

## **State of Society Reports**

### **Bloomington-Normal Monthly Meeting**

We have not grown much in membership but have grown in spiritual depth and in our ability to support each other through a challenging political time and a worldwide health pandemic. We have eight members and additional attenders. An average meeting includes five to seven people. We continue to enjoy our permanent space in Normandy Village.

The plight of immigrants has been the focus of much activity. The meeting co-sponsored a rally on immigrant rights, one member has volunteered at the Immigration Project, the meeting provided Christmas presents for the children of one immigrant family, and members organized and participated in a weekly protest from November thru February in front of the office of one member of the US Congress about the treatment of migrant children at the United States border. With the advent of the pandemic, members joined the Immigration Project in giving food to immigrant families. Several members were also involved in making and distributing masks for immigrants in the pandemic.

The monthly Meeting for Eating for Quaker women has continued through the calendar year. The gatherings are co-sponsored by the Clear Creek Meeting and often attended by Friends from Urbana-Champaign. These meals as well as those at monthly potlucks clearly demonstrate the cooking skills of Quaker women and men. The Meeting for Eating dinners have over time become a place of social support and a closeness with other members.

First Day School has continued to be difficult for our meeting. Part of this is because we have few children, and they do not always come which makes planning difficult. We have started to identify the second Sunday of the month as a time when children are especially welcomed, and First Day School is held for them. The service is followed by a potluck.

As with all groups we are not meeting in a physical location during the COVID-19 crisis. Since mid-March, Renee Sneider has organized weekly Zoom meetings for our meeting. These meetings have helped us maintain our connections to each other and to Quaker values. We also have learned more technical skills.

### **Clear Creek Monthly Meeting**

At Clear Creek, we tend to think of our worship life as quiet and routine, until we start to write our State of Society report. Then we realize it is not as quiet and routine as we might believe.

The past year has seen some shift in membership and attendance. Vicky Krause, an attender at Burlington Worship Group which is under our care, applied for membership this

past summer. In early September, several of us traveled to Burlington to participate in a clearness committee for Vicky. At our September business meeting, at the clearness committee's recommendation, we welcomed Vicky into our meeting. We are pleased to see the thriving Burlington Worship Group nourishing its attenders to this extent. Long-time Clear Creek member, Lori Paton, moved to Bloomington from Peoria in March. Lori requested a transfer to the Bloomington-Normal Meeting, and we released her to their care with our blessings. We also have two new attenders. Barb Day, long time member at Upper Fox Valley Meeting, moved to Dunlap, Illinois, to be closer to family and has been attending with us since August. Mike Murphy of Princeton has also recently begun attending meeting at Clear Creek. We are enriched by their participation in our worship.

Also under our care is the Macomb Worship Group. These Friends are struggling, having not met regularly in over a year. The group has always been primarily three families, all of whom are undergoing various stresses. Please hold these Friends in the Light as they weigh the viability of their worship group.

We had two milestone birthdays this year. Dick Ashdown turned 80 in May, and Neil Mesner turned 90 in July. We celebrated both these events in Clear Creek style. We are blessed by the presence of these weighty Friends among us and by the depth they bring to our worship and fellowship.

During the summer, we were contacted by the pastor of the Metamora Mennonite Church. The church was exploring other faith traditions and were encouraged by one of their members (who many years ago attended Clear Creek Meeting) to contact us to see if we were willing to have them visit us. Always glad to have company, we immediately responded "Yes!" On August 4, we were joined by about 60 Mennonites as well as a number of Friends from other meetings for a deep and fruitful worship. Since no Quaker gathering is complete without a potluck, we then had lunch with our visitors, spreading ourselves out so that each table had a Quaker or two to answer any further questions. It was a meaningful day for all of us. Later in the fall, several of us reciprocated and visited the Metamora Mennonite Church for a Sunday service.

The Bloomington-Normal based Quaker women's monthly potluck (aka Meeting for Eating) continues, with participation from some of our members. This gathering provides additional fellowship opportunities for Friends and a form of visitation between meetings, strengthening our ties to each other. In September, this group decided they needed to do "something" to protest the separation of immigrant families and the caging of their children in detention centers around the country. Since the end of September, these women have been holding a weekly vigil outside the office of Congressman Rodney Davis in Uptown Normal, urging him to support legislation to end these practices. While those of us outside of Bloomington-Normal are unable to participate in the vigils, we support them in any way we can.

We are always enriched by our interactions with the wider Quaker community. The grounds come alive during Illinois Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions when we share our home with the rest of ILYM. We also hosted, with the help of Bloomington-Normal Friends, the Fall Continuing Committee. In September, several of us made the trip to southern Indiana to participate in the 200th anniversary celebration of Blue River Quarterly. We enjoyed the various historical programs, getting to worship in the meetinghouse of our religious ancestors, and having Sunday lunch with the local Friends Church. All of these gatherings

provide us with opportunities for deep worship and nurturing fellowship that can only serve to strengthen our local community.

## Downers Grove Friends Meeting

Meeting for worship is a spiritual touchstone for many who worship with us. We find that Downers Grove Friends Meeting is a meaningful way for Friends to connect to each other in a loving community. We extended our community by inviting Friends and family from Chicago area meetings to join us for our annual carol sing and Memorial Day picnic. We also collect stamps for Right Sharing of World Resources. To support our local community, we collect coupons for a food pantry, and twice a month when we gather to eat donations are gathered and given to social service agencies. At Christmas, we set up a mitten tree at the meetinghouse to collect winter accessories, some handmade, for a shelter.

Our meeting strives to make everyone feel welcome. We have greeters each First Day to welcome everyone as they enter the building, especially new attenders. To help newer attenders understand what "we are about," we had a series of six sessions, titled Q101, which explain not just our history but who Friends are today. Another way we promote community is through potlucks in Friends' homes, which we find helps us to know each other better. Our Meeting for Learning brings us current topics, for instance, the documentary, *Griefwalker*, about end of life issues, and a video of Dr. Joy DeGruy on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. On the 3rd Sunday of the month before meeting, a group gathers for reflective Worship Sharing conversations. On the 4th Sunday, we have a discussion after meeting led by ILYM's Field Secretary and others. The topics vary but often focus on what it means to be a Quaker. There is a dedicated Friday sewing group that also supports Friends. There is a strong core group that meets on Mondays to discuss aspects of aging. We have met the needs of others by having an additional meeting for worship on Thursday evenings. We are experimenting with a clerk's committee to bring new people into leadership in the meeting and to share the work of clerking.

We welcomed Jennifer Budziak as a member with a cake and fellowship (April 28). We also celebrated the life of much loved long-time member, Betty Clegg, who passed at age 96 at her daughter Barb's home in Tennessee. October marked the 10th anniversary of our first meeting for worship in our new meeting house. To add to it being fully accessible, we are now equipped with, and many trained for, an AED defibrillator.

We find the challenge of having an aging population brings new opportunities. We have few families with school-aged children, but are always ready and welcoming when they come. This points out a challenge that we and other small communities of faith have, that of bringing in new members, especially families. The way that Spirit opens may be narrow as far as numbers go, but those new to us persist in attendance and enrich the community. Seasoned Friends and energetic seekers journeying together anchor and renew Downers Grove Friends Meeting.

Advise from an essay by Patricia Thomas after having spent a night as a hostess at Hope House (a woman and children's shelter: "Hope begins where we are; Hope comes to us as a gift. Hope is renewed daily, sometimes minute by minute. Hope grows step by step."

## **Duneland Friends Meeting**

Duneland Friends Meeting continued to meet about twice monthly through 2019, as a small but faithful community of seekers of the truth. With a core of six regular members and attenders, we remained committed to communal worship, with occasional vocal ministry. We maintained a small budget that we used to support organizations and projects that reflected our shared values among Quakers and in communities near our meeting place. We also continued to meet for Bible Study about twice a month at the home of Marlou Carlson. We were grateful to one of our attenders for creating a Facebook page for Duneland Friends, an accomplishment that we consider to be one small step toward our ongoing wish to make our meeting more visible to others.

This year we mourned the loss of former member Pat Lucas, recently of Madison, Wisconsin, on July 30, 2019. She and her spouse, Sandra Huntley, were members of Duneland Friends Meeting from 2002 to 2018. We cherish memories of Pat's vast store of knowledge on a wide variety of topics, her dry sense of humor, and her love of the meeting's children.

Connections with Friends from other meetings were a source of energy and inspiration in 2019. In September, several of us traveled to southern Indiana to join in the celebration of the 200th anniversary of Blue River Quarterly Meeting, including a High School Friends Quake. In October, we were enriched by a gathering of Friends for a retreat planned jointly by South Bend and Duneland meetings and held at the Portage Lakefront Pavilion in the Indiana Dunes. With a view of Lake Michigan to the north and the dunes to the south, we experienced together a nature walk, silent journaling, focused prayer, sharing about vocal ministry, worship, and fellowship.

In this time when it appears that there is a general lack of integrity, compassion, respect, and engagement across our society and politics, we at Duneland Friends Meeting often find ourselves contemplating and sharing thoughts about how we can respond as Friends. How do we acknowledge and answer that of God in everyone? We pray that our work, worship, and examples will help bring about compassionate responses to the global issues threatening our world.

State of Society approved at a meeting for worship with a focus on business held February 23, 2020.

## **Evanston Monthly Meeting of Friends**

The Spirit moves among us, through us, and around us as it always has. We lovingly nurture God's Presence within the meeting, and moved by It, we witness in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and the wider world to the joy, peace, and healing it brings.

The cores of our shared spiritual journey are weekly meetings for worship, one upstairs and a briefer one downstairs for children. Some children sit with adults upstairs for a while; some adults sit downstairs with the children for a while. Many come on time, helping to settle the meeting. Some come as they are able. On average, 32-40 persons primarily worship upstairs and 10-20 downstairs. Often worship times are felt deeply by many. We

struggle a bit to ensure that vocal ministry is rooted in the Spirit rather than in the various tumults that surround us all. As meeting for worship concludes, we always invite the sharing of joys and/or concerns that we may hold them together in the Light. This practice often opens the way to pastoral care.

With the coming of the coronavirus pandemic, we began using Zoom to gather all who wish to join in for Sunday meetings for worship and Wednesday times of worship sharing. This practice has offered deep worship and the joy of checking in with one another at the rise of meetings. A children's first day school session and worship are also being held using Zoom technology. For the encouragement of spiritual growth, various meeting members have followed their leadings to offer one day silent retreats, art retreats, a weekend long silent retreat, book groups studying Quaker practice and race, and spiritual nurture groups. Twice monthly we offer meetings for learning to broaden our understandings and our vision. Spiritual growth is stimulated among our children by our commitment to three age-specific First Day School classes taught by rotating dedicated, well-trained Godly Play teachers who are organized and nourished by our Religious Education Coordinator and by paid child care staff.

Understanding that we all share the responsibilities for caring for each other, both spiritually and practically, we have been called upon by circumstances to do much of that this year. Some in our community have experienced serious medical issues which invite both spiritual and logistic support. At times, organizing our response has been undertaken by a committee. At other times, by individuals close to the persons. Care for the broad life of the meeting is carried by many skillful, dedicated committee members and individuals who assume ongoing responsibilities for specific tasks. We are grateful to them all!

Our meeting community includes people deeply led to participate in various ways to carry our testimonies of peace, equity and justice into the world. As a meeting, we also make donations available to Quaker and other organizations doing such work. Some examples in the past year include: A presence in the Evanston 4th of July parade and the Chicago Pride parade as well as various local and regional demonstrations; participation with Evanston Interfaith Action's programs of feeding and sheltering our neighbors; and active participation in climate change matters. Many Evanston Friends are active in ILYM and some in FWCC. We hosted "The Quake that Rocked the Midwest" and OWL (Our Whole Lives) weekends for regional young Friends.

Joel Erckenswick's life (1946-2019) was celebrated by friends and family; Nancy Wallace died on March 31. A memorial meeting will be held when the pandemic isolation guidelines are lifted, and we can all be together in person to celebrate her life of service, beauty, and faithfulness; Elizabeth Mertic, a cherished attender for many years, died on April 7. Lake Forest Meeting is planning the memorial meeting for her; Nina Mae was born to member Emma Rodewald Daisy and her husband Timothy Mark Daisy; Colin Adcox Sheridan was born to members Tadd Adcox and Helenmary Sheridan.; Margi Barbosa and Greta Bever became members of the meeting; and Dolores Koenig's membership transfer from Bethesda Meeting was welcomed.

## **57th Street Meeting of Friends**

Given all the changes in the lives and practices of our community, we continue to seek ways to be together in Spirit and community, and to reach out to our greater communities in fellowship and in service. We are not just now able to produce a document or report that fully and accurately reflects the state of our meeting as a whole or of its members and attenders. We will proceed to reach out to all, seeking ways to share worship, fellowship, community and outreach as we work through the transitions and constraints of the COVID pandemic.

## **Fox Valley Quaker Meeting - ILYM**

We have changed the name of our small meeting by dropping the preface "Upper" and adding the letters "ILYM." This was done in recognition that "our" Fox River flows down from Wisconsin, and to distinguish us from meetings elsewhere that might have similar names.

The name change did not change the spirit or sense of community within our small group. Until the coronavirus arrived an average of about 9 or 10 Friends and attenders met for Friends meeting in the old farmhouse at Pioneer Farm. The meeting for worship and meditation was followed by a light snack that over the months grew into a full-fledged pot-luck lunch with spirited conversation.

All of this changed, of course, with the coming of the virus. Now, instead of meeting in person, many of us meet at the same hour in our individual homes – together in spirit. We look forward to the day when we can meet together again in the physical presence of each other.

Just as we were beginning to feel the effects of the pandemic, our meeting suffered great sadness and sorrow with the unexpected death of John Hackman, who had been an active and much loved member since our earliest years. John died unexpectedly on March 26 from injuries suffered in a fall at his home.

As the long-time editor of our newsletter, John spoke not only to our small group but also to many beyond. He was actively involved in ILYM as a member of the Environmental Concerns Committee and an enthusiastic participant in work days at the McNabb campus. A memorial service will be held later this year.

Our meeting again sponsored the "Old-fashioned Corn Roast and Pot Luck Dinner" for Chicagoland Friends. This annual gathering of Friends from different Quaker traditions and cultural backgrounds served as a happy time of love, in contrast with the tensions and conflicts that were to come to our country with the virus. We can only hope to host this event again in 2020.

## Lake Forest Friends Meeting

As with the rest of the world, Lake Forest Friends Meeting has been adjusting to the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and orders to shelter-in-place at home. We decided that we could come together for Meeting for Worship via video conferencing. We have had as many as 30 people at worship including some members who have moved away but no newcomers so far. The strength we have built up at the meeting has carried over and allowed us to center into worship even as we sit in our own homes with faces on the computer screen. However, we dearly miss gathering together at our meetinghouse and socializing after meeting.

Lake Forest Friends Meeting welcomed long-time attender Joe Rockey as a member this past year. Joe has served as our greeter for several years and has a bright smile and kind word for everyone who enters. While we welcomed Joe into membership, we are also sad to see Jane and Joe Rockey and Ward Burton move across the country. Jane, Joe, and Ward have served as calming and warm members of our community.

Lake Forest Friends Meeting lost two members over the past year. Bill Dawson passed away in September 2019 and Elizabeth Mertic in April 2020. Lake Forest Friends Meeting also deeply feels the loss of Nancy Wallace in March 2020, a long-time, well-loved member of Lake Forest before transferring her membership to Evanston.

Our First Day School program has been thriving over the past few years. We have three classes: one for kids age 0 through Kindergarten (generally 3-5 kids/week); one for 1st through 6th graders (4-7 kids/week); and one for junior high and high schoolers (2-5 kids/week). As we have transitioned from in-person meetings to Zoom meetings, we are working to find something that works for each age group. While the children appreciate getting to talk with each other, it is a struggle for our youngest children who do not understand why meeting is closed and who do not appreciate Zoom technology.

Adult Religious Education continues to be a very active community at Lake Forest Friends Meeting. In addition, there are occasional potluck dinners to discuss specific queries. For most of the year, a small but regular group of adults has held Friendly Bible Study. Inspired by Friends General Conference's Welcoming Friend Project, the meeting formed The Working Group on the Impact of Systemic Racism on Spirituality.

This year, we created a new position in our roster of clerks. We now have three clerk positions: Clerk, Assistant Clerk, and Rising Clerk. By having three individuals, we are able to spread out the work of Clerk.

The Peace and Social Justice Committee held a successful fundraiser at the meetinghouse to assist a Waukegan-based not-for-profit called FOCUS which provides small stipends for recent high school graduates planning to attend community colleges. In addition, the committee continued its work with a local FCNL-trained team advocating legislation to reaffirm Congress's role (rather than the President's) in starting war.

Overall, Lake Forest Friends Meeting is doing well. We are fortunate to worship in a building surrounded by nature. The layout of the Meetinghouse helps drive intergenerational connection, which is so important to our Meeting. While we have a lot of members who are getting older, we also have growing families and people willing to take on new responsibilities within the meeting. Our strong support of our First Day School program has

allowed families to participate in our community. While we are sometimes rooted in our ways, the meeting has a collective attitude of being open to the idea of change. The many prayerful and/or social gatherings, outside of Meeting for Worship, help strengthen our community. Within worship, we have several members who regularly share heartfelt and vocal messages, which help the rest of us grow, learn, and experience other perspectives. The rest of our community is made up of people who give occasional messages and those who rarely, if ever, speak. We are a steady community that handles personality conflicts like a family, and which strives to be a welcoming place for all who enter.

## **Northside Friends Meeting**

Northside Friends Meeting has enjoyed growth in numbers of attenders and in deepening of Spirit during the past year. We have renovated our website, provided childcare during Meeting for Worship, begun hosting regular Healing Circles, and expanded our antiracism work. Our annual retreat was designed to celebrate this growth in Healing, families, and antiracism, as well as discernment about who we are as a meeting. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to delay both the retreat and our anti-racism training workshop, but it has not diminished our Spirit.

Our website's much-needed renovation was completed by an Ad Hoc Website Committee without need for outside expertise. Our attractive new website and online archive has many user-friendly features that better serve the needs of the meeting and will be easier to maintain.

A number of families with young children began attending NFM this year. Recognizing the need to welcome families, NFM formed a Childcare Committee. Friends with little previous experience in First Day learning, volunteered for childcare duty and found great pleasure in "watching the kids make friends and become Friends".

An influx of young adults into NFM is, we believe, a direct result of the meeting's conscious efforts to be a welcoming community. These new attenders give NFM a fresh vibrancy. The increased committee work associated with NFM's growth has provided newer Friends the opportunity to learn Quaker process while utilizing their personal skill sets.

An exciting new leading resulted in formation of the Healing Circle Committee, which in June 2019 began monthly Meetings for Worship with Concern for Healing within the Second Hour calendar. Friends have found healing and recognized their own healing gifts in these deeply gathered meetings. These Healing Circles attracted participation from other Chicagoland meetings, and other monthly meetings are now forming Healing Circles of their own. NFM currently holds virtual Healing Circles twice monthly, responding to the world's vast need for mealing.

The new Ad Hoc Committee for Ministry on Racism has brought prodigious spiritual energy into NFM. The Committee organized a 2-1/2-day workshop, "Analyzing and Understanding Systemic Racism," with the anti-racism training group CROAR (Chicago Regional Organizing for Anti-Racism). This workshop, designed specifically for Quakers and jointly sponsored with several Chicagoland meetings, was scheduled to occur at the end of May, and will be rescheduled as soon as possible. Our increasing sensitivity to racial issues



has also led to deepening interaction with our physical hosts, the Japanese American Service Committee, including Friends attending some JASC events.

Thus, NFM has faced the COVID-19 pandemic anchored in deep spiritual interconnection, providing a firm foundation of 'normalcy' to carry us through these abnormal times. One Friend likened it to learning to drive stick shift in Kansas, then driving in San Francisco: the terrain has changed, but we have not ground to a halt. Our first virtual Meeting for Worship was held March 22.

Since then, NFM's virtual activity has flowered on the Zoom platform. In addition to First Day Worship we have a mid-week Meeting for Worship, twice-weekly 'Check-In' meetings for Friendly interaction, and weekly 'Playdate' meetings for the children. We have navigated our first virtual Meetings for Business and formed two book clubs. Committee meetings are far easier to schedule and attend virtually, but we remain cognizant that the convenience of virtual interaction must never impede discernment in decision-making.

We have discovered, with abiding joy and gratitude, that electronic meetings have been fully as gathered and covered as physical meetings. Moreover, a silver lining of virtual Meeting for Worship is that Friends may attend from other locations. Participants have joined Meeting for Worship from France, England, and many distant states, keeping us connected with distant members of our beloved community. We predict that NFM will continue 'hybrid' meetings long after the shelter in place restrictions have lifted, thus keeping Meeting for Worship accessible regardless of Friends' geographic locale or physical condition.

Milestones: August 2019 Beth Burbank's endorsement for chaplaincy re-confirmed; August 2019 Died, Eloise Piper; October 2019 Married, Melissa Halka and Siobhan (Shea) Kohl; January 2020 Born, Rennard William Henley, to Ted Ehle and John Heintz; May 2020 Erica Dix accepted as Member

## **Oshkosh Monthly Meeting**

Oshkosh Monthly Meeting has not had a lot of growth in membership over the past year. But, we still seek: to seek God's blessing for ourselves; to express our appreciation to the Father, our faith in Him, and our love; to open ourselves to receive forgiveness for our misdeeds; to ask God's favor for others and thank Him for His love of them; to open and close our meditation sessions; to attune ourselves to the will of our Creator; to offer ourselves and our efforts to Him; to invite His participation in our lives; and to remind ourselves of His abiding presence.

We as a group have been active with other religious denominations in our community to help the poor and homeless. One of our primary activities has been our community loan fund. We were particularly happy that we could raise \$500-600 of new money. We have not received any visitors this year from NYM or ILYM. We are hoping that will change.

## **Elders Report**

The state of our meeting is firmly committed to goals but fragmented in action. Our meeting has always been a meeting of a few committed Quakers and many attenders, who are with us for varying periods. We are very small and believe in following the spirit rather

than just the letter of our faith. We have a strong belief in social action and frequently interact with our officials in an attempt to redress missteps in the legislative process. Due to our size we have more or less split concerns or duties among ourselves, according to our bundles and interests, and often our attenders help us do this.

Some of us interact with the prisoners in our prison system. Some go to meetings involving the community we live in, such as the group Esther and the warming shelter. Some round up urgently needed items for those in need such as toilet paper or clothing or food. We have never been disappointed in getting the help we have needed to accomplish our goals. Usually, and when possible, we come together each Sunday in faith and humility. Time and time again we have been the recipients of amazing grace, and our work with those less fortunate than ourselves has reinforced our perception of this, both individually and as a meeting; When we come together, the examples we see have helped us to practice more faith, humility, and patience than we might otherwise, with ourselves and our attenders. As we grow older, we cherish each other more and take more pains to understand each other's concerns.

Attempting to see all sides of any issue before us is done by taking it to the light, which helps us to find out what God would want us to do. This, of course, is an on-going project which sometimes is easier than at other times. We seek to apply the light to our lives, with different degrees of success at various times, as our lives are made up of many movable parts and getting all of them moving and working together within the light is the continuing challenge of our very busy lives. Meeting is an oasis in the center of our lives that renews our faith and returns us to God whenever one of those movable pieces leads us too far astray.

## **St. Louis Monthly Meeting**

2019 was a year of continued growth and joy, even as it included some growing pains for St. Louis Monthly Meeting. Continued regular attendance and increased involvement, especially from younger friends, has felt like something that can be built upon for our future. It was agreed that Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business are held with a deep sense of worship even when there is disagreement. There is a sense that people are listening both to the Spirit and to each other.

The meeting is nurturing the spiritual life of members and attenders through opportunities for service – notably, the Friends' Winter Outreach shelter and the ongoing anti-racism work. Additionally, Friends cited the opportunities for gathering through Friendly dozens, Spiritual Directions, and the Quaker Reading Group. Friends greatly appreciated Quakerism 101.

Regular meetings for worship feel deeply connected to each other and to the spirit. Members and attenders are creating a community where people are doing their best to practice with intention. It does seem that an ongoing question for our meeting is when or when not speak during meeting for worship, that is learning to discern whether a message received is for everyone or solely for the individual receiving it. As one person put it, "Sometimes there needs to be space for people to find their way – when to speak and when

not to speak." Another person felt there was room for eldering regarding vocal ministry and particularly discerning a spiritual message from a political message or opinion. "I come here," they said, "because I need to hear God-sent messages."

Among the joys cited by members and attenders were what the membership practices preached in terms of Quaker values and that there are many opportunities to get together for adult religious education. When people do gather together, there is a feeling of fellowship and joy. One attender noted that they valued the regular meals we share together as that allows relationships to grow.

Many folks cited the appreciation that they had for holding each other in the light and sharing during the time for "Joys and Sorrows" in meeting for worship. People appreciated being supported and being given the opportunity to support others. Clearness committees were also cited as a joy that helped someone to "tell the truth of a situation" during an ongoing problem they were facing.

Among the leadings that meeting feels most strongly about in this moment are Peace Initiatives, work with the Friends National Advocacy team, and Winter Outreach. People expressed gratitude that we are not just talking about things, but that we are also doing things. One particularly wise thought that expressed the sense of the meeting was when someone noted that our group, "does a lot of internal work to heal ourselves that translates into healing our community." We are feeling led to continue to build a community of support so that we can continue to be a space for our members and attenders while also being accessible and welcoming to those who are seeking this community.

Some of the challenges facing our meeting are seen as "good ones" to have in that they are ones of growth—how do we accommodate and maintain growth and do so in keeping with the Spirit. There is also a desire for ongoing and meaningful cooperation among our committees. A greater need for thinking about and increasing accessibility within the meeting was discussed—a need to think about "all the forms that accessibility takes." Someone thoughtfully said, "You don't always understand the roadblocks to someone's comfort until you talk to that person." Someone also said that "Often welcome comes from a place of clarity."

Despite the challenges, there is a sense of joy and excitement about the time we all spend together. It is clear that there is a sense of love and peace among us. One mother shared that when she told her three year old that they were about to go to meeting, he replied, "Meeting for Worship? Those people are quiet, but they love me." This young friend speaks all our minds.

## **South Bend Friends Meeting**

This year's State of Society report finds South Bend Friends staying at home to protect one another's health during the COVID-19 pandemic. While Friends have been physically isolated, we have maintained fellowship through increased phone contacts and through shared worship. We have continued to worship synchronously from home at our usual time, and some Friends have gathered virtually for worship as well; virtual meeting has brought us

the joy of being joined by nonresident Friends and of getting to know Friends from Duneland Meeting who have been worshiping online with us. The Elkhart Worship Group under the Care of South Bend Monthly Meeting is holding virtual Meeting for Worship as well on alternate Thursday evenings.

Prior to these unexpected, dramatic changes to our regular worship, the meeting had been preparing for a different change. Last spring, after many years of worshiping at the Charles Martin Youth Center, the Meeting decided to consider finding another location, and now the Meeting is in the process of working out a lease for a new worship space. Relocating is always a challenging process, but we have found this challenge to be an occasion for spiritual growth. Our discernment together has deepened our fellowship and enabled us to come to clearness about our authentic needs as a meeting; we feel great gratitude for this blessing!

In other respects, the meeting experienced stability and growth this year. Although our hearts were saddened by the passing of the young daughter of a nonresident member due to congenital disease, we have joyfully welcomed two babies to the meeting as well as one new adult member and several new attenders. First-Day School for young Friends remains an important part of the life of the meeting. As the main cohort of young Friends approaches their teen years, they are becoming more active in the community in volunteer work, sports, and the arts. Supporting young Friends' endeavors has become an important aspect of the life of the meeting this year.

Adult Friends have also taken up new forms of activity within the meeting community and in service to the larger community as well. The meeting joined Faith in Action in Indiana this year. Friends are actively involved in leadership in our county chapter, and many Friends have attended events supporting social justice initiatives consistent with Friends' testimonies. Within meeting, the Fellowship, Study, and Outreach Committee organized a bimonthly Quaker 101 group, which met mid-week last fall to provide an introduction to Quakerism focused around Philip Gulley's *Living the Quaker Way*. A second, ongoing adult study group called Quaker Conversations formed last spring to practice a contemplative form of dialogue based on the vocal ministry practice of "speaking out of silence." Texts used have been Gorman's *The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship* and Neil Douglas-Klotz's *The Hidden Gospel*. Friends have also begun a practice of singing once a month prior to Meeting for Worship. Following the rise of meeting, Friends have appreciated weekly provision of coffee that two Friends have taken up as a service to the meeting. Their action has inspired an increase in participation in providing post-meeting snacks as well. We find we are more able to linger in conversation following meeting when we are not so urgently called to lunch. The meeting continued its practice of holding monthly potlucks following meeting. The meeting also convened a worship sharing, a practice we had not used in some years, to celebrate Jason Shenk's ministry on the occasion of his laying down the ministry. The meeting's first retreat in some years, held in October jointly with Duneland Meeting, rounded out our year's activities supporting the life of the Spirit among Friends.

The volume of activity has at times challenged our capacity to carry out the functions of meeting, but we have been clear that our activities have arisen authentically out of leadings and concerns for the quality of our shared life together. We look forward to finding ways in the coming year to continue to act as Friends in the world while cultivating simplicity and inward peace.

## Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting

This year our meeting's unity and vitality have been enhanced by widespread committed participation in Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Business, by service on formal Committees of Care and informal care networks, and by joining together in workshops, presentations, and discussion series. Our well-attended Meetings for Worship may offer deeply gathered silent worship, or a feast of powerful ministry, sometimes in the form of a poem or a song. After worship we remain together to share joys and concerns, hear excited reports from First Day School, and hear many announcements – often about events that connect us to the wider community.

We are grateful for an especially active Committee on Adult Religious Education whose programming has helped us to explore the roots of our Quaker beliefs and ponder how these can be made visible. We heard five compelling talks from friends who sought conscientious objector status in conflicts from World War II to Afghanistan. These demonstrated the courage demanded by this paradigmatic Quaker action. In the fall, Marcia Nelson, clerk of ILYM, led an invaluable five-hour workshop on Quaker decision-making; our inclusive and spirited discussion continues to provoke reflection. We followed up in the winter with a worship sharing on the topic and a down-to-earth question and answer session. Participants offered many practical suggestions for strengthening our day-to-day processes to achieve unified and transparent decisions. Many of us are participating in an ongoing *Exploring Quakerism* series, using a curriculum by Marsha Holliday, a Friends General Conference publication. Sessions explore one aspect of Quakerism through a two page handout followed by worship sharing. Reflecting together on our faith and practice throughout the year has deepened our meeting's unity and purpose.

We have also grown closer by providing abundant care for friends in need – both formally and informally. Appointed Committees of Care are offering ongoing support to friends managing chronic diseases, recovering from addiction, or needing help with the activities of daily life. Informal networks of care, organized by friends or family, have given rides to meeting or to medical appointments and provided plentiful food and welcome companionship to folks suffering from pain or disease. We arranged a Meeting for Worship with a concern for healing for one member as his health declined. Daily visits sustained another member as he struggled with severe pain and difficult surgeries. We grew closer to each other and to those we visited in their last months and were sustained and inspired by their cheerful courage. We had the grief and joy of hosting a Memorial Meeting that celebrated the life of Don Chenoweth, a long-standing and active member, and we look forward to one for Charlie Haines, a more recent and welcome addition to our meeting.

We continue to enjoy socializing at our annual events: the Thanksgiving potluck whose move to Saturday garnered increased participation and the festive Holiday potluck. We are especially grateful to Peter Lasersohn whose presentation on his recently published *Two Hundred Years of Blue River Quarterly Meeting* helped to generate a larger group than usual at the September meeting of Blue River Quarterly. This was a special anniversary celebration at the historic Blue River Meeting House which is more than 200 years old, the oldest in Indiana.

Although our Meeting has thrived this year, we continue to seek solutions to perennial issues. We have an active First Day School, with a paid teacher and 5-8 children attending

weekly. But we have not yet figured out how to provide needed volunteers to sustain an ongoing curriculum that meets the needs of small contingents of preschoolers, grade schoolers, tweens, and teens. And, at this time of the year when the Nominating Committee works to create next year's slate of Officers and Committees, it is always a struggle to find enough volunteers.

Since COVID-19 closed our meetinghouse, we still care for and support each other with phone calls, food drops, and park meet-ups. We Zoom Meeting for Worship, First Day School, midweek check-in, committee and business meetings. A Virtual Stone Soup Fundraiser and talent show with matching donors was instituted to benefit our community's most vulnerable. In these ways, we continue to sustain and revitalize ourselves.