



Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends

Western Quarter: State of the Meeting Reports Received

Written on: **JULY 27, 2021**

Kendal Monthly Meeting

The COVID year of 2020 kept us apart physically, yet as a community, Kendal Meeting grew together strongly. We surprised ourselves in quickly learning Zoom technology and using it to gather for Meetings for Worship and for Business. More residents from our Health Center attended when the Meeting was brought to their rooms, often with help from Kendal staff, than when they had to come to our usual meeting place, the Library. We were quickly and easily able to adjust our Meeting hours to accommodate mealtime in the Health Center. And as a welcome touch, those who were away from Kendal could still attend our Meeting from wherever they were.

It has been wonderful to see faces close up and without masks and with names shown clearly. Vocal ministry has increased and we have been able to hear each other more easily. Expressions of gratitude for the safety and care we have had at Kendal were frequent. We found occasions to celebrate, as in 100th birthdays, and we have enjoyed the chatter before gathering in silence for Worship, as we have

enjoyed the chance to talk and share thoughts and concerns afterward. We look forward to being able to get together in person in a post COVID era, but we will seek to preserve the connections that we have come to value this year.

As the year unfolded we became painfully aware of the contrast between the security of our lives at Kendal, and the grief and loss facing tens of million in our country and around the world. For the third year in a row, financial contributions exceeded our planned budget, making possible additional contributions to the community-based organizations that we already support, and allowed us to make special contributions to address needs in nearby communities made urgent because of the pandemic.

The Meeting's ongoing link to FCNL led to the formation of an FCNL "Advocacy Team" that includes others, both inside and outside of Kendal. Friends have ALSO been instrumental in Kendal residents' attempts to address of race and inequality that plague our nation.

The physical isolation of this year has meant that we have not had important ways of learning about the condition and needs of others, but since residents and staff have now been vaccinated, we will soon be able to restore some of those ways of keeping in touch.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Elder, Clerk

London Grove Monthly Meeting

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

Recognizing the gift of community, we strove to assure spiritual sustenance and to overcome a threatening, painful, imposed pandemic isolation preventing our safe gathering inside the meetinghouse, by instituting virtual meetings. Virtual meetings for worship began March of 2020 and remain our means of gathering for worship, in committee work, and in other activities. Once weather permitted, outdoor meetings for worship on the meetinghouse grounds became the format for 2nd and 4th First Days. This was a breath of spirit. In a deliberate desire to preserve the wholeness of our meeting body, we kept virtual meetings and physical meetings scheduled on alternating weeks. (Once meetinghouse worship is safe, we are fully prepared to begin hybrid meetings of simultaneous physical and virtual worship.)

We recognize and applaud our Quaker “flat hierarchy.” No parson, priest, or individual carries the responsibility for our spiritual growth as a community; we all know that we are called to participate, to assume committee responsibilities, and to further our covenant.

Friends bring varying strengths, gifts, and needs to our London Grove community. Some found outdoor worship more conducive to vocal ministry, noted some of these gatherings as covered, and were grateful. Some felt we have lost the community spiritual stimulus of Biblical readings, spiritual readings, and references that often occurred in a more structured manner in times past. One individual noted that she is more prone to offering vocal ministry through Zoom knowing she can be well heard. We all recognize that virtual tools have brought Friends to worship who have relocated and have long been absent. While we all miss the collective Spirit that we feel while meeting together, some have expressed their joy that we are able to have a gathered meeting through Zoom.

Worship and Ministry Committee feels compelled to nurture our covenant as a spiritual community and is seeking to present means and practices to the meeting as a whole for deepening worship and vocal ministry.

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

We have learned that “one size does not fit all.” Virtual gatherings do not suit everyone but for others they have been a saving grace, a means to community if not full. We have found joy in connecting with Friends at a distance. We have come to know one another even better than we did before the pandemic through added opportunities like Zoom Coffee Time sharing twice a month, book discussions of editor Jessamyn West’s *The Quaker Reader*, and breakout sharing groups following meeting for worship. Some of us have learned how important community and London Grove is to us; simply seeing the mostly empty meeting for worship room on our Zoom screens while we met this morning, brought comfort and the ache of absence.

We have challenges. We are not whole. Some of our members could not safely gather outdoors and do not, for a range of reasons, feel led to use Zoom. We miss their presence. We recognize that we could become fragmented: we are all having different experiences. It is critically important to connect with one another, to share our various experiences, and move forward together. Nominating Committee reminds us that we each have gifts to offer meeting, strengths that will meet our community needs, and foster a strengthened covenant.

How has our faith supported our social witness?

We have faith, complete trust, in continuing revelation to guide our social witness. Individuals shared their experiences and exposure to varied means of growing their understanding of complex issues such as climate change, racism, and inequity. It was noted that the meeting has engaged in more active social witness and outreach to the larger community in the past than we do now. Our Peace and Social Justice Committee has continued to witness and promote actions against racism. They are

an example of a covenant commitment and a refreshing example of how our Quaker spirit has not sagged. Beyond the committee, there has recently been an upwelling of energy to increase our understanding and take action. We are voicing the query: What is our social witness to be now in this moment? Some of us have encountered examples of social witness through other meetings and other organizations. These can offer consideration and direction.

A comfortable tool of social witness to our larger community beyond London Grove Meeting has been our annual plant sale, providing a time and place for Friendly dialog and testimony as well as funding for community organizations whose work expresses our Quaker values. It was necessary to cancel the sale in 2020 and in 2021. Friends also cited our care for one another within the London Grove community as a form of social witness.

How have our community members supported one another?

The In-Reach Committee maintains an active communication among members and attenders through an email list-serve. We are able to learn of one another's needs for being held in the Light, receive and respond to various announcements, prepare for Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, and continue the work of our various committees. Some have expressed a desire to see more joys noted through the Care and Membership Committee meets monthly, notes concerns and challenges known of meeting attenders and members, and strives to make certain each will be personally contacted.

Although Care and Membership work to connect with members and attenders across meeting, it would be helpful to have all members take a role in calling, writing, or emailing Friends in isolation or need. It was suggested that it would be well to simply reach out to one another and not await an explicit need. More frequent small group sharing opportunities through Zoom would help each of us to be more supportive to others and perhaps seek support we, ourselves, might need.

We recognize that “support” can take different formats; one may have greater appeal over another for different generations. An Ad Hoc Committee on Growing the Meeting has been working on social media outreach, revitalizing our Facebook page and communications as well as our website. This is one tool to reach younger Friends, but other suggestions have been collected and will be explored.

Mill Creek Monthly Meeting

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

We have stayed very committed to each other. Meeting in the spirit when not able to attend. We've met face to face as soon as possible. We met through texts and E-mails.

Telephone and Zoom were also useful. We even added 2 new members during the pandemic.

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

We have the joy of adding to our membership. We have enjoyed health and safety in our membership. The joy of still being together.

We have learned patience to wait for each other to be comfortable to meet in person.

We learned to maintain discipline by adhering to our worship and devotional schedule even when we are apart. How has our faith supported our social witness?

We looked after each other, shared joys and sorrows. Shared food and resources.

We had a very successful food bank drive and shared with the community.

How have our community members supported one another?

We kept each other informed about how and where to get vaccinated.

We have sent loving gifts to each other ie. food, books, flowers.

Grace Matoy, Clerk

Newark Monthly Meeting

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

We have gone to Zoom format; we have maintained contact with the children through monthly First-Sunday First-Day school meetings, cards sent by mail, and gifts; we designed an imaginative way of exchanging food and gifts among local members at Christmas and mailed greetings to members elsewhere; we have maintained our financial obligations to PYM, WQM and our designated charities.

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

Covid-19 was the big challenge; the joys were that we're all together, that no one was lost, and that we've been able to enjoy in our Zoom meetings for worship the company of friends and members who could not otherwise have joined us. We did try a hybrid meeting for worship, but despite care and skill the technology was inadequate.

How has our faith supported our social witness?

We have participated in Hope Dining Room's food service for the needy; individual members have devoted time, money, and letter-writing efforts to the presidential election and the social issues that eddied around it. One member said that having fewer demands enabled her to offer better public participation.

How have our community members supported one another?

People have reached out to one another; elderly members have felt connected in a way that would not have been possible without Zoom; we have created a telephone tree in case of disruptions; a member felt very supported during his spouse's surgery. Diane Kesler noted that she will attend an FJC meeting devoted to alternatives to the distance conferencing system, Meeting Owl.

