

## **Appendix B – Ministry & Care Committee Spiritual State of the Yearly Meeting Report 6th Month 2020**

In this time of pandemic and strife in our nation, we will come together as members of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends to do business, share fellowship and continue to seek how to walk in the world as people of faith. We are a varied fellowship made up of larger, vibrant meetings with engaged Friends and responsive active committees; smaller, active and strong meetings where members and attenders work together as a committee of the whole; and meetings both larger and smaller which strive to bring together the spiritual and material resources to respond to the call of these times. Some meetings appreciate an abundance of physical, spiritual and financial resources while others are concerned that they lack what they need to accomplish what they see as important. Some meetings are able to enjoy the benefits of paid staff to help carry administrative tasks, teach first day school or support programming for adults. In some of the smallest meetings, these tasks are accomplished by a few Friends and sometimes by the committee of the whole.

Although there are many differences in size, location, resources and needs, here are some common threads which unite us as Friends.

### **We engage the time, talent and treasure of the meeting to steward the schools and properties under our care and the spiritual lives of members, attenders and children:**

Perhaps the most often recounted concern expressed by PYM meetings regarded the care of property. One meeting wondered if our need to focus on building, property and finances overwhelms our openness to our leadings as a faith community.

The many schools within our region are lovingly cared for (physically, financially and spiritually) by meeting members.

Adult First Day School takes a variety of different forms: discussing films and videos, reading together, having silent retreat time, speakers, spending time focusing on a query. The thread running through all these activities is the desire to know one another more deeply in that which is eternal and embrace our faith journey more fully.

Children's involvement in meeting for worship and provision for their spiritual development is considered a fundamental meeting function by many. Friends appreciate the presence of youth during a portion of Meeting for Worship, and several meetings regret not having adequate resources for vital, vibrant First Day School programming.

**We absorb the impact of events in the wider community including especially the pandemic and the growing recognition of systemic racism and its multi-faceted impact on society:**

Some meetings are fluent in technology; for some, it will always be a second language; and for still others, a language yet to be learned. Some meetings have an established foundation of electronic connection and have adapted to Zoom Meetings for Worship with relative ease. For other meetings, connection is associated with proximity, and the electronic communication required by the pandemic has been unsatisfactory. For still others, there is discomfort with, or lack of access to the necessary electronic resources to make this method of connection possible; in spite of pastoral care efforts, physical distancing has made the sense of community tenuous and hard to maintain in these times.

There are meetings in our fellowship for which the current imperative to social action has drawn from a deep well of study over the past several years; in these meetings, exploration of white supremacy, internalized racism and the need to move to anti-racist behavior has been ongoing. For other meetings, these topics are distant from their most pressing concerns. For still other meetings, there is a newly developing awareness of these issues and a desire to learn and understand more.

**We struggle with conflict and its resolution in our communities:**

Some meetings report loss of members because of difficulty handling conflict. Others wonder why we allow conflict to fester under the surface and pretend it is not there. Perhaps we are unwilling to address conflict because we lack the tools to do so effectively. We need to learn, understand and use our Quaker processes for effective conflict resolution.

**We strive to support and enhance community, increase inclusion and improve communication.**

Ironically the pandemic has provided both imperative and opportunity to gather differently. For some meetings this has resulted in greater inclusion, allowing members at a distance to be part of the worship. Meetings express concern about web presence as well as about social media and its impact on meeting members, although Friends see web presence to be helpful both as a tool of communication among those already part of the meeting community and also as an outreach tool. Once the social distancing has been relaxed and we are able to go back to meeting in physical proximity, several meetings recognize that they may profit from maintaining some electronic communication, given the geographic dispersal of meeting members.

Food and fellowship are part of the essential glue holding our communities together. Themed Potlucks, Spiritual Friendship circles, friendly 8s, snacks after meeting, special meals and celebrations all serve to bring us together in community.

**We embody our faith in our meetings and in the world:**

Meetings claiming involvement with the yearly meeting are few. We often see the Monthly Meeting as an entity unto itself. Several Quarters, however, are active and provide a broader community for meeting members to engage. Several meetings have members who are committed in engagement

across the Quaker Alphabet and who share their experiences with the meeting. Many meetings are active in the wider community, both secular and inter-faith. Attention to the many schools under our care, providing space for community service organizations and donations of time, talent and financial resources are valued activities.

Concerns are broad in scope. Many meeting members are deeply engaged in bringing their faith into action with involvement in social justice activities at the local, national and international level. Some Friends wonder if this translates into meeting activism. They ask how we assess our community involvement and whether the work must be undertaken by the meeting as a whole or if the meeting's support for the work of individuals counts.

### **We yearn**

- to enrich the spiritual health of our current and potential members and attenders and find ways for growth without proselytizing
- to better understand how to combat racism.
- to know and respect Quaker process and practice.
- to understand how best to prepare for worship
- to know how to balance the needs and desires of the individual with the needs and desires of the many.
- to create reliably deep worship in which all can participate and by which all can be nourished.
- to remain flexible to new input and maintain the centrality of silence
- to satisfy the desire for deeper connection, both spiritually and emotionally and deepen fellowship
- to express mutual respect for each other and for our decision-making process.

Jean-Marie Prestwidge Barch, Clerk, on behalf of Ministry & Care of QLC