



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

# **Chester Quarter: State of the Meeting Reports Received**

*Written on:* **AUGUST 31, 2021**

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## **Chester Monthly Meeting**

### **Query 1: How have we sustained our commitment to be a covenant spiritual community during this past year?**

Eight of us sat together in worship/sharing; the thoughts offered are reflected here, and there are others, which I have woven in as I considered this past year.

As of March 29, 2020, our meeting community began much of its life on Zoom. We will reopen as a hybrid meeting in a couple weeks. Our shift to virtual helped us to sustain our community during this time of the pandemic. This year, we have welcomed some new attenders who for reasons of distance would not have been able to join us in person, even had we been open. However, others have not joined during this virtual time, as this way of meeting does not serve them. We have kept in touch through phone calls, and also through the meeting Google group, where jokes, stories, encouraging words, pictures, and calls to action or reflection are shared.

Following are some of the gatherings and practices, which have sustained us as a Covenant community:

Our Recording Clerk does much thoughtful and creative workaround communication, which has helped us to prevail and has evolved over this year.

Property Committee has worked with diligence, wisdom, and perseverance during this whole time. The committee planned two outdoor workdays where some of us could safely gather in person. Activity focused on tree damage after storms, clearing away brush, and making sure the internet was installed.

Property committee members have communicated with neighbors and others; all their work has kept the community vital.

There are singers in our Meeting. Sometimes we have taken turns singing on Zoom and had much laughter when singing together.

A small group met during the winter to discuss the book of Revelation; these sessions were led by one of our elders.

Last summer, some of us participated in a threshing session on racism. We shared some stories about ourselves, and our learnings that have come in the journey of understanding. Our session was guided by two members who shared their gifts and knowledge with us.

## **Query 2: What have been the joys and learnings of this past year and where have we encountered challenges?**

One thing that has been a challenging circumstance in our community for years was brought up with frustration and concern during our discussion. This is our small size. Participation in worship could be greater. There are not many people to do committee work; attendance ebbs and flows. We continue to hope, and to reach out to members we haven't seen in a while. Attendance has been a little greater during the pandemic, but the patterns haven't changed too much.

One challenge of this year is the exhaustion, suffering, and loss that people have experienced for many reasons. There is also the disappointment expressed at not being able to gather in person.

During this year, the joys of fellowship, often with creative problem solving together, has continued in spite of everything.

An elder of the meeting shared about her learning. This year, she has experienced our worship as spiritually deeper. Sometimes, she is the only friend of color in meeting; she finds this to be less stressful or isolating when meeting is virtual.

### **Query 3: How has our faith supported our social witness?**

In the uniqueness of our communal spirit, Chester Meeting is all about building Beloved Community, and standing with those who are suffering in the world. This can be seen as joys, concerns, and sorrows shared after worship, and in the work in the world that individuals in the group do.

Following are some things that have been done corporately over the past year:

We planned a presentation, inviting friends from the Quarter. One of our attenders, who is a peacebuilder, and researcher, shared about his work in Cambodia, where he has been learning and writing about the recovery of music in the country, and the healing and peacemaking this recovery brings.

Small groups of us gathered and attended several Black Lives Matter protests in the area. Education Committee did the work to ensure that in springs of 2020 and 2021, new N.A.C.C.P. Quaker scholars were chosen to receive our four-year scholarship to help with college expenses.

We continued to offer space as a grow site for herb gardens which are part of a wellness, spiritual, and community-building work directed by Pamela Boyce Simms.

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

Care of Members Committee and others have attended to our community, helping with practical needs, times of loss, and health concerns. We did hold two Zoom socials, which took some planning as Zoom is such a different way to spend time together. The socials were focused on games, and sharing of stories and pictures. If there were awkward moments, there were lighthearted ones as well.

We face the challenge of finding safe and hybrid/blended reopening, working through technical and practical issues, holding everyone's concerns as we find a way forward that serves us all. As Clerk I am grateful for many things; the four or five elders who show up regularly, the ministry of long-standing members and new attenders, the peaceful and gracious help of our Zoom hosts, for silent gathered worship, and for messages.

For all these, I am grateful.

*Susan Elliot*

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# Lansdowne Monthly Meeting

**What opportunities are provided to address topics that are important to deepening both the personal spiritual journeys of members and the life of the meeting?**

LMM offers a broad range of opportunities for spiritual deepening and enhancing fellowship.

Examples: Meeting for Learning, Weekly bulletin, Monthly Bible study, and Messages during MfW

**What practices and strategies are employed by our meeting to help members and attenders of all ages to prepare for worship—whether in meeting for worship and/or and in meeting for business?**

We have been attentive and creative to helping prepare for worship.

Examples: Weekly bulletin with Quaker quotes 52 weeks a year, Piano music before MfW, and Holding "MfW with attention to Business" in the light

**What work has our community engaged in or explored in the past year that reflects our testimonies?" "What worked well over this past year?**

We were led to respond actively to last year's police violence crisis.

Examples: BLM sign, Anti-racism book reports, and Social Concerns Support Group

## Challenges

We conflate community actions with individual leading. Some members would like us to be more focused on anti-racism work.

## **What is most needed to strengthen the communal witness of the meeting to the local community and beyond?**

We aspire to strengthen our collective witness.

Individual suggestions: Need to understand “communal witness”, Collective action is needed, and Education is key.

### **Challenges**

We don't share a common vision to bring to the local community, and lack the capacity to develop one.

“Collective conviction is needed. What is missing is collective witness that may come from collective listening.”

Our ad hoc Social Concerns Support Group played a useful role in 2020 but does not provide the capacity of a dynamic Peace Committee.



#### **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.