

# **2013 State of the Meeting Report**

## **Midlothian Friends Meeting**

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, Midlothian Friends Meeting met at our meetinghouse in Powhatan, Virginia for our annual Gathering for Clearness. Through worship sharing, we responded to queries to explore our spiritual community. These queries fell into five areas of reflection.

### **Spiritual and Emotional Safety**

Midlothian Friends Meeting offers a sense of safety which arises out of our gathered silence. The lack of labeling and proselytizing allows the community to include attenders of many different backgrounds and beliefs. The increasing diversity we have seen develop over the years can only emerge out of a safe environment. One area of opportunity, however, is in our written communication. We must remember to allow all forms of interaction to be worshipful by receiving the ideas and feelings of others with acceptance. One Friend noted that filtering communication & framing statements without judgment are areas of personal struggle. Some members feel they aren't searching for anything, and that path is accepted by the community. They are glad that Midlothian Friends Meeting allows them to attend and just "be."

### **Fulfilling the Needs of Spiritual Life**

As our lives have become increasingly busier over the decades, expectant waiting has become more important. Our spiritual need for silence is as important as our physical need for food, sleep & exercise. The distractions of everyday life make it hard to experience silence outside of meeting for worship. Gathering together in worship changes the quality of the silence and the accessibility of the spirit. This gathered silence allows for direct communication with the spirit, which our members find better meets their needs than a designated minister. This communion with the spirit is available to anyone who wishes to attend meeting – it's not necessary to identify oneself as a Quaker. The lack of a creed has increased our diversity, allowing the expression of many different ideas and beliefs, and Friends find they learn from this variety of ministry. Of course, our spiritual life isn't just the meeting, our spiritual life IS our life. The meeting and testimonies give us strength to express the Spirit in our everyday lives. We are supported in this by the energy of our local spiritual community, as well as the Baltimore Yearly Meeting visitors, which have given us a connection with the wider Quaker community.

### **Promoting Testimonies through Religious Education**

Midlothian Friends Meeting fosters the spirit for a lifetime. For us, religious education isn't just something that happens in another room for 45 minutes during worship. The entire meeting, with all of its interactions, is religious education. Every member is involved. Our children speak wisdom, and we listen. In a world where children are told simply "do this," it is our responsibility to help them recognize their individual talents and the value of those talents. Adults who grew up in this meeting are a reflection of the influence that this Meeting and the testimonies have on children. One member notes

that his children have become kind, loving adults and believes this is a direct result of their time as Young Friends in MFM. Recently, an adult who grew up in the meeting, chose to pursue a masters degree in public policy, and a teenage Friend received a college scholarship for an entry on Quakerism. The children raised in this meeting carry the testimonies forward into the world.

### **Promoting Social Justice and Outreach**

Rather than aligning ourselves with particular political persuasions, Midlothian Friends Meeting made a conscious effort to focus on the Quaker testimonies. Sometimes, however, we are called to exercise our responsibilities as citizens. When we feel the actions of our leadership are an affront to the testimonies, we “let our life speak” by taking a stand to give a voice to the voiceless. A few in our community find that the term “social justice” itself has too many political connotations, but appreciate that Quakerism allows for thoughts that challenge the status quo. We ask ourselves, “Do I avoid partisan concerns and rhetoric?” Friends recognize that laws have moral consequences, and just as Quakers before us, we must stay active and engaged in the decisions of our government. Midlothian Friends Meeting has begun questioning what social justice means to us, and in what ways we are reaching out to those in need. We are searching for ways in which the Thrifty Quaker, a thrift store supported by the meeting, can provide even more support to our surrounding community. One Friend is pondering why they are willing to invite friends to social activities but not to attend meeting. They feel we should reach out to include people who may find our meeting meaningful.

Our children are also engaged in outreach efforts. A few teens participated in a walk-out from their Richmond school to participate in a march on city hall. Even though their own school is in good repair, they were moved to protest the poor physical conditions of many public city schools. Giving a voice to the voiceless is an important aim of Midlothian Friends Meeting.

### **Impact of Meeting on Personal Life**

Midlothian Friends Meetings has impacted the lives of members, attenders, and the wider community. We have enjoyed new attenders recently, which has given us a renewed sense of hope and energy. Because we welcome seekers of all spiritual persuasions, the diversity of our meeting has increased. The Friendly Eights interest groups enjoy attendance by both Quakers and non-Quakers. While we don’t push, we would be pleased to see any of these people attend meeting. The responsibility of committee participation and holding positions within our meeting has helped some people live the Quaker values because they are more active with the community.