

2014 State of the Meeting Report

Midlothian Friends Meeting

Overall

Midlothian Friends Meeting continues to be a small, vibrant Meeting led by the Spirit and guided by the ideals of equality and the importance of nurturing each individual.

- We work to create a feeling of inclusiveness, warmth, and love in everything we do.
- We believe that unity in the Spirit is most important. We de-emphasize control and structure. For example, membership in the Religious Society of Friends is not a prerequisite to any position or committee, nor do we have a facing bench or designated elders.
- We concentrate on the wisdom, love, and gifts each of us has to share, regardless of a person's background or how long they have attended Meeting.
- We try to keep things "open and real", sharing both our joys and the difficulties we all face in life.

Highlights

Spiritual Growth

In 2014 we continued to be led to grow spiritually. In addition to our vibrant Meeting for Worship, we have found that small, focused groups with ample opportunity for Friends to express themselves also provide for spiritual growth. For example, one of our seasoned Friends hosts a "Circle of Friends" spiritual discussion group for 30 minutes before Meeting for Worship.

Peace and Social Action

Our Peace and Social Action committee grew in membership, and was drawn to social action as an outgrowth of our spiritual leadings. For example, once a month they sponsored "Meeting for Nurture", after Meeting for Worship, on topics such as unitive justice, values clarification, and FCNL. These have proven sustainable and rewarding.

Community outreach

We are fortunate to have a thrift store launched by the Meeting that provides significant funds to the greater community as directed by our Peace and Social Action committee. The Thrifty Quaker made cash gifts of close to \$17,000 to twelve individual charities in 2014, and contributed about \$160,000 through the donation of excess goods, clothing, and household items to individuals in need and other local thrift stores.

Our Friend\$hare program is also affiliated with the thrift store, and is designed to provide emergency financial aid to individuals outside the Meeting. In 2014 it donated about \$4500 to 20 individuals.

Religious Education for children

We cherish our children, and recognize our responsibility to provide for their growth within the spiritual reach of our arms.

We made some changes in 2014 which we think have strengthened the RE program and also conserved our energy.

- We offer formal RE on the second and fourth Sundays.
- We set out to hire two teachers, and we were fortunate to have two former Young Friends come forward. They both work with children professionally, and have brought renewed interest and excitement to our classes.
- We encourage Young Friends to sit in worship with the adults.

De-emphasis on formal structures

We did an informal survey of the Meeting in 2014 that turned up a discomfiting trend: people would attend for a while, become involved, and then burn out, pleading “don’t put me on a committee again”. So we strove to be flexible, and de-emphasize a large, formal committee structure in favor of more ad-hoc requests and individual callings.

One simple example is the person who closes Meeting for Worship. We struggled to find a role or person to do that on a regular basis. So now we let the Spirit move whoever feels called to close, using a slip of paper with directions that we put on the mantle in the meeting room.

Signs are that this is improving attendance and teaching us to rely more on the Spirit.

Buildings and Grounds

Our Buildings and Grounds committee spent much of their energy in 2014 on providing universal access and maintaining our meeting house. The Meeting house improvements were Spirit led, and drew us together as a community.

Universal access

We improved access to the meetinghouse considerably in 2014 and into 2015. We now have a concrete walkway from the parking lot that rolls straight into the building. In addition, we combined the need to replace our roof with the addition of a front porch, which provides an 8’ deep portico across the whole building. The porch features rocking chairs and benches that promote lingering at Meeting.

Repairs to the meetinghouse

The small building we purchased in 2002 is now about 30 years old, and consequently we have had to devote money, time, and energy to renovating and maintaining it. Fortunately we learned the value of a home warranty program, which has saved us some money on necessary repairs.

Our repairs, universal access improvements, and the four acre wooded area around the Meetinghouse seem inviting to visitors while serving our needs. As one Friend put it, "Now it looks like a real meetinghouse".

Critical transitions

We have begun the process of ensuring the permanence of Meeting by transitioning critical positions to younger Friends. For example, we added four younger Friends as trustees of Meeting.

Attendance

Overall attendance at regular Meeting for Worship over the last five years has increased, although the number on a particular Sunday varies. We have some Friends who financially support Meeting while attending infrequently. It seems that people want Meeting to be there even if they don't always attend.

Finances

We remain a small Meeting with few financial reserves. In 2014 we had to slash our budget to just the absolute necessities like the mortgage, utilities, and insurance. Fortunately our Meeting digs deep for large specific projects or tasks. That and a grant from FGC helped us provide universal access.