

## 2015 State of Society Report

“Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.”

*(Britain Yearly Meeting)*

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Three interrelated aspects of our lives together at Friends Meeting at Cambridge (FMC) connect and nurture everything we do here: worship and our communal spiritual life, outreach, and witness. What follows summarizes only a few of the many activities that have taken over the past year. All direct quotations come from responses to questions posed to our Meeting members and attenders over the weeks preceding this report.

### Worship

Worship, the heart of our Quaker faith, is experienced in many ways by the individuals who come to FMC. Here are some of their voices:

“Sunday worship is the gift we make to each other as we create a silence together for listening to the spirit.”

”An oasis of mental spiritual peace in what feels to me like a world of fragmentation and distraction. I always feel better after coming to Meeting.”

“Sunday morning worship is one of the very few things in my life that I do solely and exclusively for myself. It's a time for me to center, find that of God in myself and in others, and reflect on how to reach that potential of being the person that I want to be.”

'It is the core and foundation of my spiritual life.’”

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Many gatherings have fostered our spiritual life together, and also have links to our outreach and witness. Members and attenders spoke to the different ways that different activities have had a positive impact on their life:

The **weekly forums** which precede Sunday worship offer brief presentations followed by worship sharing. Highlights have included reflections on prison work, anti-racism, gender identity, the young people's presentation of their learnings from the OWL program on sexuality education, and worship sharing on the queries from the new NEYM Faith and Practice. As one person comments, “The forum offers depth, authenticity and challenge; it grows me spiritually.”

**Afterthoughts**, directly following Sunday worship, offers a small group setting for questions and reflections regarding the preceding worship: “A way to have meaningful sharing and conversation.”

**The New Story** studies the evolution and cosmogenesis of our life on planet Earth: “It has been a core element in my time at FMC.”

**New Lights**, a twice yearly introduction to Quaker history, faith, and practice: “It has helped me deepening Quaker faith and experience.”

The **All-Meeting** weekend retreat in Alfred Maine, with a focus on the question of how we live our essence of spirituality, individually and collectively,

**Workshops** exploring: our response to the plight of our planet, couples' enrichment; anti-racism, and much much more.

Many also spoke with appreciation of the different social activities which help to bind us together as a community: **coffee hour**, **potlucks**, the **art exhibitions** and most recently the **simple lunch**.

#### Children and Youth

In the past year, Family Worship has seen an increase in the number of children and parents, as well as other FMC members who come to share in the joyful energy of these gatherings. In a recent family worship we heard a story about how Mr. Potter's failure to write a novel led to his writing instead a list of "good things" to be shared with others. The children then created their own lists of good things which can be seen on the wall leading downstairs.

Other child-related activities include the intergenerational breakfasts; and the Christmas Pageant, which drew the following comment from a member: "It brought smiles to my face and an almost irresistible urge to get out of my seat and down on all fours and join the procession of animals."

For our teen-agers, our wonderful Youth Programs Coordinator increased participation and created energy and a sense of fun among our youth through ski trips, apple-picking, hikes and more.

#### Outreach and Witness

There are many different and varied ways that the Meeting does outreach and witness: The Youth Group held a Pie Fund-Raiser with proceeds going to the Harvard Square Homeless Shelter, Doctors Without Borders, and Friends Camp. FMC helped with planning and then participated in the Boston celebration of the United Nations International Day of Peace; in the wake of recent events, communication with the Muslim community was initiated and a future meeting is planned; the Good Friday Witness for Peace took place on April 3 on the Boston Common.

The Sharing Circle is a weekly gathering of people who have been incarcerated or care about returning citizens and prison issues; they have a home-cooked meal followed by deep sharing of what is going on in their lives. "It is such a strong community and besides, there is free food every week."

A yearlong series of threshing sessions on Palestine/Israel; this faithful and difficult work has led to the drafting of two documents: "A Quaker Statement on US role in Israel Palestine," and "Thoughts on Conflict and Peacemaking."

Friends for Racial Justice (FORJ) has created spaces in which to help educate ourselves and the Meeting on race/racism and whiteness. In Debby Irving's April white privilege workshop, the group discussed the myth of the "level playing field" and patterns of privilege reflected in many of Friends' structures and habits. We have much more work to do here. On the anniversary of Michael Brown's death in August we held a Meeting for Worship and grieved the loss of Black lives, joined by Friends from other meetings—part of our work in alerting each other (and other Friends) to racial justice vigils, protests, and other opportunities to stand in solidarity with BLM and actions called by communities of color.

On the third Sunday of October, since 2011, the whole Meeting has gathered (as able) for morning worship outside Textron in Wilmington MA. Smaller Meetings are held on the third Sunday of every month. Textron makes cluster bombs that can kill hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children, and our act of witness takes us to Textron where we pray, asking ourselves and encouraging others to ask, “Where do wars come from?”

In November, members from several Meetings, including FMC (some of whom were arrested), took part in a vigil at the West Roxbury construction site of a new gas pipeline, to demonstrate their opposition to the development of infrastructure that will support continued use of fossil fuels.

### Challenges and Difficulties

In June of 2014, the Meeting discovered itself without a single individual who was willing to take on the role of Presiding Clerk of the Meeting. Six members bravely stepped up to the challenge of co-clerking FMC over the past year. They have brought stability and wisdom to the task and their work was greatly appreciated. In September, 2015, following a threshing and discussion of the role of the presiding clerk, we moved to a more usual arrangement of two co-clerks,

We are currently in search of three new staff members: Youth Programs Coordinator, Office Manager, and Nursery Coordinator/Teacher. Additionally, John Field, our Facilities Manager, continues to recover from a serious concussion that limits the hours he can work. This has put a strain on the whole community, but especially for our blessed Resident Friend on whom a disproportionate burden has fallen. We are saddened but understanding of Christa Frintner's decision to move on the next stage of her life, and we remain grateful that she continues in the position of Communications Coordinator..

We continue to suffer from a serious failure to increase our annual donations, and although we have paid for budget deficits each year from our unrestricted permanent funds, this cannot continue indefinitely.

Despite the positive aspects of our programs for children and youth, and increased attendance among our children, there is more work to be done. As one person noted, “Wish there were more fellowship opportunities for families with kids under 11.”

Last spring an attender behaved inappropriately with regard to teenagers and others. This raised great concern among parents, but gave us the opportunity to, for the first time, talk openly about how to address the problem of sexual predators in the Meeting. We worked towards unity through deep discernment, weighing the question of how to balance inclusion and risk while keeping our young people safe. After significant discernment the Meeting for Business in Workshop passed a revised Child Safety Protocols and Guidelines. Friends are also considering guidelines that attempt to codify our community's thoughts regarding appropriate behavior between adults, violations of trust that might arise, and how to handle them.

A further cause for concern is the apparent falling off of the Young Adult Fellowship group, which had seemed recently to be growing. Clearly our meeting has great need of young people, to share in both the joy and the work of our community, and we hope that forthcoming outreach activities will increase their participation.

About committee work, one say, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” There are simply not enough of us to carry out the work of the Meeting, without putting a heavy burden on those few. Yet committee work was listed as a positive more often than any other activity by members of Meeting. One comment was echoed by many others: “Outside of worship, the most significant activities for me in Meeting are my committee work – I really love being a member of this community and my work towards its life seems essential to that sense of belonging.”

And finally, the snow! This was truly a case of triumph over adversity, as the community joined in the Herculean task of dealing with it, with special thanks to John Bach, John Field, Sharon Frame, and the Center Residents.

### Conclusion

Many many people have spoken of the sense of change and vitality that they felt at Meeting: “We are energized in a way I have never seen. I think the Meeting is better than it has been for many years.” Greater inclusivity, friendliness among ourselves, welcoming to newcomers, a willingness to work together on difficult issues, and a deepening of our shared spirituality as Quakers have all contributed to this new vitality.

Two (among many) examples, witness our achievements as a community; both came about, not without struggle, through many months of work and discernment.

1) The establishment of a household in Dorchester and a support system for seven Quaker Voluntary Service young adults who have embarked on a year of service while practicing Quaker process in living together as a community. Our own communal lives have been enriched by their presence among us.

2) The completion of the new entrance: a ceremony of celebration was held at the rise of worship. The children joined us as we exited the building by the old entrance, and then came back in by the new entrance. We experienced for ourselves the sense of welcome provided by this graceful and accessible walkway. Festive music and singing followed on the greensward in front of the Meetinghouse.

### And for the future

We look forward to the following: outreach initiatives aimed at increasing the number of new and younger members; conversations about aging; a series of Discernment Sessions on Conflict Transformation; enactment of the Small Groups initiative; the next New Lights course, to be held at Cambridge Friends School (which is under the care of FMC); ongoing work on gender identity and being a welcoming community; and participation in the April conference on “White Privilege.”

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“Live up to the Light that thou hast and more will be granted thee.”

(Caroline Fox)

May all be led to join gladly in the work of this Meeting