



Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends

Concord Quarter: State of the Meeting Reports Received

Written on: **JULY 27, 2021**

Birmingham Monthly Meeting

The Christmas cookie platter still sits on the bench in Birmingham Meetinghouse, waiting to be claimed by its owner. It is a reminder of our lovely Carol Sing in December 2019, before the whole world changed. The pandemic impacted how we worship, how we meet in committees, how we conduct pastoral care and how we reach out to one another and stay connected. It is the major challenge Friends faced in 2020 and early 2021.

Our primary joy is that Birmingham Friends Meeting has remained a vibrant faith community, continuing our work together to find meaning and truth in our lives. The Clerk trained herself to learn how to conduct meeting for worship and business by Zoom. The Worship and Ministry Committee supported this effort with their thoughtful discernment on how best to move forward. Most of Birmingham's Friends have answered the question "Can you find God in virtual worship?" with a decisive "Yes". For those who have not found virtual worship to be meeting their

needs, the meetinghouse is open for in-person worship, connected to Friends virtually, called Blended Worship. In addition, we have added a midweek meeting in which a small group gathers for worship.

Birmingham Monthly Meeting now has four new active working groups in response to the pandemic. These working groups have engaged a large number of Friends in the work to keep our faith community connected in worship and fellowship.

- Reopening Working Group – prepares Guidelines for Outdoor and Indoor Blended Worship and recommendations for opening the meetinghouse.
- Zoom Host Working Group – supports virtual worship.
- Tech Support Group – provides guidance for tech equipment and training.
- Special Projects Group – works with the Fellowship Committee to offer virtual and socially distanced activities and events in the absence of large in-person gatherings.

During the summer months, we combined worship outdoors with our expanded virtual community. We worshipped to the sounds of nature as well as the sounds of the modern world. In October 2020, we began worship inside the Meetinghouse that was blended with our virtual community. We continue to be mindful of the Pennsylvania Covid-19 Guidelines.

One of our deep concerns since the pandemic started is keeping our children and youth engaged in the Meeting. Dedicated Friends have continued to work with our children outdoors. We have utilized the peace garden and our beautiful grounds for the study of nature and the relationship Quakers had with the Leni-Lenape who once inhabited the land upon which our Meetinghouse stands.

The Oversight and Pastoral Care Committee continues to be attentive to the needs of our faith community, utilizing the care groups that have been formed. This support has helped many of us to stay connected and to help the larger community

to understand the needs of our members and attenders. Meals, flowers, and personal notes have kept us in touch with one another and offered solace to those in need.

Our Spiritual Enrichment gatherings have begun to pick up momentum as Friends have gained confidence in using Zoom. A Bible Study Group is meeting virtually, providing meaningful and thoughtful discussion. Worship and Ministry offered a lively discussion on the topic of “Is Quakerism (Too) Precious?” In addition, a group of Friends gathered to read and discuss the book “Me and White Supremacy” by Layla F. Saad. Early this year Worship and Ministry sponsored a program based on the Quaker Speak video “The Prayer Life of Quakers”. Next month they are sponsoring a program on the Gospel of Thomas.

The greatest lesson we have learned from the pandemic is that our faith community is a strong and vibrant one. Friends rose to meet the challenge with love, spirit, and heart to serve our faith community. It is due to the spirit-led efforts of so many that Birmingham Friends Meeting has not only survived but has thrived during the past year.

Celia Lang, Clerk

Goshen Monthly Meeting

The past year offered numerous challenges to our small meeting. We adapted to Meeting for Worship via zoom, and when the weather was suitable we met for 1st-day worship outside at Goshen. For those who did not feel comfortable meeting outside or in person, we continued to offer zoom or the hybrid approach to ensure members would have an option. The usual number of attenders at 1st-day worship is between 8 and 13. Our committees are Worship and Care, and Property Committee, Burial Grounds, as well as some ad hoc groups. We currently have an ad hoc group to address outreach.

To encourage our relationships with each other we began the lockdown with mid-week check-ins via zoom. These mid-week check-ins were really helpful in allowing each of us time to discuss our challenges, concerns, and joys with each other. The mid-week check-ins grew into more spiritual discussions. Our Worship and Care committee reintroduced Meeting for Learning and offered questions of a spiritual nature for us to discuss every first Tuesday evening of the month via zoom. This has been well attended and meaningful in content. Goshen members have two evening opportunities on zoom; Meeting for Learning one week, and a check-in/fellowship time the following week. Our Meeting for Business has been held via zoom.

Goshen has concerns with our small size. Committee work continues with small numbers of members involved. We have representatives now working with the Concord Quarter Planning Committee and the Aging Concerns group, and we hosted a well-planned Quarterly Meeting with a focus on environmental stewardship.

Over the last few years, some members moved from the area and a few transferred to other meetings. We do have two long-time Quakers who transferred their memberships to Goshen this past year. Our plans for outreach are beginning and will include the initiation of a Goshen Meeting Facebook Page. We are also

evaluating our signage on the meeting's grounds with the goal of making it clearer and more visible. We anticipate that new attenders and existing members will continue to enrich the spiritual life of our meeting.

Bill Laky for Goshen Monthly Meeting, 28 April 2021

Wilmington Monthly Meeting

We have sustained our Spiritual Community during this past pandemic year by our members using their gifts to meet the unique challenges to Friends traditional practices. After two months of closing our Meetinghouse to prevent spreading the Covid virus, we learned to use Zoom. It was difficult at first, getting confused about how to get all connected, but it was worth it. We had members from all over the country start to join us, coast to coast! We kept checking county guidelines to find a safe way to return to in-person worship in our 223-year old Meeting House. We eventually opened our Meeting House with 12 people physically distanced, but spiritually united with those of us participating by Zoom. Eventually, we purchased equipment and established “blended” worship enabling those of us with health issues to worship from home, in conjunction with those in the Meeting House.

It has been a joy to see members use the opportunities of the pandemic to meet the unique challenge of restructuring our way of worship. We invented three new roles for the Meeting: “Technician”, who sets up the equipment in the worship room; the “Host”, who can be either at home or in the meeting room; and “Virtual Facing Bench Host”. This person starts the blended worship with a reading, closes worship calling for afterthoughts, and naming people to be “Held in The Light”, and after that calls for announcement, etc.

A main concern for us is how many members will return to “in-person worship” when it is safe for us to hug each other, shake hands, and share hospitality together. To help with the hospitality aspect, we are experimenting with Zoom coffee hours and may eventually try a Zoom “potluck”!

When we had in-person worship, we had a shoebox for donations to our local food bank. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee is working on a list of Friends’ organizations they can highlight for members to support.

Our members support each other by interlocking their gifts it is like a jigsaw puzzle holding our faith community together. Some who use Zoom in their work have helped others “catch on” to using Zoom. Our First Day School Coordinator is a health care professional who keeps up with current health recommendations and has kept our First Day School active with at-home projects, zoom meetings, Service Projects via Zoom (including a student from our Meeting whose family has moved to New York State, who then distributes her service projects to her local community). Another member runs a business and brings his skills to clerking our Financial Stewardship Committee.

The team who manages our Meeting is like the center of the onion that is the Meeting. We send out a weekly newsletter as well as a lengthier monthly newsletter. We each have connections with those who because they live too far away, or are not mobile enough to participate, can still stay connected through us. As Friends what binds us together is not what we believe, but how we believe. How we believe shows how we are Friends.