

Atlanta Friends Meeting
State of the Meeting Report 2014
Submitted by Nan O'Connor, Clerk

This year we sought a deepening of our spiritual life together. Our meetings for worship are opportunities to live together in the spirit and to receive vocal ministry. Periods of holding in the Light continue to provide a rich opportunity to hear and hold the many challenges facing members and those to whom we are connected in love.

In 2014, our meeting greeted eight new babies, including a set of triplets. We took two marriages under our care. We mourned the passing of one member and held three memorial services. We welcomed five new, transferring or sojourning members. Our number of attendees averaged from 100-120 each week.

We are encouraged that Friends are finding occasions during the week to gather in small groups. There are two active Spiritual Nurture Groups, including a Circle of Trust, a Bible Discussion group, two mid-week worship groups, a Young Adult Friends group, a monthly dinner for newcomers and the Adult First Day class. These small groups help us to “know each other in that which is eternal” and provide connections that deepen our corporate worship. In the Adult First Day class members and attenders are provided an hour to share their spiritual journeys and challenges in depth. We find preparing, delivering and receiving these accounts to be rich and intimate experiences. In second month Quaker healer John Calvi led a retreat around the theme of “A Day of Rest and Renewal.” Clearness committees continue to flourish in our community and we provide education on their use and spiritual nature. AFM is now in its third year of supporting Quaker Voluntary Service Atlanta and there are currently five QVS Volunteers serving in Atlanta.

We are a large meeting and a theologically diverse one. In the last year, we explored through a forum the way different Friends root their spiritual story. We are challenged and quickened by these exchanges. Learning more from one another provides opportunities to move from abstract head knowledge to the sure heart knowledge that unifies and strengthens us.

We experienced great richness in the last year as leading for new ministries bubbled up in our community. We continue to experiment with processes and practices to support and recognize these ministries more formally so that they may deepen in faithfulness. A number of friends meet regularly with anchoring committees to support their ministries. In the past year we recognized and supported Friends leadings to ministries of music, photography, and Quaker interfaith chaplaincy. We continue to encourage Friends to listen carefully for prompting to take up ministries and to lay them down as the Spirit leads.

We are blessed by the many children in our meeting. We continue to seek ways for our community to support children and their parents. There is sometimes a separation felt between adults and children, and we seek ways to actively cherish each member of the community. In 11th month we held our second semiprogrammed worship with attention to Welcoming Children. Members of meeting signed prepared certificates for

17 individual children witnessing our promises to cherish and nurture the children of our meeting.

The Care & Counsel Committee began the year with a half-day retreat where they set priorities for the year. As a result, several practices are in place to support those priorities. C&C continues to have a Point Person for each month to receive requests for assistance from the Meeting community. The volunteer sign up sheet was redesigned to encourage more Friends to serve in the life of the Meeting. The visitor sign-in was redesigned to make it easier to provide follow up information. To allow for a wider participation of Holding in the Light the names of those Held in the Light in Meeting for Worship may be included in the newsletter, providing the inclusion is completely voluntary and the privacy of the person involved is protected. A wheelchair was donated to assist attenders who might have difficulty getting from the parking lot to the meetinghouse. A subcommittee of Care and Counsel presented information throughout the year in forums under the theme Conscious Aging/Mindful Dying. C&C, with Ministry & Worship committee helped to arrange three memorial services.

The Administration Committee, made up of a dedicated group of Friends representing other committees, continued to focus on Meetinghouse building & grounds maintenance and repair. The major playground renovation project was finally completed, after unexpected delays. The building sprinkler system repairs were a continuing source of frustration, but essential repairs were made. A new project, renovation and maintenance of the library, was begun with the help of members of the Meeting. Administration strives to act with the intention that the day-to-day maintenance of our space is a Spiritual journey. We work to develop procedures for our facilities and our community that will not limit the Spirit with cold, closed policies. When the committee feels ready to move forward with projects, we seek patience – both within the committee and from members of the Meeting – so that all voices can be heard and considered. In all of our work, we hope our energy helps make a better life for the Atlanta Friends Meeting.

AFM continues to be challenged to find enough Friends who feel led to serve in the many roles we have created to meet the needs of the Meeting. We added a part-time bookkeeper to our staff due to the increasing demands of that position. Nominating Committee is trying to meet on a regular basis and make the inquiries needed, in between our meetings. We are also updating the spreadsheet that lists all positions and terms of those serving.

Living our testimony of equality is an important spiritual concern that compels us to address racism in ourselves, our communities, and in society, especially in the criminal justice system. Quakers for Racial Equality (QRE) has been the main group doing anti-racism work in AFM, but many individuals in Meeting also share this leading. QRA has offered a weekly literature table, a monthly Listening Ear for concerns about racism, queries related to personal racism, and workshops on “Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity.” At Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association (SAYMA) and at AFM, QRE members showed film segments of “Cracking the Codes” and facilitated small group sharing about bias, privilege, and institutional racism. We continue our efforts to make AFM a more welcoming spiritual home for all and to track

the racial diversity of attendance at Meeting for Worship. In addition, two QRA members took facilitator training and participated in the YWCA, "It's Time to Talk about Race" circle dialogs.

AFM participants have also been engaged in addressing racism in our neighborhoods, in Decatur, and the wider Atlanta area by supporting AFM members affected by an incident of Klan leafleting, by working with the Decatur Community Coalition to end racial profiling in Decatur, and by joining four other Decatur congregations in the Oakhurst March to protest racial profiling and police violence everywhere. AFM folks also participated in other vigils and marches in Atlanta to affirm that "Black Lives Matter". QRE and the Prison Reform Group have supported workshops on the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), an approach that has been successfully used with both prisoners and youth. Five Atlanta Friends met the requirements to be apprentice AVP trainers. QRE members have also been very active with the End New Jim Crow Action Group, a racially and religiously diverse group that focuses on action in education, legislation, and re-entry. Listening to the leadership of formerly incarcerated people and recognizing how structural racism perpetuates inequality have been important lessons from this work. As we strive for racial equality in our personal lives, communities, and society, we appreciate the witness of Friends, both here and physically distant, who challenge us to follow our spiritual leadings to step up for racial justice.

The work of the religious education committee is inspired and guided by our First Day schoolteachers, doorkeepers, and the children we teach. From this deep well of the Spirit we approach this year's Old Testament curriculum. We find that we are called to teach the scripture, as Barclay says, "by the inward testimony of the spirit," knowing that we follow the Spirit as our guide to all Truth. In our work we strive to teach children how to listen for God's voice, guiding our youngest members to the inward teacher with thoughtful wondering through our Godly Play curriculum. We endeavor to honor each child's voice and empower young people to know that divine inspiration is available to us all, thereby allowing us, at any age, to access the deeper meaning in scripture by finding our inward guide. Thus springs our 2014-2015 First Day School theme--Making meaning of scripture: finding our inward teacher.

This year we adjusted our classrooms from six, including the nursery to five. We knew going into the year that we would not have enough lower elementary children to fill out a full class so we adjusted our classrooms to reflect our current age distribution. On any given First Day we can expect 5-8 lower grades children (3 years to 1st grade), 4-7 middle grades children (2nd to 4th grades), 4-6 upper grades children (5th -7th grades), and 15-20 high school children (8th-12th grade). We have 14 Friends who teach First Day School on a rotating basis and 6-8 Friends who volunteer as doorkeepers weekly.

It is very important to note something that is vital to the strength of our community, but rarely mentioned. That is the countless acts of kindness and support between Friends that occur every day, but remain hidden from the larger view. Simply put, we are there for each other.

Atlanta Friends Meeting aspires to be a welcoming spiritual home for all and there is a deep desire to faithfully discern a spirit-led path toward making this an ever-increasing reality. We have made progress along this path as evidenced by our active, engaged and supportive community.