

## **2023 State of Society Reports Monthly Meetings of Illinois Yearly Meeting**

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

We as a meeting are still recovering from what we lost to the COVID pandemic during 2020 and 2021. Our sense of connectedness and fellowship suffered while we were not able to do First Day School activities, in-person worship, or potlucks. We made do with videoconferencing for worship and adult education, meeting outdoors when possible, and holding each other in the Light while people were under tremendous stress. Friends had frustrating times trying to keep families safe from illness and adjusting to changing requirements and policies while the virus evolved, spread, waned, returned, and generally had us all considering its impact or threat level in any spaces where we encountered other people. We have felt a relief at once again spending the colder months and bad-weather days in-person indoors at our usual meeting space in 2022 and 2023 and at having the year 2022-23 back with our Friends at monthly Women's Meeting for Eating potluck dinners.

We continue to offer love and support to each other when life brings unexpected difficulties, tough choices to make within family relationships, deaths, and other emotional moments. During our weekly Joys and Concerns time, and at monthly Women's Meeting for Eating, Friends stay connected and informed on where other Friends can use spiritual, emotional or material support. We share stories of similar experiences if we have had any, and ask questions in the hopes that answering questions can help Friends find a clear path.

There was a change in clerkship in summer 2022. Previous clerks of the past decade have provided helpful advice, guidance in Quaker process, reminders of deadlines, and support in maintaining the vitality and work of the meeting to the new clerk, Heather Evert.

As a meeting, we have re-committed to regular First Day School, starting with programming for our elementary-school-aged Friends. Both parents of that group and other adults have worked together to make plans for activities and plans for when families will commit to attending worship. Young Friends from Bloomington-Normal Meeting have attended OWL (Our Whole Lives) programming at the local Unitarian Universalist Church. The Monthly Meeting has worked around that schedule when offering First Day School activities.

The children's questions about Friends and their parents' sharing of which areas of faith formation are important to them are guiding our programming decisions. We also have dedicated time together for sharing children's resources, both physical books and curricula and digital resources. We have room to grow in planning and volunteering for age-appropriate First Day School activities for our youngest Friends and for pre-teens and teens.

## **Clear Creek Monthly Meeting**

At Clear Creek, our State of Society report typically begins with our Easter celebration. This year was a particularly special occasion as we chose that day to celebrate the life of our dear Friend, Neil Mesner. We held Neil's memorial service that morning during the worship hour. It was well attended by family and Friends from throughout Illinois Yearly Meeting. Those present shared stories and memories of Neil and his impact on their lives, then enjoyed a lunch catered by Zach and Kelly Schobernd. We miss Neil's wisdom, kindness, and gentle humor and still feel his presence among us during worship.

We saw the return of events to the campus in 2022, and we rejoiced in welcoming Friends back to McNabb. Women's Weekend in April and yearly meeting Annual Sessions in June brought Friends to campus for the first time in 3 years. We have missed being able to share our home with others. The influx of additional energy these events brought raised our spirits considerably.

Shakespeare, the faithful service dog of caretaker Judy Reese, passed away suddenly in July. Judy and Shakespeare had become a vital part of our meeting and we grieved his loss with Judy. Unfortunately, Judy's disability prevented her from living in a rural area without a service dog, so she moved to Wisconsin to be near family. We miss both Judy and Shakespeare and their contributions to our spiritual and physical lives.

In September we welcomed Magnolia Irene Johnson, daughter of Peyton and Rose Dennis Johnson, as a member of our meeting. Adding children to our numbers gives us hope for the future of Clear Creek Meeting.

In the fall, our numbers thin. One Friend moves to Arizona for the winter and another spends more time in her alternate home in Urbana, while the weather dictates attendance for some others who live away from McNabb. Most Sundays there are only three or four of us in attendance, but our worship is deep. We are thankful that we are able to be together and that we have Clear Creek House in which to worship. We are always grateful for visitors.

## **Columbia Friends Meeting**

This was a transformative year for our meeting. We began meeting in person again on March 20, 2022, the first day of spring. We also maintained our presence on Zoom, offering hybrid worship on Sundays so that we can continue to welcome friends from afar (Seattle, WA and Jefferson City, MO) as well as Brad Laird, the Illinois Yearly Meeting Field Secretary. After purchasing a new meetinghouse centrally located on Broadway Street in Columbia in late 2021, we spent 2022 settling into our new home and our new place in the community. In August, we welcomed caretakers to live in the meetinghouse (Joe Decker, a graduate student; Zarchi, an activist from Myanmar; and baby Rosaria, all of whom had been living in Southeast Asia until summer 2022 and who breathe life into the space). We continue to have midweek meetings on Zoom on Wednesdays. Our regular attendance has expanded to about 20 people each week, and we welcomed several regular new attenders.

First Day School is full and lively, with 4 to 10 children from ages zero to ten attending each week. We have involved some of the older children in our sustainability efforts, as well as in service projects such as feeding unhoused neighbors. We have also expanded our pool of adults who regularly teach First Day School from 2 to 6. The kids join the worship five to ten minutes before the rise of meeting, and they love to introduce themselves and share the projects they worked on.

Our Peace and Social Justice Committee, our Meeting for Learning Committee, and our Hospitality Committee have all expanded their efforts. We have continued our monthly vigil, the focus

of which shifts depending on current events. These are now in a much more visible location with dozens of cars passing every hour. We reconsidered the organizations we provide yearly donations to and began having presentations about organizations our attenders are involved in, such as Right Sharing of World Resources. We are also partnering with a local Buddhist organization, Show Me Dharma, to provide meals to unhoused people six times per year. We have also restarted Fun Night once a month, with a potluck supper and games or activities. We renewed our commitment to accessibility by having a ramp constructed to make our meetinghouse more accessible. We continue to consider possible long-range projects such as renovations/expansions of our space, and a garden in our front yard, to be financed by the sale earlier this year of the lot on Rollins Road where we had planned to construct a new meetinghouse.

This year our meeting had several losses. Our attender Alex Metro, father of Rose Metro, died in March, and meeting hosted a hybrid memorial service for him. Bill Kountz, who had longtime connections with Quakers and had recently begun attending again, also passed away.

This has been a year of significant growth for our meeting. We are hopeful and excited for the future.

## **Downers Grove Friends Meeting**

For Downers Grove Friends Meeting, 2022 was a trying year. As the COVID pandemic moderated, we tried a few different ways to meet together for worship. We had begun small group discussions intended to bring together all our measures of light to the question of safely reopening our meetinghouse. We first tried staggered meetings for worship, one using technology to include remote worshipers, and one without technology to honor the wishes of those not at ease with technology in Meeting for Worship. In between these two staggered morning meetings, Friends met together to share blessings and concerns and make and hear announcements. After a limited time trial Friends agreed this arrangement was unsatisfactory.

So we then tried alternating ways of Meeting for Worship: the first and third Sundays of the month Meeting for Worship at the meetinghouse does not include technology; during the same Sunday morning hour, worshipers meet online for a virtual-only meeting. On the second, fourth and fifth Sundays, Meeting for Worship at the meetinghouse is a hybrid meeting that includes both remote and in-person worship. Our Meetings for Business remain virtual only; we had observed that attendance at Meeting for Business had increased when the pandemic forced us to move to meeting online. Some Friends remain not at ease with the current arrangement; some Friends are tired of wearing masks. Dealing with changing public health guidelines and varying individual health risk assessments among Friends has tried our mutual love and patience.

This past year has also been a year of mourning. We held two memorial services to mourn the passing of Friends Tom Jones and Evelyn Zerfoss. We received word of the passing of three Friends no longer in the area but dear in memory: Ed Smith, Jean Smith, and Ian Tasker.

The year 2022 has also brought us openings. We continue to welcome new attenders who bring new questions and new energy to our community. We have also been able to offer Quakerism 101 twice because of interest in learning the basics of Quakerism. Friends wanting to know more about the new *Illinois Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice* met in a reading group. Children occasionally attend our meetings, and a Friend has been generous with her gifts and talents in providing them with religious education as needed.

The election of 2022 prompted louder witnessing to the world. Concerned Friends participated in the Quaker Call to Action to amplify Friends' testimony of integrity with respect to the nation's

elections. We hosted an online pre-election prayer vigil that drew 25 participants from five states. We also endorsed this call.

Our meeting has been reopening, slowly, tentatively. Small social groups have begun meeting in person again at the meetinghouse. During COVIDtime, we knew the Light remained with us; however, seeing it and sharing its warmth, and finding our sense of connection and community, were often difficult. The meeting has remained faithful, working and waiting, but it was a challenging time. As we have regained the ability to be present at meeting (and to one another) and find comfort in our human connections, we are experiencing the Light in our midst in familiar and yet newly shining ways.

## **Duneland Friends Meeting**

In early 2022, the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Omicron variant peaked and then declined in the fall; still, new variants, Flu and RSV were ravaging communities. Duneland Friends Meeting continued to meet virtually twice monthly on First Days and every Wednesday for midweek meetings. In the fall, we began to meet in person at the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), with 3 to 4 Friends attending and the rest participating by Zoom. Unfortunately, in-person meetings were halted by structural issues at the FYSB building that necessitated its closure in December.

First-day worship and midweek meetings are a lifeline to all Friends, including those who prefer intimate in-person gatherings. Meetings via Zoom allowed distant Friends Roxy and Tom Jacobs to attend from Florida. “Anything Goes” Wednesdays are an opportunity to have informal discussions of any topic where Friends want to lead. In the fall, at the request of a few Friends, Fernando Friere led us in a Meeting for Healing which included poetry, prayer, and quiet worship for those Friends who requested to be held in the Light for healing. The meeting for healing was cathartic and helpful to all Friends that attended. Grief was an appropriate topic, especially since long-time member Marlou Carlson passed away in January of 2022. Before the pandemic, Marlou had been the long-time host of our Bible study. We attempted to revive our Bible study via Zoom this year, but interest was thin due to the online format and the lack of deeper discussions afforded when studying in person.

Ministry has been an essential component of the meeting. An individual interested in Quakerism who lives in a distant retirement community was contacted occasionally for discussions about Quakerism and history. Our continuing support for those near and far through life challenges—births, deaths, health issues and more—has been welcome. Duneland Friends, while small, remains a vibrant and diverse community of Friends seeking spiritual guidance in waiting worship.

## **Elkhart River Worship Group**

This year with Elkhart River Worship Group has been a time of deepening and exploration. Ministry during worship has come in many forms—most attenders have given vocal ministry, and the presence of young people often draws our attention to the Spirit’s movement. As we gather for worship outdoors in warm weather—another “member” is the natural world. Creatures and the elements around us seem to spark ministry among us as often as any other “text.” Our smaller size allows for an easy flow into reflection as we share food, joys, and concerns after the rise of meeting.

Our regular location for worship at “Faith House” serves as our home base. We often will “flow out” to hold worship elsewhere and then return back home. We are still fairly fresh as a worship group,

as we began to meet as a worship group in this form only in summer 2021. By summer 2022, we sketched out a vision of a direction for the worship group and stretched as various attenders took up roles to support the life of the meeting such as communication, care for children. Some attend the worship group regularly, and some attenders come and go. We continue to explore what rhythms suit best for our lives and where personal guidance and the sense of the Meeting will align.

One attender recently compared Meeting for Worship to a washing machine: we come in dingy, get shaken up by the Spirit while we are together and by the end, have come out feeling revived and clean.

Our most consistent program is First Day School. This past year, there were nine young people who participated from time to time. The last two autumns, we held a “Quaker Tea” event, a special occasion to invite those curious about Friends to come for conversation.

Since 2013, the Elkhart River Worship Group had been under the care of South Bend Friends Meeting. Then in spring 2022, South Bend Friends expressed their limitations in being able to nurture the worship group in an ongoing way. Over the next several months, the worship group worked with the Ministry and Advancement committee (M&A) of Illinois Yearly Meeting to discern how we might best be nourished.

In September 2022, the Elkhart River Worship Group both noted with appreciation the many ways that South Bend Friends Meeting has supported our worship group over the years, and requested that South Bend Monthly Meeting release the worship group to the care of Ministry and Advancement of Illinois Yearly Meeting. South Bend accepted this request, and Elkhart River is now functioning as a preparative meeting under the care of M&A.

Throughout the year, we held worship at six different locations: our “home base” at Faith House, three times at the various homes of attenders, and twice in early 2023 in support of local work for racial justice and to address poverty:

- Working with our local chapter of the Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival and aligning our Meeting for Worship with a celebration of a legal victory for Hahkeem Layman, a young black man who had been targeted by the Elkhart Police Department.
- “Praying with our Feet”: we held meeting together with a walk to benefit St. Margaret’s House, a local day center for women and children.

## **Evanston Monthly Meeting of Friends**

It was a year of expectations, loss, and challenges. Many felt that after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, things would return to the way they had been. However, with new viral variants and periodic spikes of illness, many concessions to COVID-19 remained in place. People still wore masks in meeting and there were few handshakes after the rise. Some people who had formerly attended meeting quite regularly continued to avoid group meetings as a precaution due to personal conditions or fear of exposing others in their homes. Therefore, meeting persisted as a hybrid gathering, with uneven experience. Periodic technical problems challenged volunteer assistants who were not always able to restore technical connections so that those worshipping remotely could hear vocal ministry from the meetingroom. Seeing faces on a screen kept us nominally in touch, but fell short of the sense of community fostered by conversation at the rise of meeting and former frequent gatherings for Friendly dinners, potlucks, and pancake breakfasts.

Aside from weekly Meeting for Worship and monthly Meeting for Business, we gathered most often for Memorial Services. We met to remember dear longtime members Judd Thompson and Clyde Baker. Another longtime attender, Kathy Judge, was also remembered in a memorial service.

Members of the Ministry and Counsel Committee were challenged to provide pastoral care to those nearing end of life, to the bereaved, and to individuals experiencing the physical onslaughts of illness and aging, as well as to those weary from isolation due to the pandemic or facing other concerns. Some sessions of Meeting for Learning focused on pastoral care, and the Ministry and Counsel Committee explored ways of better serving the meeting community. The Nominating Committee also found it challenging to fill appointments to committees as fewer people were available or willing to serve.

As the incidence of COVID-19 in Evanston fell, the meeting re-instated social gatherings for potlucks and pancake breakfasts in the fall. Birthday Sundays resumed with children coming up to the meetingroom at the rise of Meeting. Friendly dinners were held on a month-to-month basis. The practice of having a greeter at the doorway of Meeting for Worship was re-established. A gathering of committee clerks was held on October to reflect on the role of clerks, establish better communication among the committees, consider how committee work may be an extension of worship, and discern the gifts and leadings of members. A well-attended Meeting Retreat in January explored ways in which the Meeting can better serve both its own needs and those of the surrounding community. Stewardship of Midweek Worship at The Admiral on the Lake was transferred to Northside Meeting. First Day School flourished, offering classes at three levels on Quakerism, world religions, and the Bible as viewed through a Quaker lens. Meeting ended the calendar year with a positive budget balance, turning around an expected deficit that had been anticipated due to increased costs, as well as the recent deaths of several members who had donated generously to the Meeting for many years.

The meeting welcomed Evanston's decision to provide reparations to Black residents descended from those who had for decades been limited in their housing choices due to redlining and other discriminatory practices. Trustees proposed, and Meeting for Business approved, a contribution of \$25,000 from the principal of an endowed meeting fund to the Evanston Community Reparations Fund, to which individual contributions were added for a total contribution of \$35,000 from Evanston Friends. The meeting also continued to sponsor a college student through the Bolivian Quaker Education Fund, and members significantly supported the Bayard Rustin Fund at Chicago Friends School for the purpose of recruiting more low-income students of color.

An active Working Group for Antiracism met regularly and promoted workshops offered by AFSC and ILYM on topics such as racial equity and being an “upstander” who speaks up when observing microaggressions. Building from Friends' Testimony of Equality, the group developed a set of queries, to be used by meeting committees throughout their work, “moving us towards a loving inclusive community.” The queries and the goal were welcomed with enthusiasm by Meeting for Business in October, and have been regularly considered by Meeting committees since then.

## **Lake Forest Friends Meeting**

First Day School students, families and teachers are leading the way forward at Lake Forest Friends Meeting with active groups from pre-school through high school. They were the first to return live to the meetinghouse, as COVID restrictions loosened. Many of their lessons focus on doing things for others, reaching out to Friends not in person at the meetinghouse, and fundraising for meaningful causes.

Lake Forest Friends have made an investment in inclusion through Zoom and hybrid meeting alternatives. This builds from last year's decisions and work, resulting in an effective operating system fully running by the end of 2022. A big thank-you goes to all who made this possible with technical and dollar support. We are able to share meeting room activities, including meeting for worship (with an on-line greeter), business meeting, and special events—speakers, the multigenerational Christmas pageant,

Christmas Eve candlelight worship and memorial meetings. We have away Friends, seekers, and those with health or weather concerns who join via Zoom. In addition, the system provides closed captioning as well as a technical link for those with hearing aids in the meeting room. While virtual gatherings enable much, we miss the joys of in-person worship and informal conversations. Some Friends find it very difficult if they cannot worship together in person.

We have had steady attendance at meeting for worship, with more folks shifting to in-person, as they are able. Often worship is without vocal ministry, but is enriching. We have some new regular attenders and the start of a newcomers group. We have had no new members, births, or marriages this year. We held memorial meetings for Elizabeth Mertic (delayed) and Allen Flitcraft.

Lake Forest Friends Meeting experienced gun violence in the adjacent community of Highland Park. A shooter killed and seriously wounded many people during the local 2022 Fourth of July parade. After hours of uncertainty for the Chicago area, the alleged shooter was taken into custody a mile up the highway from the meetinghouse. Meeting individuals were not hurt, but some have friends and neighbors who were shot.

Our meeting has had regular opportunities for worship, study and enjoying time together. A new women's group has been formed, and our long-standing men's group continues; both welcome all who identify with that group. Intergenerational pre-meeting "music and muffins" has continued our lively singing during COVID times. For virtual gatherings, several midweek worship times are being tried out, plus adult religious education, a handwork group, game night, and pre-meeting Bible and topical studies. We returned to our much-loved Thanksgiving potluck. George Lakey joined us as a special speaker on his life as a Friend and peace activist. At their request, we were able to provide seasoned input on reproductive health care issues to the Friends Committee on National Legislation. Friends continue to participate in a wide variety of ways within Illinois Yearly Meeting, including a meaningful meeting for worship once a month on Zoom. Many also participate in the work and opportunities of Friends General Conference and other Friends organizations. Our representatives attend the meetings of the group of ministers from Lake Forest and Lake Bluff churches to share local resources and concerns.

In general, we have the human and monetary stewardship to make things happen for the meeting. We have met the recent challenge of how to keep going in unusual times with COVID and now have to go forward in different times.

Challenges to Lake Forest Meeting include the spread-out geography of our meeting community. This makes it difficult to care for one another, especially in long-term situations. We are seeking additional ways to assist others in need in greater Lake County. The PADS organization we partner with is evolving, and needs less volunteer hands-on help for providing its services to homeless people. We have merged two meeting committees for want of Friends to serve at present. We need to nurture leadership for the meeting. And, in the words of Parker Palmer, "How can we be better at sharing the gift of Quakerism?" Overall, we have the joy of worship, community, children and contributing to the natural environment on the meetinghouse grounds.

### **Northside Friends Meeting**

The theme of our 2022 Spring retreat was "Renewal"; a prophetic choice, as renewal and re-connection have been dominant themes for Northside Friends Meeting this year. In 2020 we found it stressful to adapt suddenly to lockdown and to online worship. Gradual, relentless change is also sometimes difficult, but as the restrictions of lockdown lift Friends are finding joy in the freedom of in-person worship. As always, change is exhilarating, even (or perhaps especially) when it is challenging.

NFM has resumed many activities interrupted by the pandemic. The Committee for Ministry on Racism, after a three-year wait, was able to re-engage with Crossroads /CROAR (Chicago Regional Organizing Against Racism) to present an anti-racism workshop. The in-person workshop planned for May 2020 would have been delivered over 2½ days during a single weekend. The online workshop CROAR now offers requires five weekly 3-hour evening programs and five 3-hour ‘homework’ assignments. However, the full allotment of thirty Friends from Northside, Evanston, and other ILYM Meetings completed the workshop in February 2023. The program has increased Friends’ vigilance about systemic racism; attending together has enhanced the connection between Meetings.

Friends have longed to resume in-person worship. At May 2022 Meeting for Business we ambitiously chose June 12, 2022 to begin meeting hybrid (online and in-person linked). The preparation was formidable: collecting electronic equipment and Friends to operate it, arranging setup of the meeting space, ensuring attenders’ safety with air purifiers and masks, and developing safety policies. Improving sound for hearing-impaired Friends is an ongoing exploration. Meeting for Business is still conducted solely online but the format for each Second Hour program is determined individually. Our mid-week Meeting for Worship, originally established by Evanston Friends Meeting, is now under NFM’s care and meets in-person and online on alternate weeks.

The move to hybrid worship inspired many changes in committees. The House Committee, having been laid down when worship was online, has been revived, as has Childcare Committee. Justice and Service Committee has been replaced by a Justice & Service Coordinator to facilitate J&S-related events. Difficulties associated with lockdown, combined with a financial surplus, prompted NFM to create a Community Cash Fund to provide financial assistance to any Friend in need. And outreach has recently included a welcoming ceremony requested for an infant with a Quaker grandparent.

NFM noticed a striking increase this year in people contacting us: telephone and email inquiries, and new attenders both in-person and online. Many are seeking a spiritual home, others are worshipping with NFM while visiting Chicago, and some are simply curious. Last month two NFM Friends spoke at an Episcopalian church about Quakerism. We are grateful to Technology Committee, and to everyone who contributes to the website, for helping make NFM so visible and accessible. Wherever people look to find us, we are there, and we respond.

Committees have presented many Second Hour programs. Ministry of Worship Committee has offered “Quakerism 101: A Brief Guide for Enquirers” and hopes to offer more such events, both for new and veteran attenders. Other programs include discernment of FCNL’s policy on reproductive rights, AFSC’s Healing Justice in Illinois Program, and several anti-racism events. NFM is gratified to find our calendar crowded with instructional, contemplative and devotional programs.

Just as NFM is emerging from hibernation—from both winter and the pandemic—another big transition faces us. The Japanese American Service Center (JASC) has provided NFM a home for 25 years, and deep connections have developed. In 2024, however, JASC will move to a new location. NFM must discern our course, whether to move with JASC to their new building—an option JASC enthusiastically supports—or to seek a new brick-and-mortar meeting place.

With all these leadings and concerns Northside Friends Meeting moves toward the future, continuing, as always, with expectant waiting.

**MILESTONES:** March 2023, Erica Dix marries Dylan Cheng; November 2022, Ted and John Henley welcome a second son, Beckett Andrew; Fall 2022, Lillian Robinwhite enters Clark University in Massachusetts; Fall 2022, Lindsay Brubaker begins graduate school at Univ. Rhode Island; Fall 2021, Liam Brubaker enters Earlham College in Indiana.



## **Oak Park Friends Meeting**

The strength of our community has been renewed each week with good spiritual flow in our meetings, and we are sharing our joys and sorrows more freely. This is partly due to our new space, which is much lighter, brighter, and more welcoming. It may also be somewhat due to many of us shedding our COVID masks. We still offer hybrid meetings, which result in attenders occasionally joining us via Zoom. Standing the test of time, our Sharing Circle continues to meet 2-3 times per month. They have added sharing a written reflection during each meeting. As concerns about COVID continue to abate, we found more opportunities to serve communities both near and far.

Work days at Columbus Park gave us a chance to act with others to help maintain and improve native plantings in a large community park in a nearby low-income community. Thanks partly to a grant several years ago from Quaker Earthcare Witness, we planted a garden of native plants in front of the Trailside Museum of Natural History in the Thatcher Woods Forest Preserve of Cook County. This year we replaced some plants that did not thrive or survive. We look forward to planting even more native plants there later this year. It is good to reconnect with this beautiful forest preserve near Oak Park.

We reconnected with our local homeless shelter, Housing Forward, which, due to COVID, radically changed how they operate. We adapted to the new situation and found a way to again prepare meals for the guests. Although we miss the in-person connection we used to enjoy with the guests, we are grateful that Housing Forward has been able to continue while keeping all involved as safe as possible.

Through a member of our meeting who has been led to help a new elementary Quaker school in Uganda, Care Children's Academy, we have been finding a way to help support this struggling community of Quaker children, parents, and staff. Learning about this community of Quakers, their challenges and successes, has enriched and deepened our understanding, and we feel unity with them in the Spirit.

Our attempts at local outreach have not been very successful. However, we are creating a new welcome brochure that we hope will resonate better with the wide variety of visitors who have attended our meetings. Our outreach efforts may also get a boost from a new banner we are getting to hang in one of the front windows.

The Spirit is nudging us to pay more attention to our library. We have an event scheduled to go to our offsite storage space, sift through the collection, and bring some essentials to the bookcase that a member just donated to our space at the String Academy. We need to vacate that storage space, so will have to disperse what is not moved to our new space.

The Peace, Justice, and Environment Committee continues to lead us in various discussions and activities, including meeting with Chicago AFSC staff to learn their concerns about incarceration of youth in Illinois and how we may help.

## **Oshkosh Monthly Meeting**

We are a small meeting that has always promoted and tried to live in the spirit. We are too small to need much permanent(or inflexible) structure—one advantage of a small meeting. We have weekly meetings for worship on Sunday at 4:00 p.m. and a monthly business meeting. We have a treasurer, a clerk, and elders, all of whom are flexible and will jump in to accomplish tasks if necessary.

We also let attenders experience meeting by allowing them to help when possible. We respected and welcome all attenders while including them in as much of our meeting as possible. Our size

fluctuates according to the number of attenders we currently have, and has risen as high as 23 or as low as 3. Of the attenders, 3 are adult convinced friends who claim meeting as their own and attend most of the Sunday 4 p.m. meetings, when we touch base with each other and give reports on our progress in any area we are working on currently. We have never had a problem with racism of any sort.

We are active in spreading the theory and practices of the Society of Friends. We continually try to both teach and serve as examples of living in the spirit, both in formal meetings for that purpose or informally in our daily lives. We each take responsibility for various areas of interest in our meeting work, such as prison work and visitations, anti-war protests, working with local groups on projects such as setting up and keeping the warming center for the poor and/or homeless stocked with necessities, attending or working on community events such as holiday dinners, making small local grants or loans to those who need necessities they cannot afford, contacting our legislators about issues or legislative actions of concern, testifying in favor of free school buses for students, contacting other meetings when possible or necessary, etc. Some of these areas overlap and we rely on those most interested in the specific issue to find the facts and bring them to the meeting. This enables us to counter with facts when emotionalism threatens as well as informing the meeting so we can determine whether or not and how to act if needed. Actions can be any of the types listed above, depending on the research.

We need to keep up with events in our world—a lot of our energies go into speaking truth to power. We interact with all levels of our government when there is an issue needing more light—a common event in this world of ours. We do this by meeting with them or mailing or emailing them

We have gone to both of our yearly meetings and to local gatherings when we have been able to do so. As we are getting older and have earned more family responsibilities this has not been as easy to do as it used to be, but we persevere. We try to assume new duties when needed and find ways to accomplish all of this efficiently. We very often have telephone or email communications that sometimes resolve any issues that arise. This helps conserve our time and sanity, and gives us more time to take issues to the light.

### **South Bend Friends Meeting**

South Bend Friends Meeting (SBFM) continues to provide spiritual nurture in our meetings for worship and in our other activities. As a community we seek to hold open space for listening for that of the Spirit in ourselves and in each other. This year we joyfully welcomed multiple new attenders and a new member, Philip Doctor. We celebrate our sense of being a loving community of seekers of the Light as we continue to share meeting for worship in-person, on-line, and synchronously off-line.

Our committees have been active. Young Friends learned about other religious traditions and led an intergenerational book discussion. They appreciated that Peace and Social Concerns organized field trips and conversations with activists focusing on civil rights work in our community. Nominating will invite high school age young Friends to serve on working committees to include them more actively in the life of our meeting. Communications continue to support the technologies that connect us and make our meeting accessible. With Faith in St. Joseph County, we worked for social justice in our broader community. Our Quaker Conversations group has been a place for spiritual sharing. Fellowship Study and Outreach organized a series of enlightening and community-enhancing conversations on the Quaker testimonies. We participated in the National Quaker Call for Action. Ministry and Counsel reinstated a practice of reading queries at the rise of meeting for worship. Our library enriches and informs our spiritual lives. We have supported members of our meeting community facing illness and other challenges both spiritually and in material ways. All these interactions deepen our relationships and strengthen our community.

We continue to name a concern to sustainably maintain our meeting community without unduly burdening our members and attenders. We have asked our Nominating Committee and our working committees to consider where we might pare positions and simplify committee responsibilities to lighten the load of those who serve our meeting community. As part of this process, Elkhart River Worship Group, at SBFM's request, engaged in a period of discernment and then asked to be released from our care to the care of ILYM's Ministry and Advancement. SBFM approved this request. We appreciate the rich relationship we have enjoyed for ten years and look forward to continued intervisitation between ERWG and SBFM.

Our meeting recognizes that conflict is a part of being in community, and our meeting, like all meetings, needs a procedure for promptly addressing conflict and harassment. To nurture our beloved community, we adopted procedures that will enable us to transform conflict or address harassment when it arises. As part of this process, SBFM affirmed that we will interact with integrity, tenderness, and respect for each other, for our community, and for Quaker processes. It is our hope and prayer that, by using the procedures we developed to address harassment and transform conflicts when they arise, we will continue to strengthen both Light and love in our community.

As SBFM discerned and eventually agreed to the request to increase our financial support for ILYM, we recognized a need for spiritual support for our monthly meeting that is not being met in our current yearly meeting relationship. We have almost no contact with other members of yearly meeting. The ILYM facilities are not perceived as accessible or welcoming to many of us for reasons of distance or layout. A significant portion of the support we provide to ILYM maintains a campus that is a barrier to our meeting's broader participation in ILYM. We are in dialogue about these concerns with Ministry and Advancement.

We are grateful for the Light and love that move among us whenever we gather in community.

## **Southern Illinois Quaker Meeting**

Southern Illinois Quaker Meeting endured the challenges of the pandemic, then a move back to the Gaia House Interfaith Center, then the passing of three of our beloved Friends in the span of eight months; nevertheless, we persist. A dedicated core continues to hold weekly Meeting for Worship and welcomes occasional newcomers, ever hoping to increase the Peace and enjoy more breadth and depth of our awareness of the Divine. Our second hour has become informal except for small monthly potlucks and monthly worship with attention to business, while we continue to hold at least six Life of the Meeting gatherings in homes each year, welcoming Friends, family, and the Quaker-adjacent, in appreciation of togetherness. We enjoyed a visit from the ILYM Field Secretary Brad Laird along with Ministry & Advancement clerk Janice Domanik, which strengthened our connection with the yearly meeting.

In a university town, most changes in meeting participation are due to the comings and goings of students, educators and researchers, not to mention the relentless growing-up of our children. The meeting had not lost an active Friend to death in some 25 years, so it has been earth-shaking to lose Maurine Pyle in May, Gary Marx in December, and Stone (Joseph) Parr in January. In fact we continue to process their passing and remember their presence.

Despite a shoestring budget, we raised considerable funds to aid an Afghan family in hiding, but the project failed when all avenues for emigrating appeared closed. We await Guidance for alternative ways to provide our support amid the Afghan refugee crisis. Closer to home, a Friend's leading resulted in our arranging a speaker series by former member and Carbondale resident Michael Batinski, whose book *Forgetting and the Forgotten* speaks to the neglected story of indigenous and Black inhabitants of

Jackson County Illinois over the centuries. The series was very successful, engaged full local participation, and resulted in two recordings about Michael's research that are linked on our website.

Having gone many years with no children attending, young Russell has brought a happy Light. Among her many gifts, Maurine inspired us to enjoy singing, and we arranged and performed *How Can I Keep From Singing* at her memorial meeting, later recorded at YouTube. You can find the link on our website, [www.siquaker.org](http://www.siquaker.org). Her spirit and good humor continue to echo.

## **St Louis Monthly Meeting**

Our meeting has a sense of being “gathered” and being “in communion” in our First Day meetings, and that we have recovered from the loss of personal contact sensed during the pandemic year. One member expressed it as feeling “uplifted and joyful to be part of the meeting's spiritual community.” The vitality of the meeting is back. Many joys were expressed, including the work done by the First Day School teachers and the older young Friends who help out. Adult Religious Education, Quaker Reading groups, and Spiritual Direction groups have provided an opportunity to get deeper into personal development. The work with various committees is also picking up as well as outreach, including community work with the Project Lakota-Ville, Friends' (Winter) Shelter, and new Advancement Committee projects.

As far as challenges, we continue to work on helping and supporting people who may have stopped coming to meeting or who feel that their needs are not being met. Given the COVID disruptions, we are trying to return to traditional ways of the Ministry and Caring reaching out to Friends and encouraging all Friends to reach out to each other when someone suffers a loss or is in crisis. Appreciation was expressed for those Friends who do reach out. A few have expressed the sense that they are being pushed away or are no longer welcome. In some cases it has been a sense of not feeling safe in meeting and in others due to being elided about their behavior in meeting. This is an ongoing issue and part of a discussion about the pastoral care duties of the meeting as a whole and Ministry and Caring as a committee. Friends discussed how we want to show individuals who feel in conflict that they are valued as members even though they may not get the resolution that they want.

We continue to meet in person and via Zoom, which allows those with transportation or health issues to attend. We commented on how Friends have changed in their attitude towards technology over the years and how we have managed to incorporate different modes to communicate with each other individually and as a community. Tasks that have been set for the future are how to educate new attenders about our faith and practice, as well as how to encourage long term attenders to become members. We also are looking for better ways to inform everyone about the different meeting committees and the work they are doing. A Listening Campaign has been proposed to help find a focus for the Peace, Justice and Community Concerns Committee. All of this speaks to community building and working on sensing what it means to be a Quaker.

## **Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting**

The last year has brought us closer together as many Friends have returned to the meetinghouse to worship in person indoors. Ministry during worship has gradually increased and we have grown together through worship-sharing and our traditional Quaker Q&As. Some are newly eager to socialize.

We have united to provide spiritual and practical support to members who have suffered from serious illnesses. The invaluable contributions of two long-time meeting members have been joyously affirmed in their Celebrations of Life. We have also welcomed new energy from a vibrant youth education program and from regular visitors that include young families and graduate students.

We strive to improve our technology at hybrid Meetings for Worship and Business with a goal that everyone can hear both in the meetinghouse and on Zoom. We are learning to keep our introductions and announcements brief and audible as we sometimes have 18-20 folks in the meetinghouse and several on zoom. The Ad Hoc committee on Reopening the Meetinghouse continues to make adjustments to our protocols to reflect current conditions and comfort levels.

We have embraced a rich menu of adult education offerings. We explored, on Zoom, how to encourage others to fight climate change, inspired by an online talk by Katharine Hayhoe at Faith in Place's Green Team Summit. Many participated in two post-Meeting for Worship Quaker Q&As and a worship-sharing session focused on the January Query: "What is your experience of the divine or the spirit in your life?" Fueled by a *Friends Journal* article, "Confronting the Legacy of Quaker Slavery," we strove to discern our own responsibilities for that legacy. We have discovered that providing separate in-person and on Zoom discussion sessions promotes lively conversation and deep sharing.

We newly relish socializing in person after a long hiatus: first at a July evening potluck and an October picnic after Meeting for Worship, both intergenerational—with croquet. In addition, we joyously resumed our annual holiday celebration; this began with a concert where young Friends performed a cello trio, a clarinet solo and a song solo, and an interpretive dance. Afterwards everyone delighted in holiday cookies and animated conversation with friends we had been missing. In April, the Stone Soup Supper will have a new format: an afternoon picnic followed by an indoor talent show. Finally, we were happy to host the Continuing Committee for ILYM. It gave local Friends who attended or helped the opportunity to engage with Quakers from other meetings.

The fall theme for the First Day School, meeting twice a month, was social justice movements. The first (hybrid) meeting provided a lesson on the movement; during the second (in person) session, the children actively participated. Memorably, a film on the struggle for disability rights was followed by a session where each child experienced firsthand the inaccessibility of our meetinghouse by using a wheelchair to maneuver through the front door. Subsequently Building and Grounds met to determine how to make our meetinghouse more accessible. More recently, children had a lesson on protest songs and then jointly composed their own, which they performed together with zest after worship with everyone joining in for the chorus. One of our teen members serves as an adored babysitter for the younger kids and another teen has stepped up to become an assistant convener of the Peace and Service Committee.

After years of talking about such a visit, our clerk and the co-convener of the Ministry and Care Committee visited the Springfield Worship Group in August for their hybrid Worship and Business Meeting; other U-C Friends attended on Zoom. There was easy rapport among the worship group members and the attenders from our meeting. They let us know that they are grateful for our care and are content to remain a worship group. Subsequently a member of their worship group joined us for a Meeting for Worship.

We continue to improve our beautiful grounds where, when weather permits, we appreciate worshipping together. Young Friends enjoy lessons, games, and running around outdoors. We have received a grant through Faith in Place which will pay for acquiring and planting native shrubs and trees. We consulted a professional landscaper who provided ecologically friendly designs.