

Midlothian Friends Meeting

2018 Spiritual State of the Meeting Report

During these times of political discord, Midlothian Friends Meeting (MFM) provides a quiet place for spiritual nurture and respite from the challenges and distractions of the world at large.

Midlothian Friends strive to respond to discordant political views and hate speech in a spirit of love and light. The meeting has embraced the FCNL campaign, "Love Thy Neighbor (No Exceptions)," as a way of life for the meeting and as individuals. We have used our thrift store, The Thrifty Quaker, to spread this message to the public by distributing two hundred yard signs and the same number of bumper stickers to customers.

Our Peace and Social Action Committee (PSAC) and Sanctuary Study Group approach social justice action from a place of love, compassion, and forgiveness rather than from a place of political confrontation. Their examples have moved MFM Friends to do the same in their individual lives.

In 2018 and the first two months of 2019, Midlothian Friends Meeting provided support for undocumented and documented immigrants with grants totaling \$12,000 to 501(c)3 organizations that advocate for them. Additionally, ten of our members participated in activities supporting immigrants.

Unrelated to immigrants, Midlothian Friends Meeting during 2018 was able to grant \$5,258 to non-Quakers who had emergency financial needs, and another \$28,921 to charities who provide general social justice efforts locally, regionally, and internationally.

Our roots in Quaker tradition and worship are strengthened by remembering there is "that of God" in everyone and by experiencing a direct relationship with the divine. Also, by using the queries offered in BYM's *Faith and Practice*, we experience fellowship with other meetings within our regional community, knowing that we are all led and supported by these same queries.

Our monthly discernment time together is a worshipful experience that allows the unified Spirit to prevail rather than our individual egos. We have introduced changes that reduce the "business feel" of this time together so that more silent worship and spiritual discernment can occur. In the interest of simplicity and informality, we have moved away from using committees where practical and, instead, bring decisions to the entire meeting during our monthly time for discernment. In the past year, we changed the name of this discernment time from "Meeting for Business" to "Meeting for Discernment" to emphasize our improved focus.

MFM is very egalitarian. We listen rather than respond defensively. If we don't listen, we know we will alienate and possibly lose people. By listening carefully and digging deeper, we can better understand others' viewpoints and alleviate tensions. We strive to act in love rather than indulge in potentially divisive (e.g. political) issues. We understand that if we are unable to give and receive forgiveness within MFM, we will certainly be unable to do so in the larger community.

Rather than avoiding tension due to differing points of view, MFM confronts it head-on. MFM is our highest and best place to "stay in the game." Our worship and coming together silently in a calm place help us to be open-hearted and loving. This has deepened our meeting and spiritual process and helped us to stop judging ourselves and others. ~~"Eldering," when appropriate,~~ Mutual shepherding is offered freely among MFM Friends and is well-received, since our loving atmosphere promotes gentleness, kindness, and open hearts.

We also recognize that there are healthy tensions that help us grow. The 2017 rally in Charlottesville reminded us of white privilege and how that might affect our perspective. The tension resulting from this realization ~~helped~~ us to recognize our faults and negativity. It ~~was~~ is much healthier for us to acknowledge this tension and understand its causes.

Some of our most effective voices to the community are the Thrifty Quaker and the charities we assist through its sales. ~~It has proved~~ They have proven to be an effective way to embrace the community and ~~reduce tensions through~~ demonstrate our Quaker values and process during interactions with customers. ~~An example of this occurred recently when a customer said they would prefer not to shop at the store any longer because the designated charity was one that assists the gay/transgender community. However, the store manager was able to discuss this with the customer in a loving way and convince the customer to continue shopping at the store.~~

Midlothian Friends Meeting (MFM) hungers for diversity and actively seeks differing opinions and approaches. We know we will learn and grow spiritually from those of differing racial, ethnic, sexual, political and social communities, as they will from us. Nevertheless, there is a feeling among some of us that we are too homogeneous in certain ways. For instance, Friends continue to be ~~saddened~~ concerned by our lack of diversity in age. While we realize we have a younger population than many Quaker meetings, we desire more families with young children and wonder how we might attract them.

MFM has increasingly received visits from people of color, some choosing to visit multiple times or even become part of our meeting. These Friends have helped improve our

understanding of the pain caused by white privilege. As a result, we talk about this problem frequently. We have also spent time and finances to make our extensive meeting library more representative of the contributions people of color and women have made to Quakerism and the world. Yet, we are eager to find more ways to reach out to people of color.

Over the past decade, the meeting has grown more theologically diverse. While we have certainly retained our appreciation for universal mysticism, we also experience many Friends with Christ-oriented or other influences in their approach to spirituality. This widening of the meeting's spirituality has brought strength and joy to our worship community. Our adult discussion hour each Sunday, "Circle of Friends," includes a smorgasbord of spiritual topics. It is an enriching spiritual experience that brings Friends back each Sunday.

Political diversity also seems to have broadened at MFM over the years. However, this is difficult to assess since we have long had a culture of not bringing politics to our meeting. Friends are careful to maintain this cultural norm by reminding each other when needed.

At MFM, we appreciate slowing down and listening to leadings. "We run with the Spirit not ahead of the Spirit." Our deep desire is that we help each other move forward together in love.