

## 2018 State of the Meeting Report Morningside Monthly Meeting

On December 16, 2018 Morningside Friends met to review the spiritual state of the meeting over the last year. The meeting was convened by the recording clerk, who stated that the tradition of discerning the spiritual state of the meeting began with George Fox, when he asked meetings to share news of how the spirit has been moving among us.

2018 was a year of endings and new beginnings for Morningside. We were saddened at the death of two long-time attenders, while we welcomed a new Member to Meeting. Friends stated that they missed not only the personal friendship of the departed Friends, but also their contributions to Meeting. We continue to delight in beginnings with Meeting for Children, as the children appreciate coming down to the adult Meeting for Worship at the end of the hour, and they “brighten us up.” The community worships in Riverside Church the 1<sup>st</sup> day of each month with an average of 30-40. The community is nurtured through Spiritual Nurturance Groups, monthly movement with the Spirit, and monthly Bible Study. Even Friends who cannot attend Bible Study appreciate the readings that are sent out beforehand. The meeting provides spiritual nurturance and welcomes people wherever they are in their spiritual journey. As one Friend said “Whatever my truth, whatever I’m struggling with, is accepted, is a gift given even to newcomers.”

Hospitality has enriched our lives this past year. The excellent food that Friends bring encourages people to linger after Meeting for Worship. “Somehow the miracle of the loaves and the fishes usually occurs. Most weeks we seem to have developed a mini form of Babette’s Feast, where enmities decrease and friendship increases.” Newcomers seldom leave without being greeted and welcomed. This welcoming is the work of the entire meeting and its committees, including Hospitality and Ministry & Counsel, as well as committees such as the Library Committee and the Finance Committee.

Hospitality requires self-care to prevent individual and committee burnout. Although we continue to struggle, the problem with burnout was not expressed this year. We still experience “some struggles” in fine tuning committees, but the problems of work overload have been greatly alleviated. Within the year members and attenders have both been willing to “step into the unknown,” with the assurance that they do not have to do it alone. For instance, this year a beautiful Memorial service was organized by Friends who had never done anything like it before.

Morningside provides hospitality both inside and outside of the Meeting. It is deeply involved in New York Quarterly committees and two members regularly worship at the Downtown Meeting under care of NYQM. Communications between committees and through the Morningside website are improving, although they are not yet where they can be. The establishment of a Facebook page linked to the website reflects the desire of the meeting to be hospitable outside of the box. While some Friends are particularly enthusiastic about the Facebook page, others express serious concerns about Facebook in general. Meeting continually asks, “Are we reaching out to new people, younger people, or relying too much on “golden oldies”?”

Radical Hospitality is the inclusion of those whom society has excluded and who have no rights. Morningside holds Woodbourne Prison under care and several members and attenders worship with incarcerated men there. The men feel connected to us and we feel connected to them. We customarily send birthday cards and they express great pleasure upon receiving these cards signed by members and attenders of Meeting. They feel that there are people outside who care about them. In addition to Woodbourne, Morningsiders continue their prison justice leadings by traveling to Albany to witness on prison issues to legislators.

Members of Morningside have long had leadings concerning racism, and continue to address that issue. During the past year the Racial Justice Study Group was formed, and has been meeting on fourth Sundays to explore issues raised by David Billings in his book *Deep Denial*. Meeting values the work of Ministry & Counsel and the Peace & Social Concerns Committee.

Morningside has three major methods for outreach: worship, business meeting, and peace and social concerns. The challenge is to make all three places where Friends and visitors are welcomed to engage.

Friends expressed gratitude for the “deep quality of silence,” while expressing thanks when Friends speak. The difference between communal and individual silence is that communal silence is “a spiritual place one cannot reach alone.” Someone commented that messages did not always seem well seasoned. This may be because new Friends and visitors do not understand the nature of Friends’ worship. It was suggested that we find better ways to inform newcomers—and remind ourselves—what Meeting for Worship is, and what a message is or should be. The Friend who greets people before Meeting for Worship would welcome a handout for newcomers who are unfamiliar with Quakerism. It was also suggested that we add an explanation on the website, with perhaps a link to the video “What to Expect in Quaker Meeting for Worship,” the most recent in the series from QuakerSpeak, a video project by Friends Journal.

After initiating Meeting for Business directly after Meeting for Worship last year, we have done a lot of tweaking to get the timing right this year. The move from worship to business is now smoother and more organic. The 15-minute interval between the two Meetings provides space for announcements, the greeting of visitors, and additional time for the clerk to prepare for Business Meeting. The new format has resulted in a larger number of Friends who stay after worship in order to conduct business together and assures that newcomers and visitors are greeted before Business Meeting starts. One Friend suggests that we should use Business Meeting as part of our outreach—to encourage newcomers and seekers to stay for it. Quaker business meeting is “counter cultural—so valuable and shocking,” and is “one of the most valuable” things we can offer people. How, the person asked, can we bring this “beautiful creation” to others?

Morningside Friends believe that they are led into the practice of such Testimonies as Peace, Equality, and Stewardship. Meeting’s engagement in social concerns/activism is primarily through the Peace & Social Concerns Committee, which involves contributions, personal connections, and engagement in occasional collective action. Unfortunately, most attenders of Worship do not “hang around” for Peace & Social Concerns Meetings, except for special events. Meeting needs to find ways to encourage more participation in the “nuts and bolts” of our social justice efforts. One suggestion was to find more ways to let people know about the activities we are engaged in, the “valuable little things” that we do or that happen.

In all three forms of outreach, a common concern was that the great majority of Friends who regularly attend and do committee work are “golden oldies,” including those sitting for the state of the meeting report. How do we welcome young adults and give them the chance to become involved in the administration of the community while remaining aware that many students and young Friends with children have neither the time nor the finances to regularly attend Meeting? One Friend suggested that we increase efforts to involve Friends in more intimate activities, such as Spiritual Nurturance groups, retreats, and committee work. While these may not be less time-consuming overall, they do not usually involve the commitment of such long stretches of time. Rather than bemoan the older age of Friends, it might be better to think of older Friends as holding space open for the young people until they are able to come. “We are bringing each other up,” says one Friend. “We are all models to each other.”

According to Fox, as we are models to each other, so are we also models to the world. “Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come.” Living a pattern that is in the Spirit was exemplified by one of the longtime attenders who died this year and who was an inspiration to us all even as the body failed. As a community, we practice simplicity by not purchasing a meeting house, but instead worshiping in rented space. This year Morningside friends have been practicing saying “no” to what we are not truly led. The patterns that we present to the world are especially important in the present political climate and Friends note a feeling of sadness because of the current state of the country. While this climate may lead some to give up, one Friend reminded us how beautiful the earth is and how we must appreciate it while we have it. Welcoming patterns challenge the Morningside community to live together in all of our vulnerabilities, and support one another in our relationship with God even when we do not have the strength to pray.

In Friendship,  
Pamela Wood, Clerk

