



Spiritual State of the Yearly Meeting Report 6th Month 2022
Prepared by Ministry and Care Committee of QLC
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The spiritual state of our yearly meeting as reflected in the reports of 63 Monthly Meetings is vibrant and vigorous. (footnote one¹) Ministry and Care Committee was pleased to receive reports from small, medium and large meetings across the geographic range of the yearly meeting, provided through the work of the Clerk of the meeting, Ministry and Care Committee, amalgamated reports from several meeting committees and also from gatherings of meeting members in which the Spiritual State of the Meeting was considered. In the aggregate, the pandemic has exacerbated the challenges to maintain community and to act in accordance with our testimonies and draw on our creativity to meet those challenges. Meetings have, in general, risen to the challenges. They have learned a lot about what is important to their community and gotten to know each other more deeply. Meetings have also found places where they need and want to improve and change; for many, that work is underway while some others have implied a desire for support and assistance in that process.

Our yearly meeting wide witness of climate change has engaged meetings across the span of the meeting—large and small, urban and rural—in many different ways. For some, this is a witness long held, while others are just beginning to learn about what they can do and to realize how much there is to learn. Several meetings have made extensive changes to their meeting house in order to improve their energy efficiency and decrease their carbon footprint; fewer in-person meetings also coincidentally decrease carbon footprint. One meeting has become aware through increased education that their individual actions are unlikely to have an important impact and have moved their focus away from emphasis on individual acts of conservation. Several meetings are supporting their members in performing a personal energy audit to learn about their individual carbon footprint.

Many meetings are also engaging with an increased focus on the realities of systemic racism in our midst and witnessing the need for change. Meetings have engaged this concern in a wide variety of ways including reading, lectures, demonstrations, banners, discussion groups, worship sharing, financial

¹ Footnote:

This represents about 61% of the monthly meetings in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting at this time. Reports came from 16 small (fewer than 50 members), 34 medium (fewer than 200 members) and 14 large meetings.; we recognize that membership numbers may not accurately reflect the composition of the meeting. Only reports received by June 1, 2022 have been included in this reporting—Reports received after that date will be included in next year’s spiritual state of the yearly meeting report. A list of those meetings whose reports were used as the basis for this Spiritual State of the Yearly Meeting Report is available on request. The entire group of reports can be found on-line.

donations, focus on reparations, and partnering with neighboring congregations and schools with predominantly African-American membership. One meeting has engaged dialogue with the police chief of their town to address racism. Several meetings have engaged in activities focused on in-reach as a foundation for greater, better informed action in the world. While some meetings are building on an already well developed foundation, others are still learning. By understanding systemic racism more fully, meeting members are better positioned to make choices about action.

Worship has been taking place via zoom exclusively or in a hybrid configuration for almost all meetings reporting. One meeting has continued to meet in person. Some note the advantages of including folks from a distance or those who have travel challenges and/or concerns about the pandemic, though some specifically note Zoom is not for them! Some meetings have met the challenge of zoom worship by upgrading their WIFI service and purchasing the technology (new computers, the owl, speaker systems, etc) that allows hybrid meetings for worship and business to work smoothly. Some note the benefits of blended worship and several are clear that they “will never go back” to meeting for worship only in person. The advantage of hybrid or all zoom meetings for committees is also real, allowing participation of those who find evening travel unpalatable. The use of zoom for meetings also speaks to climate concerns and allows Friends to hold meetings without significant expenditure of fossil fuels. Closed captioning and the ability to see everyone’s face allows more meaningful participation for those with hearing challenges.

The availability of out-door spaces presented both blessings and challenges. While several meetings noted using the outdoors for fellowship, worship and First Day School offerings for children, many others noted the additional responsibility (some might say burden) properties present. Storms have felled old trees which then needed to be cleared, but the comradery heretofore offered by work-days has not been as easily achieved. One meeting was pleased that they have gotten rid of their meeting house and are renting space from a local church. Others are using their space, both outdoor and indoor, to provide a base for outreach to the surrounding community. Some share their meeting house with other worship communities, some use their kitchens to provide meals for neighborhood organizations or allow those facilities to be used for such purposes. Meeting properties also provide a location for signs and for informational and protest vigils and demonstrations- primarily on racism or climate issues. Although the signs and banners have occasionally been the targets of vandalism, they have generally been a useful focus for education and for stating the position of the meeting in a public way.

Although Zoom has been a very helpful vehicle for adult Religious Education, fellowship, committee meetings and worship of all kinds, it has in general not been as successful for families with younger children and for children’s First Day School. Many meetings have worked hard to find ways to bring children to the meeting together; many have found that zoom is a poor vehicle as many children were spending their entire school week on zoom and were “zoomed-out” by First Day morning. Several meetings report heroic efforts by their first day school teachers who provided “delivered to your door” lessons for use by families at home. While this allowed for some of the material that would be taught in FDS to be shared, it did not allow for the rich and deep connections our children form when they spend time with one another. Those meetings with access to outdoor spaces used them to bring the children together in person.

Outreach to meeting members who are unable to attend worship either in person or through zoom has been an intention successfully carried through by many meetings. Ministry and Care committees (under a variety of names) have sent cards, letters, and flowers, made phone calls, and also sent emails with readings, queries and stories to share. In some meetings opportunities to then gather via zoom and reflect (in worship sharing or informal conversation times) on those stories as well as on spiritual journeys and other personal sharings have helped to bring the meetings' members closer together.

The pandemic has brought increased isolation for individual meeting members and for the meeting-as-a-whole, as well. While some meetings have been able to continue traditions of service and outreach that connect them to their local community, others have experienced attrition and a sense of disconnection. Several meetings specifically note a desire for increased connection with the community and are exploring ways to accomplish that. Others are actively seeking to reconnect with meeting members, attract new attenders and deepen and grow the meeting community overall.

Meetings in Phila Yearly Meeting have met the pandemic with hard work, and notable spiritual resiliency, holding on to some treasured traditions and developing new ways to accomplish community goals. Meeting members express pleasure that zoom and hybrid meetings for worship are surprisingly spiritual and fulfilling. Business continues to be conducted, primarily on-line. Meetings have been creative in devising opportunities for in-person fellowship, as well as on-line interaction. For some meetings, participation in quarterly and yearly meeting activities has increased, which Friends see as a positive outcome. Indoor and outdoor worship have also increased for some meetings. Friends have found many different ways to attend to the quality of worship to explore what is essential for gathered worship and to uncover different ways to enhance the experience. This year has brought sadness, loss and challenges which are encouraging creative problem solving and deeper connection.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jean-Marie Prestwidge Barch, Clerk Ministry and Care Committee of Quaker Life Council—on behalf of the committee