

State of Society Reports

2022 Annual Sessions, Illinois Yearly Meeting

Bloomington-Normal Monthly Meeting

This year finds us with eight formal members and several active attenders. All of our members have participated generously in the worship and financial areas of the meeting. In this year we have continued to deal with the COVID-19 virus and variants. We have met online during times of increased community virus and in person during low times. We end the year meeting in person. All of our members are vaccinated with booster shots.

We are holding First Day School on the first Sunday of each month and are pleased with the participation of our three young Quakers. We have continued our monthly "Meeting for Eating" women's group which includes members from the Clear Creek and Urbana-Champaign meetings. The quality of food at these meetings has been beyond belief. Heather Evert has continued to lead monthly religious education sessions for adults which have focused on racism and segments of the new Illinois Faith and Practice Book.

Meeting members have participated in the community effort to welcome Afgan immigrants and help them establish a furnished residence. We again provided Christmas gifts to an immigrant family with whom we have a continuing relationship. We have elected Heather Evert as our clerk for the next three years. We recognize her participation in both the yearly and local meetings and look forward to her tenure.

Clear Creek Monthly Meeting

The second year of the pandemic found Clear Creek continuing on much as always. We have been worshipping in person at the meetinghouse during the warmer months and at Clear Creek House when the weather is cooler. We have been utilizing Zoom for business and worship on the third Sunday of each month and enjoy seeing those who cannot be present with us in person, either due to distance or to pandemic restrictions. Our biggest change this past year has been the move of Grayce and Neil Mesner to Urbana for the winter. We miss their regular participation but are glad they can be closer to Grayce's family.

When asked by Illinois Yearly Meeting to discuss the future of worship post-pandemic, we struggled between our aversion to the invasiveness of technology and our desire to maintain connections with our remote worshipers who joined us on business meeting Sundays. We particularly have enjoyed being able to have our members who leave the area for the winter join us on those occasions. A suitable system has been identified for our use in Clear Creek House, where we have a year-round internet connection, and we will decide whether or not to move forward with that March 20, 2022.

Clear Creek Friends always have on-going projects at the meetinghouse grounds. This year, the big one was cleaning out the tool room on the east side of the meetinghouse after the raccoons tore through the floor and made a huge mess. We emptied the tool room into the east side of the meetinghouse, sorted through the contents and decided what to keep and what to recycle. After the room was painted, we helped reload the usable tools and other hardware back into the room during fall workday. And we continue to pick up sticks after every wind. Having the caretaker, Judy Reese, on site helps us keep track of what jobs need to be done.

Since most of us are older and we are widely dispersed, we are not always able to participate in person in efforts to help others. We try to make up for that by contributing funds where appropriate. Those causes on our hearts this year included Asian-Americans targeted in Georgia, Afghan refugees being settled in Bloomington-Normal, and a Flutes for Vets program in Putnam County.

Our worship ends each week with the sharing of joys and concerns. This year we have been particularly grateful for the news of a new grandson for Judy Reese, a baby due in August for Peyton and Rose (Dennis) Johnson, and a scholarship for Kiva Schobernd to attend Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. Our primary concern has been for the health of our dear Friend Neil Mesner and the care of his family.

Columbia Friends Meeting

2021 surprised us. We have continued meeting on Zoom due to COVID-19, and our meetings are attended by several people who do not reside in Columbia. While we hope to meet in person in coming months, we are dedicated to continuing the option to Zoom in given the connections we have built with friends who join from afar (e.g., Seattle, Washington, Lohman, Missouri, and Clinton, Missouri) and who have become a vital part of our meeting. We were also able to have reoccurring visitors such as Brad Laird (ILYM Secretary), and David Wixom from St. Louis meeting. About 15 people join each First Day, and we also have Midweek meetings on Wednesdays.

Although First Day School has not been held in person, children have continued to engage in the Zoom meetings in their own special ways—showing toys they are playing with and sometimes sharing messages. We have also initiated a new project involving the children, filling “Blessing Boxes” that serve people who are impacted by food insecurity.

We have continued to hold masked and socially distant monthly “Black Lives Matter” vigils, and the Peace and Justice Committee has revived its efforts to initiate topics of discussion. We read Thomas Kelly’s *Testament of Devotion*. We also held a discussion series of films concerning racial justice, organized by a meeting attender with a background in film studies. David Shiner presented about the history and publication of ILYM *Faith and Practice*. At a subsequent Meeting for Learning, we read and discussed the history of IYLM as detailed in *Faith and Practice*.

This year our longtime member Carolyn Doll lost her husband Jack. Although he did not attend meeting, Carolyn’s stories about their life together have animated our meeting, and we will miss his presence in the world.

One unexpected development was that due to rising construction costs, we made the difficult decision not to proceed with building a meetinghouse on our property on Rollins Road at this time. We had a wonderful ground breaking ceremony, but as we moved further in the process of working with contractors, it became clear that we did not have the funds to carry through with construction. We then considered buying two different houses—one centrally located on Broadway, and another house that belongs to a family long connected with meeting in the same neighborhood. After careful consideration of these two properties, we decided to purchase the house on Broadway in December 2021. This house will allow us to begin meeting in person as soon as COVID conditions allow, and to have a home-base for our meeting, even as we consider what use we might have for the property on Rollins Road in the future.

The decision to buy the new meeting house was unexpected and required us to make decisions at a fast pace we were not used to, but our meeting weathered the challenge and emerged from that process united in purpose. We are excited to have a new home so visible and centrally located, and to offer a gathering space for our community.

Downers Grove Friends Meeting

This year made evident the challenges of moving forward through the COVID pandemic. In the early part of 2021, we began discussion of how to re-open the meetinghouse for in-person worship. We were mindful that we wanted to hear from all Friends about exploring the safe return to the meetinghouse. To hear the concerns of everyone during this time of transition, we created queries on

“how do we move forward” for all DGFM Friends to consider. In early June, after asking Friends to respond to these queries, we held threshing sessions on “How we reopen the meetinghouse safely.”

Friends agreed to begin a provisional/experimental period beginning on June 27, 2021, which consisted of holding two simultaneous meetings at the meetinghouse, one in-person without the use of electronic devices, and one in-person that permits Friends to attend using Zoom. For safety, we made the decision to require masks and vaccinations for everyone entering the meetinghouse. The two groups alternate use of space at the meetinghouse. At the same time, we began an ad hoc committee on how to resume the Meeting for Worship as a community. In November, the ad hoc committee began to organize small worship sharing sessions made of 6-8 Friends to discuss “how we meet for worship.” The groups began to meet in 2022.

We had several noteworthy events over the year. The Thursday Meeting for Worship resumed in person gathering during the summer, the Aging and Saging, and the Sewing groups began to meet in person once again as well. In May, we offered a virtual workshop led by Karen Tibbals, of Rahway Plainfield (NJ) Monthly Meeting, “Seeing that of God in People we Dislike.” The workshop was based on her book, *Persuade, Don't Preach*. Some Friends began (completed in 2022) the four-session AFSC e-program entitled “Radical Acting in Faith for White People.” A study group for the new Illinois Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* will begin in 2022. Marcia Nelson led an online version of Q101. Worship sharing resumed on the third Sunday in September in the Virtual Meetinghouse. The Peace Environmental and Social Concerns Committee held several Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Social and Environmental Healing. They also presented the video “The Need to Grow” about regenerative agriculture.

We welcomed two new members, Ellen Maxson and Ruth Fiedler. In October, we held a COVID-appropriate social time with refreshments at the meetinghouse for Ellen, Ruth, and Mark Masi (Mark was welcomed as a member in December 2020). Andrea Wolfe Bretl, daughter of Bruce and Pam Wolfe, requested transfer of her membership to Urbana-Champaign (Illinois) Friends Meeting.

The effects of not being able to see and interact in person due to the pandemic are still unknown in the wider society and at DGFM as well. At the same time, being able to worship on Zoom has shown that through technology there is “a way” for all of us to gather on First Day even when external forces block us from physically being present at the meetinghouse. Discovering how God is leading us to resume Meeting for Worship has been a challenge for DGFM this year. There are some who feel that hybrid Meeting causes a secularization of the worship and can impede hearing God speak to us, while others feel that the hybrid meeting allows Friends and visitors to attend who would otherwise miss M for Worship due to a variety of reasons (health, travel, inclement weather, distance, etc.). We hold in the Light our intention that together we will come to a sense of how the Divine is leading us to resume Meeting for Worship in a way that meets the spiritual needs of the entire community. Our desire is that all may feel welcome here and worship “in Spirit and in Truth.”

Duneland Friends Meeting

Duneland Friends Meeting continued to be small but faithful in 2021. We started the year with regular Wednesday evening midweek meetings via Zoom, plus twice-monthly Sunday morning worship, also via Zoom. We began to have in-person meetings on Sunday mornings with a laptop in the room to connect with others virtually during the summer. When cases of COVID began to rise again, we returned to all virtual meetings throughout the rest of the year.

Early in the year, we responded to queries from ILYM about meeting virtually and observed that, while we missed hugs, potluck meals, and joining our voices in song, our virtual sessions allowed for more frequent meetings, more regular attention to business, for distant members to participate, and even resulted in increased attendance. In 2021, we mourned the death of one member who had not been able to attend our meetings for several years. We gained one faithful attender who moved to the area

and one member by transfer from another meeting. No matter our format, we remained committed to seeking together, listening to one another with open hearts, and caring for each other.

We spent much of our Wednesday evening time together exploring concerns and interests that had touched the hearts of meeting members. One member shared the hopeful messages he found in *The Book of Joy* by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu through several sessions. Another member generously donated copies of Jemar Tisby's book *How to Fight Racism*. We spent several meetings exploring the book and examining our own lives regarding systemic racism. The following is an excerpt from our April 2021 response to ILYM's queries on racism: "...Duneland Friends Meeting was clear that we need to respond from our hearts. We believe that racism is an important issue to address, that it is very complex, and that we need be careful not to seek quick action to feel good. We feel that the heart of the issue is to dismantle the cultures, attitudes, and policies that prevent us from seeing all humans with the respect and love they deserve. Many in our society are not being affirmed and have unmet needs that include spiritual, physical, employment, educational, and social justice. As individual members, it is our position that we strive to minister to others we encounter in the way we feel the spirit is leading. As a meeting, we will strive to discern how we can be supportive to all people locally."

We have observed from time to time that our meeting's spiritual concerns and values are reflected in how we spend our modest budget. Because of our small size, the geographic spread of our members and attenders, plus the recent pandemic, we have found it difficult to discern ways to be hands-on in service to the Valparaiso community where we hold our in-person worship; thus, we have looked for other ways to support local needs and initiatives. In 2021, we continued our annual giving to a local food pantry and a local pet pantry. We also supported Mobility Ministries, whose workshop in nearby Wheatfield, Indiana, builds hand-powered carts for mobility-challenged people in developing countries. One way we have shown our concern for the environment is our voluntary "carbon tax" fund which allowed us to make donations in 2021 to the Haiti Tree Project, to the local Woodland Savanna Land Conservancy, to FCNL's Advocacy Corps, which supports young people working for environmental justice, and to Quaker Earthcare Witness. We were interested in reports from ILYM's Anti-Racism Committee about several ILYM members working with the indigenous-led protests of the Line 3 pipeline construction impacting indigenous lands and water in Minnesota. We were subsequently led to donate our budgeted sufferings funds to support the travel of indigenous people to attend the People Versus Fossil Fuels protest in Washington, D.C.

We find meaning in our discernment process as we prayerfully consider how to express our values through our contributions. In contributing even small amounts to these organizations, we unite with their valuable work and send our bit of Light out into the world.

Evanston Monthly Meeting of Friends

Evanston Meeting continues to adjust to a world in which COVID remains a constraining factor in our lives and affects our ability as a spiritual community to practice such cherished activities as gathering for in-person worship, mingling after worship, sharing meals together, interacting often with the meeting's young people, and holding face-to-face committee meetings.

We seem ever aware—on both the individual and corporate levels—of the importance of our spiritual community and of Quaker values and ways during a time of turmoil and change in our broader community, nation, and world. How to translate this sentiment into effective action and witness is an ongoing challenge. An Antiracism Working Group formed to focus on bringing ourselves into right relationships with our neighbors.

Some traditional opportunities for spiritual enrichment and community building continued. An off-site silent retreat was enriching to attendees. Meetings for Learning held during Second Hours covered varied topics, and spiritual nurture groups fostered participants' development. An Inquirers

Group drew an encouraging number of seekers, and a reading group found insights from discussing *Being a Quaker*.

Yet we dearly missed in-home dinner groups, movie nights, potluck meals, preparing meals for homeless teens in Chicago, and spending time in McNabb with Quakers from around the Midwest. Without these, we lacked previously-welcomed opportunities to socialize and get to know each other more deeply as well as interact with the larger Quaker world and serve, in a small way, some of the unfortunate persons in our midst.

As COVID persisted, there was a sense that “We are all in this together and together we will make it work.” Behind that sentiment, however, are differing opinions about what is needed to “make it work.” Ministry and Counsel Committee has been charged with being keenly tuned to the meeting’s spiritual health as we address sustained public health concerns, meet to worship using a hybrid format, and respond to the awareness of how remote participation can play a role in meeting activities.

About 35 to 40 persons gather to worship each First Day, in person and via Zoom, which is comparable to pre-COVID times even as the composition and geographical spread changed slightly. Meetings for Worship often encompassed significant periods of silent waiting and worship. Ministry messages were varied and heartfelt but typically arose from a rather small and steadfast group of individuals. Even so, Meetings for Worship remain a time of spiritual refreshment, and a sense of shared worship and community often arises amidst the silence.

At times, the work of “running” Evanston Meeting felt burdensome and unevenly distributed rather than joyful, spirit-led work. A relatively small number of persons devoted considerable service to committee work. Several committees became especially busy after the departure of the meeting’s live-in caretaker, which led to a wider understanding of what is involved in the stewardship of meeting’s physical and financial resources. A paid, part-time coordinator successfully sustains our religious education program, and the meeting engaged someone as a part-time administrator. Various members, including some relative newcomers, renovated our website and put in place a system to enable hybrid Meetings for Worship. Steps are under way to develop a framework for better offering pastoral care as a corporate undertaking, an area where the meeting may have fallen short in recent years.

Breaking from ILYM’s tradition, we wish to explicitly mention the deaths of Jeanette Baker and Roger Laughlin, members loved and appreciated beyond our doors for the ways they lived their lives and for their sustained contributions to many Quaker organizations. In late March, the meeting sustained the loss of another cherished member, Leo Schelbert. Earlier in the year, we welcomed one new member by conviction and another by transfer, with two new associate (junior) members also joining the meeting.

In summary, the spiritual health of Evanston Meeting held rather steady in the past year. The ever-present concerns remain about the quality of worship and how the Spirit is working within and among us.

Fox Valley Quaker Meeting

Our small, committed meeting, accustomed to worship in member homes, was seriously challenged by our desire to avoid COVID-19. It was a blessing for us, however, that for most of the year we were able to meet outdoors at Howenstines ‘ Pioneer Farm. (The lovely little slope on which we set up our folding chairs is now referred to as “Quaker Slope”). During colder weather at the end of the year our members, Pat and Bill Mueller, graciously allowed us to meet in their Woodstock home (with masks on, even though we all have chosen COVID vaccination). We conduct business on the first Sunday of the month, or whenever we need to decide something.

We lost our long-time member, Ellen Hackman, who followed her husband, John, in death after about a year. We Quakers attended a lovely memorial for them at the Unity Center in Woodstock. Their ashes were buried by family and close friends under an oak tree at Pioneer Farm. We were also saddened by the unexpected death in December of Emelyn Piotter, 24 year-old daughter of Debra, and

granddaughter of Alice and Bill Howenstine. though living in Missouri, Debra joins our Meetings for Worship on returns to Fox Valley.

Because of COVID we did not hold our traditional “Chicagoland Friends Old-Fashioned Corn Roast and Pot Luck Picnic,” but hope to sponsor it again in 2022. Though our numbers are still small (generally 4-8 persons at Meeting for Worship) our Friendship is warm, and our spirits are high. We do regret that our distance from McNabb and increasing ages limit our participation in ILYM events so much.

Lake Forest Friends Meeting

We have struggled this year to remain a vibrant spiritual community as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to stick its ugly head into the world and into the meeting. Despite our strong efforts to keep the meetinghouse open for worship and to provide ways to worship online, attendance at meetings for worship has decreased. We struggle with the intrusion of masks and technology into the meetinghouse; we struggle with centering and connection as we worship from our individual homes. We are slowly, slowly learning how to create a living silence as we worship without being all together in one room.

Circumstances force us to adapt and metamorphose. After much laboring for discernment, the meeting committed to having “hybrid” meeting for worship for the long-term and to do what we can to strengthen this type of worship, trying to make the best possible environment both for Friends in the meetinghouse and for Friends online. We are spending quite a lot of money and effort in order to use this adversity as an opportunity, connecting with homebound Friends and Friends in the wider Quaker world while maintaining and growing in-person worship in our beloved meetinghouse. We have hope.

Many of the messages and queries that came to us this year spoke to finding the Divine during difficult times. Still, we have many simple joys, and we take comfort in our community, with support groups, a weekly online gathering where we share each other’s company while doing handwork, online game nights, the sharing of happenings in our newsletter, and reaching out with cards and calls. These connections help us to recognize and enjoy the Inner Light in each other. We are glad to have some new frequent attenders at our meetings for worship and other activities. Our membership numbers have stayed the same, with the exception of the unexpected and untimely death of our Friend Lukan Paulus.

A number of determined individual Friends have worked doggedly for the meeting this year, and their efforts have been the spiritual and practical lifeblood of the meeting. We also benefit from the labors of our committees, and serving in those committees helps to foster community. Our First Day School rolled with the waves of the pandemic, deciding whether to have classes online or at the meetinghouse and providing engaging lessons that spark the Inner Light in our children. The adult religious education program gave us opportunities to learn and reflect together; we studied the ILYM *Faith & Practice* and topics including call and discernment, answering that of God, and U.S. history related to the abolition of slavery. We cared for our meetinghouse and grounds. We ministered as a meeting and as individuals to our local community, especially in providing food and other donations to the homeless and to those oppressed by racism. Our children learned about the work of our various committees as part of their First Day School curriculum, and while they were at it, they helped with planting and maintaining and ministering. Several Friends served ILYM and the wider Quaker community.

We continue our work as individuals and as a meeting to address racism, learning to become more welcoming to all and to change our thinking, our feelings, our behavior, and our culture. We read poems and other writings to each other at the rise of meeting during Gay Pride month, Indigenous Americans month, and Black History month. We listen to each other. We recognize that we have a long way to go on this journey.

We watch with trepidation as Russia invades Ukraine, the latest of many conflicts in the world. We need to find more ways to bear testimony and to express our faith through action.

As Spring arrives, the meetinghouse waits in expectant silence for more Friendly faces as we work to discern whether to make mask-wearing optional and to allow ourselves to share food together again. We want to return to our meeting's traditions and to create new ones. As we live our days with their troubles and joys, let us remember to ever seek guidance and comfort from the Divine that connects us.

Northside Friends Meeting

In this second year of lockdown we have struggled with feelings of disconnection. Said one Friend, "The pandemic transformed us from a small town in a big city into a ship.... I gratefully enjoy the scenery, having points of interest pointed out, [but] I don't know how things work in the boiler room or on the captain's bridge. I wonder how much of a tourist I am in our meeting. I would be useless in the boiler room or on the bridge, [but] this is my home too." New attenders report we are uniquely welcoming, but Friends recognize it can be difficult to weave oneself into the tapestry of the meeting.

Yet, "Zoom has been a gift to the meeting in the richness of sharing. I hope we can bring some of that with us when we return to meeting in person." "Meeting for Worship check-ins and introductions get me to know different personalities." "More of us know significantly more details of one another's lives than pre-COVID." And we love worshipping with Friends' cats. Friends challenged by dealing with large groups found Zooming more comfortable.

Although "historically we have had a hard time coming to unity around our witness to the world," now "we're still able to work together on leadings.... Spirit is with us, nudging and pinching, but definitely with us." Spirit led us to champion Tribal rights, both in Treaty camps of Minnesota and at the People vs. Fossil Fuels event in Washington, D.C. (two NFM Friends were led to be arrested alongside our indigenous relatives). In addition, we continued to acknowledge the white privilege benefiting many of us. We also actively insisted on correct gendering, and we supported our Justice and Service Committee through letter-writing campaigns to abolish cash bail and to battle environmental racism. Friends continued to serve on the ILYM Anti-Racism Workgroup, including planning and participating in the Monthly Anti-Racism Café and AFSC's Radical Acting in Faith for White People workshop.

Fellowship occurred primarily through committee work during lockdown. We found interpersonal issues/conflicts more difficult to resolve without in-person connections. Perhaps Spirit has been leading us to make extra efforts towards intentional interpersonal communications, even online. Moving toward in-person worship involves much discernment and experimentation. Worship by the Lake was lovely but weather-contingent. An ad-hoc committee is exploring options for inclusive (hybrid) worship. We provided technical support and hosting for Evanston Meeting's Midweek Meeting for Worship. We miss our Japanese American Service Committee partners.

We discovered Friends have a limited appetite for Zooming; we have observed dwindling attendance at events. Some drew close to the NFM 'fire' while others remained comfortably on the periphery. Painfully, despite efforts, Zoom has not been able to keep our children engaged in our community. Our remarkable Technology Committee kept our website engaging, easy to navigate, and reliably current. The website attracted new attenders, and worship was enhanced by these Seekers. Spirit was generous, giving us an abundance of Friends with technical gifts.

As anticipated, committees needed time to embrace the 2020 reconfiguration of committee structures. So, 2021 Nominating Committee remained active all year, supporting committees' readjustments and welcoming newcomers' gifts. Ministry of Mutual Care Committee transformed the Sufferings Fund, created in response to COVID-19, into a less stigmatizing and more accessible Community Cash Fund. Its availability is announced at Meeting for Worship alongside a request for contributions. Attention to the lives of Friends, and focus on abundant worldview, deeply enriched our past year.

Before each Meeting for Business we read Crossroad's Transforming Institutional Values: Both/And Thinking vs Either/or Thinking, Abundant Worldview vs Scarcity, Transparent Communication/Decision-Making vs Secrecy, Collaboration/Cooperation vs Competitive Individualism. Aspiring to actually live these values makes us an ever more stable, loving, welcoming community.

Milestones: Birth - Beckett Andrew Henley, born 11/13/21, to Ted & John Henley; 4/2021, Minute passed endorsing "Empowering Communities for Public Safety" ordinance; 4/2021, Weekly special Meeting for Worship in Memory of George Floyd and all Victims of Police Brutality; 8/2021, Minute supporting Aniiishinaabe Water Protectors and Stop Line 3; 10/2021, Welcoming celebration at the Lake for Erica Dix and Arcenia Harmon; 10/2021, People vs. Fossil Fuels protest / event, Washington, D.C.

Oak Park Friends Meeting

The third year of the pandemic seems less overwhelming. Meeting in person (as well as online) for almost a year has helped us reconnect socially as well as spiritually. The Spirit has moved among us in vocal ministry that has resonated with truth and love. Monthly worship sharing focuses on written reflections submitted by members and attenders. A nearly weekly, spiritually deepening Sharing Circle began last Fall. Our Peace, Justice, and Environment Committee continues to lead us in various discussions and activities, including worship sharing on encouraging anti-racism awareness both personally and in our meeting. Service work opportunities have enabled us to experience Quaker testimonies in action. We have started planning a memorial service for our oldest member, Burke Shipley, who died in April of 2021.

Last June we started meeting in a different space, 350 Harrison St. in Oak Park. Although it does not have a kitchen, it gives us more light and a more open, welcoming feeling than we had in our previous meeting space. There are two sound-proofed rooms adequate for First-Day School, but we still have no children among us. Outreach is being discussed by the Ministry & Care Committee.

We have joyfully welcomed two new members who have given abundant time, creativity, and positive energy to meeting committees and activities. One of them led an especially rich discussion of the 12/2021 Pendle Hill Pamphlet *The Atheist's Guide to Quaker Process: Spirit-Led Decisions for the Secular* by Selden W. Smith. It gave us all a chance to dive more deeply into the spirituality of our decision-making process.

However, difficult conversations were held with a member who, disagreeing with current pandemic guidelines, has been attending a different church. We feel sad about this rift, but are open to and hopeful for the Spirit to lead us all to healing.

Despite our small number, we have a strong sense of community supported by commitments from long-timers to not only attend but also to earnestly participate. Overall, we feel relief, gratitude, and joy that having endured unexpected hardships and difficulties the past couple of years, we can sense opportunities ahead.

Oshkosh Monthly Meeting

We have six people making up our membership (we have occasionally had one seven-year-old child at this time). We have visited other meetings by Zoom. We have had no deaths or births this year.

We practice worship in person on Sundays at 4:00 p.m. Masks are required due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We have adult education once a week on Thursday afternoons. We are having some difficulty staying in touch with Friends we have not seen for months.

Our community loan fund is active and has helped many in the community. We have been active with local service organizations like the Salvation Army, Day by Day Warming Shelter, etc. We have not had a problem with racism to date. ALL are welcome.

St. Louis Friends Monthly Meeting

A great joy for the St. Louis Friends Meeting this year has been worshiping inside the meetinghouse again. Friends who were joining from afar, or were ill, or who did not wish to worship in-person have had the option of joining on Zoom. For many there is a sense of the community coming together that was missing when exclusively on Zoom. However, others welcomed the possibility to join via Zoom since it has allowed Friends who have moved away to join in and they spoke to the sense of gathering and community also experienced online. Another joy was renewed sense of wonder at the workings of the “Quaker process,” which allows decisions and issues to be worked through, albeit not always as rapidly as some would like, but that nevertheless allows for seasoning and inclusion of many perspectives. The Query Discussions each month are also a joy. Friends also expressed the joy of having children in the meeting as well and expressed gratitude for the dedication and sacrifice of First Day School Teachers who teach the children during Meeting for Worship. Friends also shared the joy of being able to continue serving as a Winter Shelter through the use of our meetinghouse. The maintenance and related costs of the meetinghouse are both a joy and a challenge.

As far as challenges faced, the use of technology during meeting has made some uncomfortable and also challenged the clerks who have had to deal with sound issues and connectivity. These are new skills that the clerk, committee clerks and First Day teachers have often had to learn, along with methods to hold the sense of community together. Many have felt that the sense of “gathering” has been fractured and that there has been less vocal sharing or ministry. A sense of loss of Quaker identity, perhaps due to cultural or generational differences has been voiced. Community outreach and individual leadings have also suffered, thanks in part to the pandemic or lack of leadership in committees in the meeting. Another challenge has been keeping up committee work and being able to communicate in a Friendly way. Emails, texts, and zoom meetings have made us aware of how much we depended on face to face communication to avoid misunderstandings or conflicts.

Over the past year, the meeting has struggled with how to deal with issues and conflict between members. The result of meetings and committee work was a policy statement with guidelines on how to help Friends who feel harmed by another. A key point brought up was how to support all persons involved in a conflict. The role of the Ministry and Caring committee in this process has been questioned because of the weighty responsibilities the members face. Overall, the meeting has found that the discussion on how to create a safe space for worship, both in person and online, is a continual process, and work still needs to be done, both at an individual level and as a group. In the end, there is a sense that having to face the challenges to gather in the Spirit has helped strengthen us as a meeting.

Southern Illinois Quaker Meeting

The Southern Illinois Friends meet in Carbondale, a university town, where people come and go. To the extent that our regular attenders have been “townies” for well over twenty years, we have seen reduced participation during the second year of the pandemic but we are keeping the hearth lit. We began meeting regularly in person in spring of 2021 and nearly always set up a “Zoom station” for a hybrid meeting format. This has facilitated connection to Blue River Quarterly and Illinois Yearly Meeting Friends, including several virtual visits from Field Secretary Brad Laird. Most notably, our long time member Maurine Pyle has participated by voice for most First Days from her senior care home in Terre Haute. Most recently, however, Maurine's health has prevented her from joining us.

With fewer attending—typically three to five each week—we have spent Second Hour in a more social and casual format that nurtures our relationships and sense of family, which feels like the necessary healing modality in these chaotic times.

The only youth in the meeting for the past several years has also been unable to participate due to the pandemic and the family's schedule, but we enjoy their company at our periodic Life of the

Meeting potlucks, which we have held outdoors until the COVID vaccine was widely adopted. Many of us see each other socially almost weekly along with “Quaker-adjacent” locals, often during Illinois Ozarks hikes that have expanded our appreciation for the Creation at our back doorsteps.

Transitions have affected us deeply. In October 2021, we moved our weekly worship back to our long-time location, the Gaia House Interfaith Center, after nearly five years at the excellent Dayemi Family Center. Three of us have experienced very serious health issues. Three moved out of state, including Michael Batinski who transferred his membership to Monadnock Quaker Meeting in New Hampshire. One retired, while the “youngest” member turned sixty. Gary Marx transferred his membership to us from Penn Valley Friends Meeting in Kansas City, Missouri. Elisha Logan Plummer and Sage Moffett married, and we have taken their marriage under the care of the meeting.

Even though our meeting’s budget has declined, we continue our tradition of supporting ministry projects as our Friends are led. We contributed to Elisha’s education in the ministry at Earlham School of Religion, and have sponsored a Humanitarian Parole application for a family of five Afghans who are still in hiding in Afghanistan after having worked for the U.S. before the withdrawal in August 2021. The adults in this family are the same age group as most of our own young adult children, with a 4 year-old and an infant to protect. We hold them in the Light daily while we all endure the glacial U.S. refugee management systems. This is the nature of the patience and faith that has been required of us.

Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge us as we seek to create a worship space that welcomes Friends and visitors with differing needs and preferences and to give witness to our Quaker values. In spite of these challenges, our Friends’ community has been strengthened in ways we could have never imagined.

In the spring of 2021, some Friends met outdoors at the meetinghouse while others worshiped via Zoom. Several Friends wanted to use the meetinghouse for indoor worship if that could be done safely, while others wanted to continue to meet outdoors. Many Friends wanted to integrate Zoom and in-person worship, and others were skeptical about the impact of technology on in-person worship. Despite differing views, Friends agreed to an experimental approach: we gradually began connecting in-person meeting with the Zoom group, first outdoors and then indoors. Friends vary in their acceptance of the changes brought about by integrating Zoom with the in-person Meeting. Some Friends feel more connected to each other now that we can hear ministry from Friends in-person and on Zoom. We can see and hear each other as we share joys and sorrows. On the other hand, some in the meetinghouse find the lengthier sharing time, which became a practice with the Zoom group, may not meet the needs of young children and their parents, visitors, and those who wish to converse with each other in-person.

We are grateful for the many Friends who have put an amazing amount of energy into our meeting throughout the year. A Friend brings his personal laptop to indoor worship every Sunday and connects us through Zoom. Multiple Friends have facilitated our Sunday Zoom meetings, regular mid-week gatherings, and several Adult Religious Education events. Many Friends have also worked together to care for and support our elders, who have transitioned from living at home to assisted living, nursing care facilities, and into a Friend’s home.

We are thrilled that our First Day School is meeting again in the meetinghouse after a long stint on Zoom. Our Youth Religious Education Committee has enlisted volunteers from our meeting to teach the older children; one of our teens provides childcare for the younger ones. The children have enjoyed learning about the testimonies, Quaker history, and the Bible. Baking cookies and playing games have been appreciated, too.

We are delighted that three people have joined our meeting this year. We welcome the new energy these Friends and their families bring to our meeting. Although each of them live a distance

from the meetinghouse, they are able to attend regularly either at the meetinghouse or on Zoom. We mourn the loss of a long-time member, Ellen Baranowski, who died on February 19, 2022. Ellen was an outstanding teacher (retired), amazing artist, lover of nature, and a giving friend.

During 2021-2022, many Friends focused their attention on anti-racism work, including confronting the ways we perpetuate white supremacy and building skills to follow the leadership of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Several Friends participated in ILYM Ad Hoc Anti-Racism Committee's activities. One Friend participated as an ally at the Red Lake Treaty Camp in Minnesota, where Indigenous people led protests against the Line 3 Pipeline which was built to carry tar sands oil from Alberta to Wisconsin. The protests were in defense of the water and Indigenous communities' treaty rights. At his suggestion, many Friends made donations supporting the camp and the participation of Indigenous leaders in the People vs. Fossil Fuels action in Washington, D.C.

An anonymous donor provided our meeting with an opportunity to contribute to the welfare of our community. The donor requested we give one-half of their large donation to local and environmental organizations. Many Friends researched various groups and made recommendations to our Peace and Service Committee during a Called Meeting. The committee continued to raise funds for additional organizations through our annual Stone Soup Supper (virtual this year).

Friends remain committed to deepening the spirit of the meeting and providing a welcoming space for worship and sharing, both on Zoom and in-person. We hope to continue our care for each other and to work for peace, justice, and a sustainable environment.