

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report
Midlothian Friends Meeting
For 2015

The spiritual state of Midlothian Friends Meeting (MFM) remains vibrant as we find ways to change, grow and learn in the Spirit. While continuing to simplify some of our committee and meeting structures over the last year, the commitment to a Spirit-led process was sustained.

We experience many visitors and have grown in attendance during the past year; however, not all those who experience our worship stay with Midlothian Friends. Our meeting benefits from all those who share their path with us; they enhance our spiritual journeys for as long as they are with us. The experience we offer them and they offer us is more important than a concern about increasing attendance.

MFM strives to be a sanctuary of peace and acceptance as we welcome everyone as part of our family without trying to push them into doing anything. Realizing life's busyness can sometimes prevent commitments of time, our offer of simplicity might be the best we have to give.

Attracting younger people seems to be a universal problem with many churches and we are not immune from this phenomenon. While we are welcoming, a noticeable lack of diversity remains clear.

Our religious education program, taught by two adults who were both raised in our meeting has continued to flourish despite inconsistent numbers as the lessons always teach a clear foundation in Quaker testimonies and in Quaker process. We are thankful to have Spirit-led teachers who share this duty of both instruction and curriculum planning for each Second and Fourth Day session for our children held during worship.

Religious education for adults has strengthened through our "Meetings for Nurture" at the rise of meeting on most Third First Days. Two separate themes have emerged this past year. First, a series of talks led by Friends detailing their spiritual paths that led them to Quakerism; we call these "Conversations with Friends." The second series has been on the topic of simplicity and all that word implies; plans on this continue to unfold.

The most popular and well attended spiritual nurturing opportunity is our "Circle of Friends" gatherings, held every First Day before meeting for about 30 minutes. Topics arise from the spiritual need of Friends and have led to explorations of many sacred texts: Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic, as well as religious thinkers, philosophers and poets. Having this sharing before our meeting for worship contributes to the "centering" of our silent worship.

Finally, a chance for both adults and young friends to share together is our "Films on the Fifth" which introduces topics of both religious and social impact through a series of films shown and then discussed at the rise of meeting on every Fifth First Day throughout the year.

Both our worship and our belief in simplicity that we come every week to celebrate remains a springboard for all of us to go out doing good work. We provide something simple and beautiful to all those who come and enjoy it while creating an impetus for supporting peace groups and all the organizations served by our Thrifty Quaker (TQ). This thrift store continues to raise thousands of dollars for non-profit community-based organizations. It provides an opportunity to share our Quaker beliefs, our passion for social justice and our testimonies, and the financial and monetary gift so desperately needed by these struggling institutions. Friend\$hare, in association with the TQ, provides emergency financial assistance to non-Quaker persons in need.

While our financial giving through the TQ is generous toward others, none of the profits can benefit our meeting. Our own meeting's fiscal issues and budget concerns has led to some guilt about not being able to pay our full Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) apportionment. Coincidentally, the BYM Apportionment Committee met at our meeting house the day before we drafted this spiritual state of the meeting report, and a number of MFM friends had an opportunity to dialog with them. The BYM friends were very understanding and asked that we pay what we are lead as a meeting to provide. These remarks were very comforting to Midlothian Friends. Buoyed by their reassurances, there was a feeling that we should concentrate on what is right with MFM.

We appreciate the advice and help from our associations with the wider Quaker community. Inside our meeting, however, we don't need elders as we feel our loving community is a place where we pay attention to each other. Being able to elder to each other is an ideal that we have reached. Our monthly men's group provides an opportunity for community outside the meetinghouse.

One of the most fulfilling Spirit-led processes undertaken during several months of our Meeting for Worship with Concern for Business held on the Second First Day during our worship time in 2015 was updating the MFM Vision Statement. A worship sharing process allowed MFM to revisit this wonderful document that expresses our hopes and vision as a spiritual community. To balance that "ideal," the process of sharing about this Spiritual State of the Meeting report helps us to continue this discernment as a spiritual community. We strive for the Love and Light our Vision Statement expresses so well.

MFM offers an intimate environment inspired in part by our vision of community.