



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

# Upper Susquehanna Quarter: State of the Meeting Reports Received

*Written on:* JULY 27, 2021

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## North Branch Monthly Meeting

We are a small but thriving meeting in Northeast Pennsylvania, and part of the Upper Susquehanna Quarterly Meeting.

During pre-Covid times we had two worship groups, meeting at two different locations because our members and attenders are geographically dispersed from the Poconos to Milford to the Delaware River border with NY State, and west to Wilkes-Barre and beyond.

One group met in Forty-Fort PA at the Wyoming Seminary Lower School, near Wilkes-Barre. Our clerk John Bonning heads that worship group, and is the clerk of North Branch meeting based there.

The other group is the Sterling Worship Group, which met at Journey's End Farm from Sept. through late June until Journey's End Farm Camp took over during the summer months. Then we met at Friends' homes or with the group in Forty-Fort.

Barbara Lewis is the associate clerk who heads that worship group and is the liaison with the clerk in Forty-Fort.

So...during the pandemic, North Branch has been meeting regularly via Zoom. Every First Day at 10 a.m. we hold a discussion of a topic, often something gleaned from a QuakerSpeak video or an article brought by a member. Meeting virtually has allowed members and attenders of both worship groups to meet together every week, without leaving their homes, lessening our carbon footprint, saving us time, and allowing for more people to participate than was possible in person! And it has strengthened the bonds between the two worship groups and promoted unity within the meeting. We've also been able to attract a couple of new attenders who previously lived too far away to attend regularly.

At least five or six of us regularly join worship with the USQM, hosted each First Day at 11 a.m. by Melissa Rycroft, and attended by Friends from State College, Huntington, Wellsboro, Millville and Pennsdale monthly meetings, as well as North Branch. We have welcomed this opportunity for virtual worship and the opportunity to meet more Friends in the wider Quaker community.

Four people from North Branch meeting attended the 9-week AFSC e-course "Radical Acting in Faith for White People" during July and August, and the small group that spun off from that is continuing to meet about twice a month on Wednesdays, superseding a prior Wed. discussion on racism and white privilege hosted by North Branch during April – July.

One of our attenders is doing research on how to improve the funding of the Public Defenders offices in the State of PA, one of the few states where no state funding supports that office, to the detriment of indigent defendants. That attender is interested in soliciting the support of other Quakers in this project, after the November election.

We continue to read and watch videos on Quakerism, racism, and other social justice issues, to share them and to support each other in finding means to take action in our local communities.

*Barbara Lewis, Associate Clerk*

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# Pennsdale Monthly Meeting

The following is Pennsdale Friends Meeting's response to you call for spiritual assessment.

Pennsdale Friends meeting has sustained its spiritual covenant by continuing to meet or being available for worship. Because of the pandemic, we also transitioned to “intentional” worship — sitting at home during regular meeting times — and sharing thoughts (and poetry) by email.

A Pennsdale member provided a zoom link every week for worship with Friends in Upper Susquehanna Quarter. A young adult attender has begun helping Friends get comfortable with virtual meeting technology and provided recent community outreach.

We find joy in knowing the Inner Light is present, always, and continue to nourish that experience communally and individually.

Friends came to the aid and support of a meeting member whose wife, also a beloved meeting member, passed away in 2020.

Although few in numbers, our members have provided faithful stewardship to sustain our meeting as a spiritual home for seekers.

Respectfully submitted,

*Jim Birt (as requested by clerk Mary Engel )*

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# **State College Monthly Meeting**

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

One Friend says, “Overall, well.” Much of the year, we met under the spreading honey locust tree outside the social room. It became too cold for that. Some friends felt that continuing to meet in person was necessary. We now allow a small number of people to meet inside. We have a zoom Worship Sharing meeting Saturday at 10 a.m., a zoom Meeting for Worship at 10 a.m., and a Quarter-wide Meeting at 11 a.m., both on Sunday.

One Friend added a personal note: Holy Spirit is always available for consultation and guidance. Like many Meetings, we span a wide theological range. The broadest generalization possible is that we all have something good at our core and that we can appeal to that same good in others. It is a force that enables us to make the world a better place. Vocal ministry reflects that. It may also be safe to say that social concerns have moved from a location of anger and fear to a location of seeking way forward, if not outright hope.

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

We have learned to connect through calls, food, and cards for losses, walks that are masked & distanced, continued committee meetings and Friendship Circles on zoom or in a park, meeting for Worship for Business on zoom. We met outside in person on the Meetinghouse lawn when the weather was conducive. We used a phone tree to contact everyone in the spring before we began meeting by Zoom. We are doing that again in the new year.

A Friend adds, “Perhaps the hardest decision we made this year was reopening the Meetinghouse. We grappled with how reopening evidenced privilege, and what protocols should be used for minimizing risk to those who chose to meet in person.” We had several discussions and a Called Meeting weighing the need for some

members to meet in-person to continue inside now that the weather is raw and cold against the risk and extra cleaning costs of Covid. Loneliness and the loss of the greater connection of Meeting in person is a risk, too.

Other Friends have found it harder to connect with spirit, support each other, especially people who have suffered losses, and gain a former depth of spiritual community over zoom.

This Friend added, “There is a general assumption that everyone present is a liberal, Democratic voter as with many assumptions, that constitutes its own self-limiting philosophy. It is, in its own right, a form of prejudice. As such, it interferes with healing the cultural divide that polarizes this nation.

While we may claim all are welcome, there is a tendency to look at the Right (i.e., Trump supporters) and ask innocently ‘how can they think that?’” We are working on honing our Nominating process to lift up the gifts of Meeting members/attenders and discover satisfying fits with specific committee work. First Day School continues via zoom each week.

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

Most things are different now. We are delving deeper into the racial and climate issues and are asking Meeting members to deepen their understanding and information for both.

Several meeting members helped with the election and /or ballot counting. There is a good thread in our Meeting that is a willingness to serve each other and our wider community. Meeting published a Minute on racism. Members participated in Black Lives Matter marches; committees are regularly reading queries on how our committee and Meeting decisions affect Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities and people. Our Adult RE committee is organizing presentations on white supremacy and other topics.

Information is being offered to members on climate mitigating choices for members' homes and lives and an energy audit has identified where we can act to move the Meetinghouse towards net-zero energy; a monthly Climate newsletter is publicizing policy, education, personal and spiritual queries for reflection and change.

Meeting is supporting the homeless through Out of the Cold and has donated financial support to a local black AME Church. Friends continue to serve on the Foxdale Village and Friends School Boards.

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

There is a Friday a.m. Foxdale support group of Friends and 2 spiritual Friendship Circles who have met on zoom.

We have done two rounds of phone tree calling to check in with Friends, and that has been welcomed and needed for many.