

Atlanta Friends Meeting
Religious Society of Friends
2019 State of the Meeting Report

In a 1656 letter from prison, George Fox encouraged Friends “to be patterns, examples in all ...places, wherever you come.” In these troubled and challenging times, we are a community seeking to be faithful and cheerful, a place of refuge as well as a place of inspiration and challenge.

We continue to explore how to be a more faithful community and how to live transformed lives. Each First Day, we gather in worship to listen expectantly. We close our Meeting for Worship inviting our community to hold in the Light concerns, challenges and joys. We seek to know each other more deeply. Once a month, a member of the community, surrounded by attentive listeners, is given an hour to share their spiritual journey. Friends participating find this a powerful opportunity for both speaker and all who witness. An adult religious education program meets each first day to deepen our spiritual lives and share new insights.

Our Meeting continues to grow and transition. We received nine new members by conviction and one by transfer. We celebrated the arrival of four babies born to Friends in Meeting. Three marriages were conducted under the care of the Meeting. Three memorial Meetings for Worship celebrated the lives of our beloved Friends Nan Pendergrast, Bill Jenkins and Carolyn Manley.

While there are many joys and opportunities with a large meeting, there are also challenges. We are investigating how we can better know the personal challenges of individual Friends. We want to note the absence of members and attenders and reach out with loving care. We are considering the responsibility of deeply caring for the marriages we take under our care especially of Friends who live at a distance from the Meeting, in other states or even other countries. Concerns about the security of the meetinghouse and the need to be mindful and prepared for life in a violent world is balanced by concerns for potential exclusion. An ad hoc committee has been formed to explore these concerns and we look forward to their prayerful deliberations.

Since a central component of our spirituality is listening to one another, Friends have raised the concern over being able to hear one another in the most literal sense. Some Friends are unable to hear the vocal ministry in Meeting for Worship and other community gatherings. We have attempted tweaks of the hearing assistance system, encouraging Friends to speak up or changing position in the room. We hear there are Friends who no longer attend meeting as they cannot hear. But the proposal of using a hand-held microphone also elicits strong feelings. We are exploring both technological and behavioral interventions to make this a place where all can hear and be heard.

Care and Counsel Committee is under the weight of a concern to create an inclusive, cared for, community. A newcomer’s table provides a place and person to talk to most First Days. Friends with health issues and life transitions are supported with meals, rides and visits. The care quilts continue to be a tangible manifestation of being under the care of the Meeting. We

continue to learn how to be more tender to the issues of gender identity and use of pronouns. Buttons are now available for members and attenders to inform others of the pronouns to use for them. Drawing on information from Friends General Conference, we are adding guidelines for greeting diverse newcomers to heighten the awareness of our front door greeters, who are often the first point of contact.

Nominating Committee actively works to involve more Friends in the organizational life of the Meeting with a goal of making each member feel welcome, included and valued. We continue to think of ways to make our processes and practices more transparent. While the short-hand terms and practices of a community are valued and familiar language to insiders, we recognize the need to find ways make these open and informing without losing our special identity and history. Decoding acronyms, explaining terms and describing processes in an accessible manner are challenges.

2019 was a year of transition for meeting staff. Our long-time Office Coordinator, Jonah McDonald, left his position and our Friend in Residence ended their term. Searches to fill these vacant positions as well as that of the new Property Coordinator led to new Friends stepping forward to carry these responsibilities. We welcomed our new Friend in Residence, Anton Flores, whose gifts and experiences in community building alongside an emphasis on immigrant justice has already provided us many opportunities to learn and grow. Nina Gooch now serves as our Office Coordinator and Kevin Wong as our Property Manager

We have an energetic and active First Day Program for young Friends. This year thirteen adult Friends committed to serving as lead teachers. Our preschool and lower elementary classes are examining Quaker faith and practice, testimonies and queries. The Faith and Play approach uses the engagement of story to explore living our faith. The teen class has been expanded to include middle and high school participants and uses a format of queries to engage in discussion and reflection. On fifth Sunday, we do not hold first day classes and ask parents to worship with their family for the whole hour. We notice that attendance is less on those First days.

The Macon Worship Group continues under our care. The group increased their meetings from once a month to twice a month and meet in a downtown Unitarian Universalist Church. They publish a regular newsletter and hold a regular Meeting for Business. Members of Atlanta Meeting are encouraged and welcomed to attend. Those who have, find the experience enriching.

Through our Social Concerns Committee, we provide financial and practical support to a variety of community organizations and projects that our meeting members are involved with. This year we provided new support for asylum seekers via monthly workshops organized by Immigration Law Lab and sustained by volunteers of the Meeting. Support has also been extended to the DeKalb Remembrance Project (Lynching memorial and mitigation), Second Chance Georgia (Expungement) and Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda (Voting Rights).

The committee continues to support leadings for peace and justice among members of the Atlanta Friends Meeting community.

We celebrated the important role Quaker women play in the ongoing struggle for women's rights. We celebrated the 99th anniversary of the 19th amendment and are reminded of the ongoing struggles to insure the realization of women's equality.

Friends with a concern for a livable planet have labored to be faithful to their leading. Green Friends meet monthly. The year began with a Friend sharing in business meeting a vision for a greener meetinghouse. Forums have been held during the year to explore the steps that might be taken to decrease our carbon dependence as a community such as installing solar panels. To educate our broader community, Green Friends produced poster maps illustrating the effects of climate change on Georgia and our neighboring states and shared these with hundreds of high school science classes across the region upon request.

Quakers for Racial Equality (QRE) and the Committee for Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting (CURAFM) continue to act on the testimony of equality and leading to undo racism in its many forms towards the vision of creating a spiritual home for all. Friends held meeting wide forums, hosted potlucks, a monthly listening ear for concerns about racism, literature table and bulletin board. Two interactive workshops on "Becoming a Welcoming Anti-Racist Meeting" were held. The committee provided support for Friends to attend educational events beyond the meeting, encouraging these Friends to bring these new insights back. Friends of Color met several times during the year. A monthly book discussion group is finding deep engagement. Beyond the meeting, QRE and Social Concerns join with community groups to transform the community.

The local Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) Advocacy Teams engaged Friends in developing respectful ongoing relationship with Georgia's federal elected senators and representatives and their staff. Team members meet regularly to prepare to speak our truth to our federal leaders in ways that speak to that of God in others, telling compelling personal stories connecting them to important legislative issues of war, peace and justice. Central to this team is faithfulness in ongoing service, working to build relationships.

Our faithfulness to the larger world continues with our ongoing relationship with Suchitoto, El Salvador and the connection that was forged between our two communities through the loving labor of Frank and Carol Cummings. We continue to carry their concerns after their deaths. The Suchitoto Fund Committee is pleased with the progress this year of the youth-led nonprofit "The Association of Current and Graduated Scholarship Students from Suchitoto" (ABESUCHI).

We are now in our 8th year as a host meeting for a Quaker Voluntary Service cohort. Our meeting has been enriched by the young adults who have come as QVS fellows. We are very fortunate some of these QVS fellows have served and stayed, becoming active members of our community. Members of our community serve as members of the local support committee and as spiritual nurturers and report on the powerful experience of accompanying those committed

to a year of service and spiritual reflection. Ten years ago, Christina Repoley came to AFM with a concern and vision that led to the founding of QVS as an organization. In 2019, we celebrated Christina's prophetic service and her transition from being Executive Director. We treasure her continued involvement with our community.

Atlanta meeting continues to be a place of transformation, of nurture, of challenge, of deep listening and silence.

Approved, Atlanta Friends Meeting, February 15, 2020