around one cause, our Journey toward Racial Justice, with many Friends meeting in small groups via Zoom to learn about racism in the US, in our meeting and in ourselves so that we may better work towards racial justice in our meeting and in our larger community. An article in LNP (Lancaster Newspaper) kicked off the journey, in which we are led by our Healing Racism Working Group.

In addition, Meeting has undertaken a care relationship with the new Lancaster Friends School, which has developed through the leadings of some of our members. The school is committed to social justice with a particular emphasis on antiracism. Its mission is to provide an educational program grounded in query-focused learning and guided by Quaker values and Quaker process. Initially, the school will use the meetinghouse, with the goal of moving to Lancaster city within three to five years.

In many ways, Lancaster Friends Meeting is doing well. We are financially sound, thanks to the generosity of Friends and the careful management of our Budget & Finance Committee. We developed a childcare policy to enhance the safety of our children. First Day School has continued to give children opportunities to engage in different and meaningful ways during the pandemic. Garden Committee has worked to keep our grounds a pleasant place for Friends to meet or to meditate. Property Committee has not only maintained but also improved our meetinghouse in a number of ways, including renovation of a dilapidated storeroom into an Archives Room. The new Archives & Records Committee is ready to organize our records so they will be accessible to contemporary Friends so that knowledge of our history—of members, their testimonies, leading, and works—will serve as a foundation and inspiration for current and future generations of members and attenders in their spiritual lives and their work on behalf of peace and justice. Environmental Concerns Committee had several programs including a discussion of the book, *The End of Ice*, and Peace & Social Concerns Committee has continued its work. The library has remained open for book borrowing. Nominating Committee has continued its work of matching the skills and gifts of Friends with appropriate committees so we are able to continue our various endeavors now and when the pandemic lockdown is lifted.

We are a strong community, strong in our connections with each other, strong in our spiritual life. Clearly, the thing we long for most is to be together physically, to feel the energy of being in other people's presence, to hug each other, to enjoy the spontaneity of being together in a physical space instead of on a screen. We want to reclaim our social gatherings: after-meeting coffee, shared meals, picnics, and

holiday gatherings, all facilitated by our Social Committee. We want to reclaim our educational work with our children and youth in First Day School and for adults in forums and Adult First Day School. We want to reclaim all the Friends we haven't seen in the past year and do better at calling each other and supporting each other. We want to be more attentive to the varying needs of Friends across the life course. We want to let go of anxiety and being separated from each other, and we want to let go of the lack of diversity (of race, ethnic backgrounds, income, etc.) in our meeting.

Maria Cattell, Recording Clerk

Reading Monthly Meeting

How have we sustained our commitment to be a covenant spiritual community during this past year?

We have sustained it as best we can in light of the ongoing pandemic. We have experienced very little community other than what we have had through our Zoom events: worship and other meetings, and our monthly chat group. One unexpected blessing has been the participation of former members of our community who are now living at a distance. We are also glad that we have had a number of new attenders who have been consistently joining our Zoom meetings. The chat groups have offered an opportunity for informal sharing and getting to know one another a little better. Earlier this year, in response to tensions in the meeting, we finished crafting a vision statement, which was actually the culmination of several years of work by a number of friends. Here is our vision for our meeting:

Reading Friends Vision Statement

Reading Monthly Meeting is an inclusive fellowship of families and individuals who nurture and support one another for spiritual growth and individual and community well-being. We take guidance from Quaker writings, Christian scripture, and the wisdom of other religious and thoughtful texts. We are committed to religious education for adults and children. While we worship mostly in silence, words and music contribute to our gatherings in the meeting house. The Light leads us to embrace simplicity, peace, and social and environmental justice. Listening to the Spirit during Meeting for Worship, in small groups, or as individuals, we discern leadings and witness change. We support those among us who are led to speak out, to engage in social ministry and activism. We are supported by our wider Quaker connections and alliances with other groups.

The places where we worship provide an inviting atmosphere, safety, respite, and retreat. We reach out to our community and we welcome fellow seekers to our spiritual home.

What have been the joys and the learnings of this past year and where have we encountered challenges?

Some of us have found Zoom worship to be relaxing and rewarding, without the attendant stresses of meeting the needs of the community that gathers in person. Other friends need a break from screen time on the weekends due to being on computers all day long while working from home, so they have not been participating as much. In response to a number of concerns about how we have been doing things on Zoom, the Worship and Ministry Committee shared the following statement:

In recent months a number of friends have voiced frustration over various aspects of our Zoom worship, including opening exercises and how they relate to spoken messages. There seems to be a general feeling that things aren't the way they're supposed to be. In light of the ongoing pandemic, this is understandable. We miss our meetinghouse and our usual ways of doing things. But now, more than ever, we need to support and encourage one another in the sharing of our imperfect gifts. We are all doing the best we can.

Trust is an essential aspect of Quakerism. We need to trust that friends are being guided by the Spirit when they offer opening exercises or speak in meeting. While a particular topic or message may not speak to us, it may speak to someone else who needs to hear it. When sharing messages during worship, friends should follow the leadings of the Spirit and not feel the need to relate messages to the topic of opening exercises, while accepting that the Spirit may use opening exercises to lead others.

We should also not hesitate to share our leadings and our interests out of fear that others might not approve. If it's important to you, it's probably important to someone else. We do not need to be in agreement in order to be supportive of one another. If we are all always on the same page, something is wrong. Listening with open hearts and minds creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and acceptance in which meeting for worship is a safe place, free of judgment and welcoming diverse points of view.

How has our faith supported our social witness?

Individuals within the meeting have continued to work on social concerns in various ways. One friend coordinated several opportunities for others to support Family Promise and U-turn in caring for the needs of homeless families and teenagers. As a meeting, we supported a response to the events of January 6th in our nation's capital in the form of a minute written by Schuylkill Meeting, which we adapted and published in the Reading Eagle newspaper and on social media.

How have our community members supported one another?

We have not been as supportive as we would have liked due to limited communication among us. We are not always aware of the needs of those among us.

Schuylkill Monthly Meeting

Schuylkill Friends Meeting took on the task of addressing the Spiritual State of our Meeting beginning in October 2020 and ending in April 2021 over four different sessions. Jean-Marie Barch led us online using queries offered by PYM and with ample time to consider all aspects of our spiritual state. Although few were in attendance, many did attend all four sessions; it did feel like we could speak for the Meeting.

We believe that COVID-19 and the pandemic-enforced need to meet via zoom brought an opportunity for Schuylkill Friends to fall apart or to come together. We came together.

We have been tested by many realities of life; the challenges have been more difficult without our ability to gather together in our beloved meeting house and be physically present with one another. We are clear that the online meeting has kept us together even if it isn't exactly what we want. It is still the vehicle, for the moment, to stay connected, a temporary path which has kept us unified. Meeting online has revealed both the durability and elasticity of our connection and the deep importance we hold in one another's lives. Although all agree that meeting in person in our beloved meeting house is strongly preferred, online meetings have allowed us to stay connected and celebrate the importance of our community. It has allowed us to stay in connection with Friends who have left the geographic area but can still be with us via zoom. Meeting online has allowed us to grow in being effective in coming together and working on an issue to get something done. The fluid and immediate process in response to Black Lives Matter after the death of George Floyd which led Schuylkill Friends to approve the purchase and installation of a large banner along a major route that is still present to this day is one good example.

Of particular note, the death of one of our beloved older members and the need to replace our clerk in a time when all were stretched gave us the opportunity to reach deeper in addressing these needs. In addition to our online meetings, several Friends have met outside at the meetinghouse weekly (except when the weather was

prohibitive) and a few Friends have held worship at the home of the member who died, during his final months and since. Particularly precious were the several outdoor Meetings for Worship with special attention to our Youth where we made a point of including our children and adolescents. Alternative worship arrangements have underlined our willingness to be flexible in addressing our need to support one another; we hope we will reassemble once pandemic precautions are no longer needed.

There is an eagerness among us to be in a covenantal relationship with each other and to the Meeting. The pause in our physical gathering has created, for some Friends, a deeper quiet and deeper listening. The pandemic has not just interrupted our lives, but has changed us. There has been a shift in priorities. Friends are reaching out to try to gather people in different ways. We are still learning all the ways to connect and to stay in touch with one another. Part of the learning is figuring out that what works for some people doesn't work for others. We note that not all the differences between zoom and in-person are negative. We can gather with those who might not otherwise be able to gather; however, some do not like zoom and will not gather and the use of zoom has been an enormous impediment to our young families few of whom have worshiped with us during these 14 months. We note that there is considerably less vocal ministry on zoom and this brings us to worry about the quality of our worship.

Care and Council has spent a good deal of time working on how to maintain closeness during the pandemic and time of being apart. There are connections happening outside of the Zoom meetings for worship and Committee meetings. The community has found ways to support each other even when we can't be together. Support committees, phone calls, weekly newsletters, care packages, and contacts from members of Care and Council have been bridges of connection. Friends' emails, phone calls, socially distanced walks and visits, zoom dinners, care packages, small meetings for worship at Friends' homes, outdoor worship at the meeting house while the weather permitted, have also allowed ways to strengthen connection. Committees still meet virtually, we come together periodically to do work on our property, and several anchor/clearness committees have been formed

during this past year which have offered needed guidance and support for Friends. Not only have the Friends who have requested these committees profited from them, so too have those who serve.

One unexpected benefit of our zoom worship is that several members who have left the area have nevertheless been able to continue worshipping and committee service; geographic distance does not have to be an impediment! We are clear to continue making electronic connections available even once we are able to return to an in-person meeting and have been exploring the changes we need to make to the meeting house in order to sustain a hybrid meeting.

Though we see the differences, we also acknowledge how much this is like other conversations we have had over the years about the yearning and efforts to stay connected, mourning those who are not present among us, and seeking to strengthen our covenant relationship.

We each wonder how has my own spiritual state grown with more time to be at home and to choose how to spend that time? We both recognize our strength and acknowledge our lack of strength; we cherish our connectedness and keep wanting more. It is harder to know the spiritual state of some of our members since the in-person time has been so limited over the last year, and only about half of our membership gather in Worship.

The importance of community and the ties that connect us in spite of the distance that exacerbates the difficulty of not being able to be together is the intersection of the joys, learnings, and challenges. The real challenge of holding that is ephemeral, yet the connection is so joyous and strong.

How has our faith supported our social witness?

Friends note it can be difficult to separate Meeting from personal social justice beliefs. The Meeting is very supportive of the wishes to deal with social issues for many of us. Our meeting has grown a lot in being effective in coming together and

working on an issue to get something done. We can come together to take a stand and persevere to carry through on those beliefs. Faith and social witness seem inseparable.

Schuylkill Meeting provides encouragement to examine conscience on a regular basis, and support to act on the results. It provides a conduit to the wider world of Friends and beyond. There have been connections with the wider Quaker community, especially through the Barch's work. The Quarter gives us a chance for broader Quaker relationships. We are grateful for the activist spirit that Schuylkill showed by quickly creating a minute in response to the insurrection on January 6th, 2021 which was forwarded to the Quarter and on to the Yearly Meeting. We have provided each other with a refuge, a place to grieve about injustices. The last few years have not been easy with the news, the chaos in the government, and the pandemic. It's cathartic to find a group of people that thinks along the same lines. It's nice to be able to ground oneself in the peacefulness of the meeting. It nourishes us in ways that perhaps we haven't thought about. For many, this has translated into action at the local level and deeper connection with neighbors in the community. Our weekly Peace Meditation Group continues to bring together Friends from Meeting and friends from the community. Monthly reading group and an anti-racism study group have continued to provide for growth beyond worship. It's been good for our souls.

In summary, the spiritual state of Schuylkill Meeting is sound, bubbling with energy, and looking forward to post-pandemic life.