



## **Ministry & Care Committee of the Quaker Life Council**

### **Spiritual State of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for the year 2020**

June 2021

The Covid-19 pandemic, political strife, a heated Presidential election, and the social uprising following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police are key events that touched everyone in 2020.

PYM is comprised of large, medium, and small urban, suburban, and rural meetings. Monthly meetings handled the pandemic's stay-at-home orders and social distancing requirements somewhat differently, but nearly all monthly meetings moved meetings for worship, social gatherings, adult religious education classes, and committee meetings to Zoom in March 2020 for a minimum of two or three months.

#### **Sustaining a Covenant Community**

To many, worship on Zoom proved to be surprisingly deeply meaningful. The technology helped keep us together as a community. The mosaic of faces on the screen helped us feel less lonely. We could see and hear everyone clearly. Friends who had moved away and who we hadn't seen in years rejoined our community thanks to the technology. We found we could have zoom meetings for worship more often during the week. Some meetings added midweek meetings, or even offered worship every day.

Unfortunately, Zoom didn't work for everyone. Some Friends didn't find Zoom worship meaningful or didn't have the technology or the ability to join Zoom sessions. Other Friends were exhausted from being on Zoom all week for work or school and just needed a break. Some meetings were able to offer alternative worship experiences or paused and then went back to worshipping in the meetinghouse as soon as they felt comfortable to do so.

We experienced a great longing to be together in community. Some meetings held socially distanced, masked meetings out of doors, even throughout the winter. Other meetings felt comfortable worshipping in their meetinghouses while being sure to follow the pandemic guidelines. A few meetings had trouble reaching unity about mask-wearing and meeting indoors. A few smaller meetings joined together in meeting on Zoom and felt closer as a result. Mid-week worship was kept going on zoom and added to the schedule of a number of meetings.

Many meetings held multiple types of worship - in-person outdoor or indoor, as well as zoom - each week. A few meetings have begun experimenting with hybrid meetings, following the lead of Pendle Hill and their daily hybrid meeting. There is a great concern not to abandon those who have been worshipping with us from a distance with us once we can safely all worship in the meetinghouse.

The experience of being able to keep in close contact during the pandemic, the election season, and the social uprising was very important. Quite a few meetings reported feeling stronger as a community after having been through all of that together. Hanging out all together on Zoom after worship for a period of Joys and Concerns, or in breakout rooms, was new for some meetings, and deepened a sense of community.

Meetings reached out to their members, particularly to those not attending worship. More reaching out will need to be done to bring Friends back into the fold once meeting in person is once again allowed.

Meetings employed a broad number of strategies for adult religious education – sessions with speakers or videos, as well as reading groups. The topics included Quakerism, peace, climate change, racism, white privilege, social justice, environmental concerns and justice, gun violence, and hunger.

Many meetings expressed concern for their children and Young Friends. Since many events had to be cancelled, efforts were made to keep children engaged. Several meetings have a Quaker School under their care. Collaboration, use of meetinghouse space, and financial support were offered to help keep the schools open.

### **Living into our Social Witness**

The murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police sparked a social uprising across America. There were demonstrations against police brutality and white supremacy across the country. It seemed as if there was a widespread awakening in the white community to the reality faced daily by black and brown people.

While quite a few meetings have been working on becoming anti-racist for years, this year we see many more reports of meetings focusing their energy on learning to be anti-racist. Meetings have been holding reading/study groups, taking the AFSC e-course “Radical Acting in Faith for White People,” organizing and attending demonstrations and vigils, and showing films for the Meeting as well as the wider community.

Meetings stayed involved with their local communities, supporting activities such as food pantries, community refrigerators and other feeding programs. Meetings supported and participated in local interfaith initiatives such as POWER and Heeding God’s Call to End Gun Violence. Meetings also support Earth Quaker Action Team, American Friends Service

Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation, and work with immigrants and refugees.

### **Our Spiritual State**

The pause in being able to gather physically has created, for some Friends, a deeper quiet, an opportunity for deeper listening, and a shift in priorities.

We see and hear that there is a thirst for transforming ourselves, our meetings, our communities, our Yearly Meeting, and our world into one that is anti-racist and not one dominated by white supremacy.

There is a thirst to know how to communicate with each other and resolve conflicts in a deep, spirit-led way.

The past year has revealed both the durability and elasticity of our connection and the deep importance we hold in one another’s lives.

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