



**Philadelphia Yearly Meeting**  
*of the Religious Society of Friends*

# Haddonfield Quarter: State of the Meeting Reports Received

*Written on:* **AUGUST 6, 2021**

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## Haddonfield Quarter – State of the Meeting Report

Haddonfield Quarter includes Atlantic City, Cropwell, Haddonfield, Medford, Moorestown, Newton, and Westfield Meetings. State of the Meeting reports from all but Cropwell and Newton Meetings plus the Quarter’s Long Range Vision Committee and the three-Quarter South Jersey Quakers project report were used in developing this report on the trends, concerns, and joys arising over the past year. This report was prepared just days after the Quarter’s annual picnic – the first in-person event in 15 months.

### **How have we sustained our commitment to be a covenant spiritual community?**

In spite of the difficulties arising from the COVID 19 pandemic, Friends responded in various ways to worship and support one another. Cropwell and Mt. Laurel Worship Group continued to have in person worship. For the remaining meetings, “Zoom” software played a central role by allowing many Friends to worship together

and participate in worship sharing, programs, and committee meetings from the safety of our homes. Zoom also made it possible for members who moved away or are unable to attend in-person to worship with us again. Zoom's volume control made it easier for more Friends to hear others' comments. Some new Seekers began worshipping with Friends as well. Unfortunately, some people did not have computer access or were uncomfortable with computer software, especially for worship. Additionally, our families with children had difficulty with the shift to virtual activities. Teachers, children, and others became "Zoomed – out" spending a lot of time virtually connecting with others.

We have learned a lot about building community and worship from our experiences over the past year. It will be interesting to see how many meetings will continue with hybrid worship going forward, and what will happen to those who are distant but want to remain connected once Friends feel comfortable and safe to meet in person again. Membership may look different in the coming years as a result of using Zoom.

## **What have been the joys and the learnings of this past year and where have we felt challenged?**

Challenges – In addition to the absence or loss of some Friends due to the shift to virtual worship and other activities, various other challenges became clearer over the past year. They included:

- Where are we as Quakers in the 21st Century?
- Are we grounded spiritually, or are we a social gathering?
- One meeting will be holding small group discussions about the future of their meeting, looking specifically at what Friends share in common theologically.
- Other Friends suggest the need for us to develop a shared set of beliefs that can be easily explained to new Seekers; the SPICES are not sufficient.

For some time, our overall membership has been declining. Between 2017-2019, Haddonfield Quarter membership went down by 32. In one meeting, 1/3 of its members were 70 or older, and only 20% under 30 years of age. Within the three

Quarters in South Jersey, there was an overall loss of 75 members between 2017-2019. It is not yet clear how many people – especially young families – may not return to our meetinghouses in the coming months. One monthly meeting is now down to two active members. What can we learn from the churches that are successful in attracting and retaining large congregations? There is an urgent need for Friends to work together across the Yearly Meeting to develop a shared strategy on how to attract new Seekers and work together in implementing that plan. Most meetings in our Quarter either do not have any children or do not have a strong enough core to sustain a children’s education program or to attract additional families. This concern needs to be at the core of a shared strategy throughout the Yearly Meeting.

Political and social differences between Friends have become sharper over the last five years, reflecting the growing polarization within our nation. While there may be consensus that politics do not have a place during worship, is there room in the Religious Society of Friends for a diversity of political viewpoints and different lifestyles?

Joys: One smaller meeting has seen growth in membership and activities, in part in response to a weeknight zoom gathering featuring worship sharing and educational programs. Another meeting created small discussion groups to provide an opportunity for getting to know others while talking about topics of mutual interest.

Friends adapted to the challenge of the pandemic in many beneficial ways, providing various kinds of assistance to meeting members, maintaining communications networks, and otherwise supporting one another.

Our “SouthJerseyQuakers” project with Burlington and Salem Quarters now has a website, a newsletter going to 350+ Friends, and a YouTube channel with interviews and discussions on a variety of topics. Advertising linked to the website has reached many thousands of people, inviting them to learn more about Quakerism.

Lessons: Friends were reminded of the importance of reaching out and supporting others in our community, as well as ways that technology can assist this process. We learned that those who moved away or were unable to worship in person relished the opportunity to rejoin with Friends again. We also learned how many Friends have been unable to hear the messages of others during worship.

## **How have our community members supported one another?**

Support for our community members included: creating opportunities for Friends to share their experiences, through worship sharing and other small groups; visits by telephone or in person; making masks; shopping for others; and providing financial assistance.

## **How has our faith supported our social witness?**

Our meetings initiated or continued various social action activities over the past year. Most of the meetings in Haddonfield Quarter responded to the Black Lives Matter movement with internal discussions and educational programs. Some Friends also participated in demonstrations or silent vigils. Several meetings now have established Anti-Racism committees. Other social action activities addressed the needs of migrant workers and refugees, as well as various peace and justice concerns.

*Prepared by a special writing committee composed of Connie Beetle, Moon Beiferman-Haines, Linda Lotz, Josh Ponter, and George Rubin.*

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# **Atlantic City Area Monthly Meeting**

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

We meet twice weekly on Zoom, learning as the weeks pass. Worship is conducted as if we were at the Meetinghouse. Our Monday gatherings provide emotional and practical support, education and time for necessary business. A committee chooses topics and formats to meet our evolving needs, including response to stressful emergencies like the January 6 insurrection at the national capitol.

In the past year, we suffered the death of three members, none from Covid. One Friend was commemorated in a Zoom memorial meeting with about 40 participants and the reading of additional submissions from those unable to join. A transcript document was prepared and circulated and a flowering memorial tree was planted. Another Friend was commemorated in a presentation at our regular Monday gathering. This was important because many currently active attenders hadn't met the Friend, an anarchist and labor historian who moved to California in 2011. The most recent death (of a centenarian convinced Friend) will be commemorated when the family clarifies its wishes.

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

One great joy is in the richness and consistency of our gatherings, and the arrival of new attenders and old friends to enrich our community. We have encountered technical, financial and property maintenance challenges. Our Buildings and Grounds committee has continued active with attention to both outdoor and indoor maintenance.

## **How has our faith supported our social witness?**

Our Monday gatherings have repeatedly addressed racial justice issues, and there have been some chances to hear under-represented voices. Recently we collected personal hygiene items and hard candy for Migrant Worker Outreach welcome kits.

(Our thanks to Medford MM for this opportunity.) Individuals have been supported in social action and outreach, including sending handmade cloth masks to the Navajo nation. Several members participated in electoral letter writing campaigns.

## **How have our community members supported one another?**

Telephone and e-mail ministry. Assistance with vaccine scheduling, which reached beyond our congregation. Mutual assistance with technology issues. Acceptance of varied levels of technical comfort/sophistication. Support of those close to deceased members. The Meeting property has been maintained to be ready for resumption of use. Meeting for Business has been conducted.

### **\*Covenant Definition:**

One way to think of covenant is as a promise to stay in relationship with Spirit/God. Faithfulness is just a part of that promise; it is the commitment to stay in relationship that is the enduring part of the tradition we carry as Friends. Those who are interested in more information about covenant relationships may read Tom Gates offering “Seeing Beyond Our Differences: Meeting as Covenant Community.”

From Tom Gates: Are there ways we can gently encourage one another to move beyond the first question (“are my needs being met?”), to the second question (“how can I contribute to the life of the meeting?”, or the variation, (“how can I become the kind of Friend my meeting most needs me to be?”) Can we learn to see our differences as opportunities or invitations from God? Can we develop the attitude and skills to be generous listeners? And conversely, are we willing to share our own point of view, and our own emotions, to give others the opportunity to listen to us? And finally, can we increase our understanding and deepen our commitment to our distinctively Quaker way of dealing with differences, our Meeting for Business? To the extent that we can begin to answer these questions in the affirmative, then we will be able to see beyond our differences, to that which truly binds us together.

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# **Haddonfield Monthly Meeting**

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

This year has obviously been challenging in so many ways, but our Meeting's commitment to keep our community united and thriving led us to adapt and adjust. Our experiment in Meeting for Worship (and for Business), first exclusively via Zoom and then, as conditions and restrictions changed, via a "hybrid method" of worship (some in-person in the Meetinghouse, others via Zoom) has been very successful; in fact, we have attracted new Attenders using this form of worship.

Our Meeting established small groups which meet periodically to share and discuss on various topics. These small groups have provided for Friends to continue to stay in contact, to provide for spiritual nourishment, and a small substitute for the hospitality time we all miss so much.

Friends have hosted and participated in online First Day School programs as a way of maintaining our Meeting's commitment to religious education.

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

We have encountered both financial and property-related issues and have dealt with both effectively.

Some members and attenders have had difficulty staying in contact with the Meeting because of connectivity issues. On the other hand, we have also gained new attenders because of their ability to participate virtually.

## **How has our faith supported our social witness?**

Our Meeting's ad hoc committee on racial justice has hosted three online gatherings centered on books which deal with themes related to racial and social justice. All three were opened to the wider Friends' community and were very well-attended

and received. Two of these events were recorded and are available for viewing at the South Jersey Quakers channel on YouTube.

Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee sponsors and coordinates a refugee assistance fund to support local refugees and their families.

## **How have our community members supported one another?**

Our Meeting has maintained the practice of holding a Meeting for Worship for Healing every other month, by meeting as a group online and by informing the Meeting community about members who are in need.

In addition to prayerful support, financial support from the Meeting has been made available to those in need, whether this need was caused by COVID or not.

We established and maintained the previously mentioned small groups.

Our monthly newsletter has helped to keep us all informed about what's happening within the Meeting and throughout the wider community, along with our email chain and Facebook page. We are also in the process of updating our Meeting website and social media platform to increase the level of communication available to our community.

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# Medford Monthly Meeting

Eleven people gathered via Zoom to share, through worship sharing, reflections on the spiritual state of the meeting. To guide us we had received queries from both Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and New York Yearly Meeting. George Rubin, Clerk of Ministry and Counsel, led the gathering.

The Covid pandemic and our need to worship via Zoom was on the minds of many people. One person noted the pros and cons of the technology that allowed us to worship and meet together, permitting participation of friends from a distance. It also prevented our having valuable personal fellowship. There was concern about how we will continue after the pandemic is over, with one person commenting that it will be a test of who we are, moving forward.

There was expression of gratitude for the personal support from meeting members. At the same time, several people spoke to feeling a lack of a spiritual foundation, an uncertainty about who we are – who Quakers are. Do we have a unified view of what Quakers represent or have we moved from being a religious society to an ethical society? What are the core beliefs that bind us as Quakers and can we articulate them? If there is a lack of a shared spiritual foundation, what are the implications for our diminishing numbers? How do we reach out to others if we are not sure who we are? One person said that what spoke to her when she first encountered Quakerism was the belief of that of God in herself and everyone as individuals.

One person said that our ability to continue to express our spiritual grounding through activities outside worship gave reason for hope. Despite Covid, we have been able to continue our adult education program, book group, and work on racial justice. But is being active sufficient, or is the question one of how we relate to the spirit and to each other on a deeper level?

Another person expressed sadness at the uncertainty expressed by others, saying that she is aware of God every day, as well as her Quaker roots and testimonies and how they play out in her life.

Someone noted the inevitability of change, reflecting on continuing revelation as one aspect of Quakerism. Over the years, Friends have been challenged by the younger generation and new understandings of issues, such as the rights of the LGBTQ community. There is a tension between keeping to the old ways and moving to acknowledge a need to change. What are the implications for attracting new members?

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# Moorestown Monthly Meeting

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

We developed the tools necessary to meet for worship virtually in March 2020, and did not miss a Sunday during the shutdown. We created a COVID-19 response working group to determine whether and how we could meet in person, and did so, outdoors, in fall 2020 and again in spring 2021. In June 2021, we welcomed F/friends back to our meetinghouses indoors, and acquired the equipment necessary to connect meeting for worship at Moorestown Meetinghouse with our virtual MFW participants.

We added a Wednesday evening worship sharing and check-in for F/friends who might be feeling unmoored, grateful, isolated, etc., etc., as a result of the pandemic and shutdown. We have continued to offer this worship sharing virtually, and have made efforts through PYM to invite more F/friends to join us. We have developed a small, thankful contingent that meets regularly to amplify Spirit in our lives and the lives of our meetings.

Most of our committees have met virtually. Our Witness in the World Support Committee gathered F/friends for two worship sharing sessions in spring 2020 to support our meeting's discernment of the legislative priorities we would advance to the FCNL. Our Religious Education and Community Building committees created two virtual Game Nights to engage our youngest Friends in this spiritual community. This continues a popular series of in-person game nights we began several years ago.

We made efforts through various committees, individual efforts and an ad hoc working group to contact members and attenders who are not connected via email or internet.

We furthered our commitment to racial justice by creating an anti-racism working group in June 2020 that became a standing committee after six months. The Anti-Racism Committee has sponsored bi-monthly Let's Talk About Race sessions for

almost a year, which have involved both Moorestown F/friends and guests from the wider community.

Our experience of virtual meetings has, of course, been mixed. Our worship has been profoundly enriched by the participation of members and attenders who cannot join in person due to distance, home responsibilities, physical abilities and other factors. (Several have reported that they hear more and better online than in the meetinghouse.) Some members have been uncomfortable with virtual meetings, and we have felt their absences and discomfort. We have reached out to, but not heard back from, a very few attenders who do not use internet technology.

For the most part, our committee volunteers have reported that they prefer virtual meetings to in-person gatherings. The time savings from eliminating the walk, bike or (for most of us) drive to the meeting location is significant. Being able to invite distant F/friends, and those with home responsibilities, to serve on committees is a boon.

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

Joys have included connecting with new F/friends and distant F/friends online. Challenges include connecting with F/friends who don't use email/internet, and with those who have the resources but don't like using them for worship.

Additionally, social hour, an important part of our community nurturing, has been difficult to replicate virtually — although many F/friends have reported feeling more at ease and included in the large gathering online versus trying to negotiate smaller groups in person.

## **How has our faith supported our social witness?**

Our meeting for worship with a concern for business approved the creation of an Anti-Racism Working Group and subsequent Anti-Racism Committee without any expressed concern or dissent.

Our Witness in the World Support Committee has created, with help from the Communications Committee, a monthly Call to Action that we distribute via email to the membership, inviting people to consider taking actions like supporting reform of the 13th Amendment of the US Constitution, and taking simple steps to promote environmental stewardship.

Our meeting donates money annually to 10-15 organizations, like the South Jersey Food Bank, Urban Promise and the Alternatives to Violence Project, whose goals align with our Quaker values. Many of our members and attenders volunteer with those organizations as well. Additionally, we offer financial support to families whose children attend Quaker schools.

For many, living through the shutdown has reinforced the value of simplicity as a right choice for our lives.

## **How have our community members supported one another?**

Our Pastoral Care Committee and an ad-hoc Outreach Group have both reached out to F/friends not connected online to offer connection and support through the shutdown period. Members and attenders also contact each other in F/friendship, without a committee-based call to do so.

Our Aid to Friends in Need Fund was depleted early in the pandemic, and we put out a call for donations. Support from F/friends came in immediately. When our largest fundraiser for the Mount Laurel Meetinghouse, a summer peach festival, was cancelled, many F/friends sent donations.

We have continued our mid-week worship sharing despite light attendance (one session had only two participants; typically we have four or five). This commitment has helped to enrich us spiritually, and supported F/friends who feel an especial need for connection.

One member was able to assist several others, who had limited technology resources, to get vaccinated.

We continue to share joys and sorrows after worship each week.

## **What future opportunities and challenges do we see ahead for the spiritual health of our meeting?**

Our meeting's membership, attendance, and participation have been dropping for many years. Today approximately one-third of our members are seventy and older, and less than 20% are under thirty — and few of those are engaged with the meeting in apparent ways. While many of our members in the 50+ age group (about 60% of the membership) have adult children, few of those children are active in worship or on committees. Perhaps we should consider a focused effort to invite and support new or renewed participation in the life of the meeting.

Our experience of the possibilities of technology, and our community's willingness to incorporate it in our activities, suggests opportunity for connecting and re-connecting more broadly, and potentially more deeply.

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# **Westfield Monthly Meeting**

## **1. How have we sustained our commitment to be a covenant spiritual community?**

Our last worship in the meetinghouse was held third month of 2020 and as of the fourth month of 2021, our doors remain shut. Our commitment to sustain covenant community has been nurtured through Zoom worship, committee work, and meetings for business. Some distant members or former members participate. Looking into faces of Friends near and far is heartening. Some with physical challenges express appreciation for being able to participate without travel or the need to be seen. Some, especially teachers, find worship-by-zoom unbearable as their weekdays are all-zoom. The sense of being an inter-dependent spiritual community may have grown for those attending regularly. Our member incarcerated in Pennsylvania was brought by zoom to outdoor worship in our cemetery, his first experience of communal worship and a powerful experience for each participant.

We encourage Westfield Friends School's ongoing mission and appreciate the diversity of the families involved. Engagement with Quarterly and Yearly Meeting is encouraged (a few are of us are engaged) as a path to greater breadth of spiritual community and witness.

## **2. What have been joys and the learnings of this past year and where have we felt challenged?**

Our families with children have not been well served by virtual gatherings. Summer into late Autumn families and others gathered for meeting outside our meetinghouse with children having communal playground time with their First-Day School teacher/parent. Committees continued to meet to move forward our communal life, but much action has been on hold.

As a community, we've recognized our need to learn American history which has held Blacks to be less than full citizens and has systematically favored whites.

### **3. How has our faith supported our social witness?**

Those who volunteered with wreath-making and greens sale at the John Woolman Memorial [in Mount Holly] or at the Bread-of-Life Food Pantry [in Palmyra] shared with the meeting how their hearts had been moved by those engagements with our wider community.

We held two lively witness-vigils at the busy Rt 130 highway along our grounds, one early June asserting Black Lives Matter and the other in early April in sorrow after another mass shooting.

We established an Ad hoc Committee for Antiracism to deepen awareness of racial injustice. History of systemic denial of basic freedoms to non-“white” citizens hasn’t been taught in America’s public schools and was brought to life for our meeting (and then to our Quarterly Meeting) in a powerful way by Teresa Nance, of Villanova University. Resource lists for further learning are developing, conversations with persons who don’t look like you are encouraged, and each of our committees is asked to seek minority-run suppliers to bid on work we might contract. We have a lot to learn and recognize that it’s the “doing” which makes a difference.

Meetinghouse and School have had an energy-efficiency audit by PSE&G (our power supplier.) We look forward to reducing our carbon footprint both there and in our homes.

### **4. How have our community members supported one another?**

Spiritual Oasis, a worship-sharing support group meets monthly, mid-week. Care and Hospitality Committees -as well as individuals -provide personal support as needs are known with visits, cards and phone calls, flowers, shopping, chores, transportation, financial aid – a giving and generous Meeting of Friends ready to hear from one another with caring hearts.



#### **ABOUT ROMA NARKHEDE**

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Roma is PYM's *Advancement, Marketing, and Communications Coordinator* committed to creating and sharing impactful stories (<https://www.pym.org/author/rnarkhede/>) in the yearly meeting. She enjoys connecting with people and believes that stories are the building blocks of forming a connected community.