

## State of the Society– 2014 DRAFT

For the State of Society report this year the constituent meetings of New York Yearly Meeting were asked to use the guidelines set forth in the current edition of our *Faith & Practice* which recommends “a searching self-examination” by the meeting and its members. Unlike in the recent past no queries were suggested. Twenty-four meetings responded in various ways and several common themes emerged.

### QUALITY OF WORSHIP AND SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

*“... those treasured moments when the Spirit gathers us into one body with a common leading.”*

Friends described meeting for worship as welcoming, comforting and joyful, a spiritual home, well-grounded in the Light. Still, while feeling refreshed and renewed in the silence, treasuring the moments when Spirit gathers Friends into one body, some Friends shared that waiting in expectation can be a challenge and some expressed a desire to cultivate an inward stillness that goes beyond silence.

Some meetings expressed their appreciation of the depth and richness of worship in their meetings, noting that there seems to be more substance in vocal ministry, spiritual counsel and deep feelings of love. Others expressed the concern that vocal ministry is rare and more would be welcomed. Some find it difficult to achieve a comfortable balance between silence and spoken messages.

### SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Meetings are laboring to foster growth in the Spirit in different ways, striving to provide a welcoming, safe place for seekers. Most meetings hold study sessions, worship sharing or discussions arising out of varied Quaker or non-Quaker writings. These sessions are reported to be deep, received prayerfully and without judgment. Sharing from wide-ranging faith traditions found among Friends and attenders helps open Friends to diverse spiritual journeys.

Some meetings schedule hymn singing once a month or use the natural world to evoke or broaden connection to Spirit. Others have been making an effort to understand early Friends, finding joy and fascination in exploring our Quaker heritage.

Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business is also experienced as a ministry, a time when Friends can speak truth and be listened to deeply. Friends report that depth in worship aids corporate discernment, though lovingly dealing with diversity of leadings is ever a challenge.

Discovering and nurturing the gifts of members and attenders as they are led to fill the roles of those who can no longer serve also fosters the spiritual growth of our meetings, as does honoring the joy and growth of the Spirit-led work of our children and youth.

One meeting mentioned a gratitude box from which messages are taken out and read periodically. Meeting retreats either at the meetinghouse or at Powell House also contribute to spiritual growth, as do mid-week meetings in homes, joint gatherings of several small meetings, pot-luck meals, picnics or gathering at a local restaurant.

### WITNESSING TO FRIENDS' PRINCIPLES

Friends participate in a broad range of witness activities in their communities. Some of these activities include Earthcare Witness, working for peace, AVP, Amnesty International, AFSC, FCNL, Christian Peace Teams, Witness against Torture, prison ministry, war tax witness, gun control, sustainable agriculture, and work to overcome racism. The Friends' tradition of Spirit led witness in the world remains constant and strong in our meetings.

### PERSONAL AND FAMILY RELATIONS

Because so many meetings are facing an aging membership, many have been having conversations on aging or offering workshop on late-life issues for children of aging parents. Some meetings have been holding monthly life-story sharing for elders or sponsoring a care-givers' group. Many meetings now have members who have completed ARCH (Aging Resources Consultation and Help) training.

Friends are offering rides to meeting and to medical appointments for those no longer able to drive. Some are reaching out by phone and email, delivering meals and paying visits to the homebound, sometimes holding meeting for worship with them.

In worship, Friends "hold in the Light" those who are ill and also make meeting attendance as comfortable as possible for the disabled. Some meetings have installed such services as an assisted-listening device or microphone in the meeting room for those who are hard of hearing. Friends who need pastoral care are receiving it from members, committees and clearness committees.

Many meetings mention a sense of community with First Day School families and some report activities such as a parent luncheon discussion or nurturing a teen group as they learn Quaker process. Intergenerational activities have been offered, such as outings to baseball games, to visit a bee-keeper, a family picnic, kayaking, holiday celebrations and crafts projects.

### RELATIONS WITH COMMUNITY AND OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Friends carry our faith into the community and welcome the community into the meetinghouse. Many Friends Meetings are affiliated with local interfaith organizations; some have participated in ecumenical retreats; others mention exchanging speaking engagements with other religious bodies.

Many meetings have scheduled events and activities at the meetinghouse, open to community, such as: tag sales, arts projects, fairs, open houses, contra-dances, healing prayer meetings. In the community, Friends have participated in local parades, a blessing of the animals, a booth at a local festival. Some have joined with other local organizations to offer scholarships to high school students.

Many meetings are participating in activities to help the less fortunate: assisting at a homeless shelter; supporting and working at a food pantry or soup kitchen; providing clothing for the needy; visiting nursing homes; providing weekend food for free-lunch school children.

### PARTICIPATION IN WIDER FRIENDS ACTIVITIES

Members from nearly every meeting participate in the work of Yearly Meeting, Quarterly or Regional Meetings. Inter-visitation with other meetings has increased and many meetings report attendance at Powell House weekends, Quaker Youth Pilgrimage, Young Adult Friends Retreat.

### CONCERNS THAT TEST US

As it has been for many years, some of our meetings report significant and growing concerns regarding aging and dwindling membership rolls, small or non-existent First Day programs and the difficulties of maintaining meetings both spiritually and physically. Many mentioned that their diminishing numbers create an increasing burden on the few who remain. Maintenance of buildings and grounds requires energy and is often costly. Small numbers can sometimes make upkeep seem overwhelming, especially when there is an historic meetinghouse and cemetery to maintain. Nevertheless, it is clear that despite these concerns, Friends across the Yearly Meeting are sustained and inspired by the Divine Source that nourishes our souls and lights the path before us. In nearly every report there is a sense of hope and an unwavering commitment to the worship that unites us in the cause of Love.