



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

# Haverford Quarter: State of the Meeting Reports Received

*Written on:* JULY 27, 2021

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## Haverford Monthly Meeting

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

- In discussing these helpful queries from PYM and the Ministry and Care Committee of Quaker Life Council, we considered a “covenant” as a promise to stay in relationship with God/the Light. Led by our Monthly Meeting’s Care & Counsel Committee (C&CC), we shared our efforts to live by example and to understand our own spiritual journeys, rather than expecting a certain type of spiritual expression from others. We find that we are “digging deep” through personal conversations and readings, to stay centered in the Spirit. The members of C&CC are asking, “What are the spiritual needs of our community?”, “What are the spiritual needs of individuals?” and “How can we meet these needs?”
- These questions—and answers to them—has spread to others within our Meeting through Zoom Meetings for Worship and other corporate gatherings.

- In the face of the coronavirus, our Meeting members and attenders quickly brought their Zoom expertise from other realms of their lives to support our on-going virtual Meetings for Worship, Meetings for Business in Worship, and committee meetings. The initial core group welcomed and trained others to be Zoom Meeting Hosts. As needed, we expanded our subscription to a total of three Zoom accounts so that groups were not competing for Zoom time and schedules.
- While we were (and still are) disappointed that virtual Meetings for Worship do not meet the spiritual needs of some local members and attenders, we were pleased that so many others who do not live locally joined us for worship. One long-time member and active supporter of our Meeting who has lived in Colorado for many years introduced herself at the end of our first virtual Meeting for Worship and informed Friends that the last time she worshipped in our Meetinghouse was in the 1950s.
- A number of people joined our worship for the first time since they or their families moved away from the Main Line to other states. Several of them felt so “welcome back” that they became members of the Meeting.

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

- As noted above, we remain disappointed and challenged that Zoom worship does not work for or meet the spiritual needs of some Friends.
- Before long, we learned to extend our Meetings for Worship into a “Social Hour” through Zoom Breakout Rooms with 3-4 people in each group. Our “breakout conversations” have been inclusive and filled with many connections. This has enabled us to get to know each other in more depth, have more meaningful discussions, and find new ways for longtime members and attenders to get reacquainted while also getting to know new attenders.
- Another source of joy among many in our Meeting has been finding our common regard for equality and seeking peace. This has been accompanied by our shared learning of the need to humble ourself and understand our

imperfections; to train our attitudes and actions; and to open ourselves to healing, remediation and stewardship of a peaceful loving path.

- By our June 2020 Meeting for Business in Worship the national reckoning on systemic racism led our Spiritual Life and Community Life committees to collaboratively propose a Working Group on Addressing Racism that was approved by MFBIW. They have discerned paths of spirit and organized actions that include an experiential/insight-oriented group in which we are practicing self-reflection, empathetic listening and appreciating others & contexts—the basic foundational skills needed to understand implicit bias and effectively impact systemic racism. The Working Group also formed a monthly Film Club and a monthly Book Club to help members and attenders better understand systemic racism. There has been great participation in these. These groups have helped us to care for one another as we look outward to the needs of those beyond Haverford Meeting.
- We also learned that not all members and attenders agree on what constitutes a “common regard for equality” and how that should translate into social witness. As a result, we still regret that one of our highly respected and valued couples decided to step out of active involvement in our Meeting.

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

- Early in the pandemic, members and attenders developed a heightened sense of our immediate neighborhood and its needs. Our Meeting accepted contributions from members of our community to support the Kindness Fund of Friends School Haverford for stressed families in that community and to support the Food Bank at our neighboring Memorial Church of God in Christ. Individuals have continued to support and remain involved with that church community.

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

- In a spirit of care and inclusivity in April, 2020, our Care and Counsel committee personally reached out with individual phone calls and/or letters to all of our members and attenders (near and far) for whom we had contact

information. There were many wonderful conversations. Since then, phone, zoom, and email contacts have continued to strengthen us as a community. Friends are updated and kept in touch with weekly and monthly newsletters that are compiled and distributed by our officer manager. These include photographs and stories of events that have brought us together, as well as invitations and instructions for participating in upcoming virtual gatherings within our Meeting, through PYM, and through Pendle Hill.

- As an example of supporting and caring, as a community we experienced great joy as we honored the 100 th birthday of our beloved member in a “drive through” celebration, later followed by the grief of his passing, marked by a meeting for worship filled with loving remembrances of him.
- We continued our Meeting’s long tradition of a Christmas Eve Carol Sing by converting it into a contact-less event. With the expert organization of several of our members, Friends stayed in their cars in the traffic circle in front of our Meetinghouse to hear Christmas Carols sung by an expert singer from inside our Meetinghouse and then joined together to sing a number of carols from their cars.
- We hopefully began a new annual Christmas tradition of “Christmas Nativity Windows” with scenes populated by small mice (including a Quaker mouse family) and other little creatures (including a gender non-conforming bear). The scenes were displayed in our Meetinghouse windows that face our front porch and circle. Each scene was accompanied by a written story or description of the what our characters were doing. The scenes were regularly changed to keep the stories going. This was brought to us by Grace Sharples Cooke (Haverford Meeting Member and PYM Associate Secretary for Advancement and Relationships) and Melinda Wenner Bradley (PYM Youth Religious Life Coordinator).
- Our Working Group on Hybrid Meetings has been working for the last several months to study and design a way forward to resume in-person Meetings for Worship while not losing the fellowship and worship of the Friends who have joined us from a distance via Zoom Meetings for Worship. We also want to avoid splitting our Meeting into one group that worships in-person and a different group that worships virtually. More and more Friends are looking

forward to resuming in-person worship. We have already found that our current Wi-Fi system in our Meetinghouse can serve our large Meeting room with the addition of an extender. The Working Group has completed trials of and begun ordering most of the equipment needed to join together in-person worshipers in the Meeting Room with Zoom-based worshipers.

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# **Merion Monthly Meeting**

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

2020-21 was a tough year dominated by the pandemic. We kept our Meeting together using Zoom for weekly Meetings for Worship (usually attended by at least 20, not radically different from meeting in person), Monthly Meetings for Business, Quarterly Meetings (we hosted one in April 2020), all Committees, First Day School (employing some materials suggested by PYM), and Adult Reading Groups (A Testament of Devotion, How to be an Antiracist). It has worked surprisingly well, and we are actively considering how to include Zoom access to all Meetings for Worship and Business once the pandemic allows us to gather in person; we will definitely tune in to the Pendle Hill classes on that this June.

Before the shutdown we had a well- attended Game Night, which included an eerily prophetic “Pandemic” Game. For much of the year we held weekly Saturday morning Quaker silent vigils supporting racial justice; they proved to be both cathartic and unifying (discussed more fully below).

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

Joys: Having distant long-term Members participate from afar on Zoom has been invigorating for all. Our renovated website, vigil, activities associated with a freshly launched Capital Campaign to preserve our National Historic Site, and a Zoom presentation celebrating the 21 Amendment have all been inspiring and helped both to attract new attenders and build closer links to other worship communities in the area.

A Capital Campaign Zoom lecture series Know thy Neighbor was launched by Prof. Emma Lapsanky-Werner, who focused on Quakers in Lower-Merion and their African- American neighbors; another is scheduled in April on the Meetinghouse’s architecture by our architect Dan Carpenter, and the series will continue through the year.

Challenges: Staying sane; offering condolences; conducting memorial services from afar for several deceased members or their spouses, held late while maintaining social distance, and the inability to attend those ailing and grieving.

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

Early last spring, preferring to employ Quaker silence over vocal demonstration, we initiated weekly silent vigils in front of the Meetinghouse along Montgomery Avenue to commemorate those lost in recent police and related racial shootings. These were therapeutic to us and attracted participation by members of the local community including the neighboring Sisters of Mercy and pastors of other religious groups who planned coordinated activity. Despite a decline in financial resources, we continued donations to a wide variety of social causes, many focused on racial and criminal justice, and the environment.

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

Through Zoom, phone calls, etc. memorial services and other activity, and by providing possible support to those facing medical problems themselves or with family members. Members willingly served on several committees, reflecting the shrinking size of membership, and actively participated in numerous committee activities and meetings.

Finally, the Meeting's Newsletter, with both news and relevant historical pieces, has also been supportive (excerpted Illustrations included below & throughout).

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# **Old Haverford Monthly Meeting**

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

During this year of gathering almost completely over Zoom, our community at OHFM has continuously sought ways to stay connected to each other and to continue to grow deeper in our relationship (both individually and collectively) with God/Spirit. In addition to Meetings for Worship on Sundays, we have encouraged and supported other kinds of gatherings that have allowed Friends to be in relationship with each other and to grow spiritually. These include mid-week worship, Meeting for Worship with Attention to Song (which is an interfaith gathering), a book group to discuss readings of a spiritual nature, a revival of our Friendly Households program, Friday Zoom lunches, and outdoor children's gatherings. We include worship-sharing in our weekly Meetings for Worship, and we were able to hold our annual mindfulness retreat over Zoom. We continue to seek ways to be more connected with God/Spirit and with each other and to move deeper into our understanding of what it means to be part of OHFM's community of Friends.

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

For the OHFM community, one joy has been the available time and space to consider some new directions for ministry. For example, our Peace Committee has become much more active over the past year, working on issues of racial and environmental justice, and our community has connected with other faith groups in various ways. Another joy is the growth of our community, including new attenders on Zoom, as well as new membership. In addition, our community has been reaching out to one another more intentionally (due to the pandemic) and have therefore connected more deeply.

The biggest challenge this year has been ensuring that members/attenders of our community feel connected, particularly those who do not attend Zoom worship on a regular basis. We also have had difficulty finding ways to keep our children engaged.

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

Anti-racism and environmental concerns continue to be an important part of the spiritual focus in the OHFM community. Our collective commitment to equality, peace, simplicity, integrity and stewardship has strengthened our faith community. OHFM has been working together to raise awareness regarding anti-racism and environmental concerns both within the meeting and within the greater community. The Peace Committee, open to all members and attenders, has met regularly to organize events via Zoom to raise awareness through group discussions based on readings, documentaries, and topics of interest. OHFM participated in Partners in Reconciliation events including weekly Interfaith Vigils (during the summer, fall, and spring). OHFM continues to host an interfaith Meeting for Worship with Attention to Song the first Thursday evening of the month.

After several years, the Friendly Household program has been relaunched. Friends of all ages in the OHFM community discuss ideas for commitments to justice in the following areas: climate, anti-racism, gender equality, education, and immigration. Ideas range from individual and household actions to larger initiatives.

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

Worship & Ministry and Care & Counsel Committees have collaborated to reach out to all members and attenders to check-in regarding their spiritual and emotional needs during COVID. We are particularly aware of the vulnerabilities of isolation and health issues that our members face and have been able to provide additional support as needed. At the rise of worship, an additional check-in to accompany joys and sorrows has been implemented to provide a separate space for concerns related to COVID. Weekly Friday lunches via Zoom have continued since the start of the pandemic to provide a social space for members and attenders to check in and spend time together outside of worship. As a community, we have struggled to keep the children engaged. We have hosted several events for families that have included an outdoor movie, a hike, holiday-themed crafts, and decorating the grounds of the

meeting for Christmas. Now that the spring weather is arriving, we are planning more outdoor events for families and children, and we are resuming outdoor Meeting for Worship – both on Sundays and mid-week.

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# Radnor Monthly Meeting

Below is Radnor MM's Annual Report. We chose to respond to a slightly revised version of one of the queries offered by PYM: "In what ways has our faith influenced our support of one another this past year? What were possible "missed opportunities"?"

Responses below were generated largely by a brainstorming session held during a late winter Monthly Meeting. One of the themes this year has been related to equality and uncovering ways in which we can devote ourselves to equality. For example, we have been discussing the idea of reopening Meeting with a hybrid approach. However, doing so potentially disenfranchises those without technology who also do not feel safe coming to the Meetinghouse, even if we abide by CDC guidelines. These points are all part of ongoing deliberations related to reopening the Meetinghouse.

This year our Meeting gave loving attention and time to support for the Black Lives Matter movement. After discussion, we rehung a banner that we had previously posted outside the meeting, stating that "Black lives do matter. Let us then try what love can do". Instituting Zoom Meetings for Worship in March 2020 was described as a "leap of faith" by one member. Since then, we have often found ourselves being surprised about the "positives" that have resulted via these Zoom meetings. They have, in some ways, built even stronger connections; we have become somewhat closer by getting to see bits of people's home environments; we have appreciated seeing each other's faces close up—and not just the backs of their heads. At rise of Meeting, we have also been breaking into groups and having fellowship which has definitely supported getting to know each other more deeply.

We also took special care to reach out to members who may have been feeling isolated because we are not meeting in person and/or due to illness. In December the Meeting Clerk initiated a "holiday challenge", asking people to go through our Meeting directory to identify several people who have not been attending Zoom

Meetings or who might be feeling isolated in other ways and then to contact these people. Our Care and Counsel Committee also reached out to support ill or dying members.

Our committees are always hard at work reaching out to various groups. Due to Zoom Meetings, our Outreach Committee wasn't able to contact new people using its usual methods, but it consistently did contact new people who joined us for the first time via Zoom. Our Peace and Social Concerns work with the local Interfaith Hospitality Network (working with homeless families) continued despite the pandemic, although with no physical contact with the families; we continued to supply meals.

The spirit is alive and well at Radnor. It seems that a "sense of the Meeting" might be that we are surprised about how well we have functioned during these trying times of Covid.

Respectfully submitted,

*Bonalyn Mosteller, Clerk*

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# **Valley Monthly Meeting**

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

We have steadfastly maintained a weekly Meeting for Worship using the Zoom platform. It has been available every Sunday throughout the pandemic beginning in March 2020. We have continued to remain in contact with members who are unable to be present on Zoom.

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

One of the joys has been the consistent participation of the group of Friends who have met each Sunday for Meeting for Worship on Zoom. We haven't missed a single week! It has also been a joy when one of our members has shared her phenomenal musical talent with us on a regular basis at the end of Meeting.

Our primary challenge has been growing our Zoom participation beyond the regular participants. Comfort levels with the virtual platform have prevented all of our usual in-person members from participating. It was also a great challenge to lose a beloved long-term member and be thus far unable to celebrate her life together via an in-person memorial service. We look forward to being able to do that in the future.

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

Members have participated in environmental advocacy (EQAT), racial justice protests, and vigils for those experiencing racism and violence.

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

Conversation and sharing after Meeting for Worship. Phone calls made to members who haven't been able to attend Zoom to make sure that everyone was safe and healthy.

