

2025 State of Society Reports Monthly Meetings of Illinois Yearly Meeting

Bloomington-Normal Monthly Meeting

Being together in worship and community is a source of joy and hope. We are holding each other up when we are downcast, frustrated and angry about decisions on the national political scene that hurt people we care about. Attenders and members who have been inactive for a time have been returning to participation in worship, where we seek support from each other and the Spirit.

Our worship space at Normandy Village in Normal is peaceful. For years, we have used queries from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to add focus to our worship once per month. This past year, we have noticed an increase in vocal ministry, which has been a blessing and a benefit to us.

We formed an Advocacy Team with the help of Friends Committee on National Legislation and made the Apartheid-Free Communities Pledge, responding to leadings among our members to make a long-term commitment to freeing Palestinians in Gaza from violence and deprivation. We shared our meeting space to host training for the Advocacy Team, which includes allies from other local faith communities.

Children coming to First Day School bring joy and hope in our Friends community. Their idealism and concern for others has guided our meeting in where to direct charitable donations. The adults and children together are learning more about the history of Friends in the United States through the past year's lessons at B-N Friends meetings. We have been coordinating our First Day School around the schedule of educational activities at the local Unitarian Universalist Church, allowing for more consistent support of the growth of our youth.

Our Women's Meeting for Eating continues as a social gathering of Friends from Bloomington-Normal, Clear Creek and Urbana-Champaign meetings. Our multigenerational group has been refreshed this year with a new generation of adult young Friends.

One area of spiritual growth that we have neglected over the past year is adult religious education. We miss the leadership of our past adult RE coordinator, who moved out of the area. In the upcoming year, we may not be able to return to holding a regular monthly adult RE hour, but there is interest in doing it more often.

Burlington Worship Group

The Burlington Worship Group is primarily the same seven people. We have various abilities to participate every Sunday, but we do usually gather and worship. We always seem to feel our time together goes quickly.

Usually, we visit after worship. Sometimes we share insights that come during worship. We find participating in worshipping with this group is meaningful and valuable.

We are grateful for the spiritually safe space that worship provides for us individually and as a group. We look forward to having the Field Secretary visit in March. The Field Secretary visit always seems to help us regather our group and ourselves.

Clear Creek Monthly Meeting

Clear Creek Friends maintain deep spiritual connections to each other and to this place. Our stewardship of the Illinois Yearly Meeting grounds extends back 150 years and we hope will continue well into the future. We are a small, loving community who supports its members and attenders in countless ways.

The coming of spring sees us having our traditional Easter worship and potluck. In 2024 we had no children present so there was no Easter egg hunt, but we enjoyed a wonderful meal and fellowship after worship.

Clear Creek Friends are an aging group but continue to do what we can to care for the grounds, participating in work days, site prep, planting flowers and picking up the ever-present collection of sticks and branches that fall from the many trees. Storms damaged even more trees this year but we were thankful no damage was done to either the meetinghouse or Clear Creek House. One of our attenders repaired the split rail fence panels around the meetinghouse this spring. We are glad that the yearly meeting has engaged the services of Shirley Maubach as caretaker, relieving us of the need to meet contractors and check the buildings and grounds regularly.

We have had some changes at Clear Creek this year. Kay Drake, our treasurer for more than 30 years, handed over those duties to Mike Murphy in April. We are thankful for Kay's faithful service and for Mike's willingness to step into the position. We have had several visitors in worship this year, one of whom has become a regular attender. We are thankful for her presence among us and for the depth she brings to our worship and our fellowship.

We continue to use a memorial fund designated for that purpose to support our students pursuing college or trade school education. This summer one of our adult young Friends attended a Bolivian Quaker Education Fund program in Bolivia. We also continue to donate to local charities and Quaker organizations, including a special donation to World Central Kitchen for relief in Gaza in support of the efforts of the ILYM High School Friends.

In March we hosted a retreat, "An Introduction to Quaker Meditation," led by Co-Field Secretary Marcia Nelson. The retreat was an effort to reach out to our surrounding community to let them know we are here and to give them a glimpse of what Quakers have to offer. We welcomed three seekers from the community and had several others indicate they were interested but could not attend. The day was enriching not only for our guests but for Clear Creek Friends as well. Time will tell if we will see any increase in participation because of our efforts at outreach.

It is always a joy for us to welcome the ILYM community to campus for work days, site prep, annual sessions, and this past fall for Continuing Committee. The spiritual energy brought by larger gatherings of Friends is a boost to our spirits. Visitors are a blessing to us.

Columbia Friends Meeting

This has been a year of strengthening our meeting and preparation for uncertain times to come. Some of these preparations were physical—we decided to replace crumbling siding on our meetinghouse, enlarge our parking area, and install solar panels, and our front-yard garden bloomed with life. We also increased our visibility by printing kid-designed t-shirts that help us represent our values in the community. Some of our preparations were emotional and spiritual. Many of our attenders were active in national and state-level elections in November, and have some apprehension about what the next few years will bring, but we are determined to stand with people around the world in opposition to violence and hatred, as Quakers have done for centuries. We continue to offer hybrid meetings on Sundays, welcoming friends from afar (Seattle, WA, Jefferson City, MO, Colorado, Kansas, and Michigan). We have had visitors from other meetings, including Steve Tamari, from St. Louis Friends Meeting, who presented about his work opposing genocide in Palestine. We continue to have Midweek

meetings on Zoom on Wednesdays. Our meetingroom is full most First Days, with twenty or more people and messages frequently shared. We also had several people attend the Blue River Quarterly Meeting in the fall, and it was great to reconnect with other Quakers in the region.

Our First Day School attendance varied, with two to six children attending (ages 2-12). Kids designed a Quaker t-shirt, helped with the garden, and visited a Catholic Church to learn more about other religious traditions. We have a rotation of adults regularly teaching in First Day School. We face a challenge in coming years to meet the needs of younger kids as well as our teens and tweens who are often busy with sports and other activities. The kids join the worship 5 to 10 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 are all contributing to the life of the meeting.

We revived our monthly vigil, with the focus shifting depending on current events. Attender Julia Tayon occasionally organizes a “museletter,” which offers us the opportunity to get to know each other by answering various prompts or questions. We continue to partner with a local Buddhist organization, Show Me Dharma, to provide meals to unhoused people six times per year. Additionally, we have had several Fun Nights, with potluck suppers, movie nights, and games.

We were fortunate not to have deaths among our regular attenders this year. Our longtime attender Carolyn Doll shared openly her process of moving toward death in her mid-nineties. We look forward to the new year with hope to build stronger connections with each other and trust in our expanding community.

Downers Grove Friends Meeting

Instead of abandoning the aging DGFM Christmas cactus, trimming dead roots and repotting led to its rejuvenation. Similarly, we have come to realize over this past year that our meeting also required attention to enhance its health and vitality. Our membership is aging with a diminishment of energy directed toward efforts to grow the meeting, committee involvement, and the maintenance and upkeep of the building and grounds. To that end, over the last several months we have held three separate discussions with Friends focused on ‘the Future of the Meeting. We made a special effort to invite new and younger attendees to breathe new life into the process as they provided their perspectives and ideas.

One of the major concerns we wanted to address was the decline in meeting attendance. Coincidentally, first-time young adults began attending both in person and online at the same time these discussions took place. The renewed vigor newer attenders have brought to the meeting is noticeable in their active roles in the community, efficiency, and organization in our meetinghouse kitchen, a call to reinstate our First Day program, and an expressed interest in serving when various opportunities were listed. The Spirit is moving among us.

We have yet to discern one way that we can all meet together every Sunday; some Friends are only willing to meet in-person because they believe technology is inappropriate in a Quaker meeting, while others want more inclusivity and feel that can be achieved using technology. This year our online presence has become even more central to our meeting. Our online monthly Fellowship Group draws many Friends who are blessed to have a time of sharing followed by a discussion of a Quaker theme; Meeting for Business still draws more participation on Zoom than it did in-person. For many Friends, our hybrid Fourth First Day provides the deepest feeling of community in both worship and the fellowship and food of Potluck. Thursday evening Meeting for Worship and Monday afternoon Aging & Saging continue to meet in person in the Meetinghouse.

An opportunity for growth is outreach to our local community. We have made some strides in this area. We fly a flag next to the street-side DGFM sign that says we welcome all to our meeting. On MLK Day we piloted a children’s program open to the community which used the talents of eager First

Day School teachers. We hope to hold other events to be attended by both our meeting and the local community. One member initiated the creation of a labyrinth on the DGFM grounds. We also reached out to the wider community by writing a minute urging a cease-fire in the war on Gaza and support for humanitarian aid for all those suffering. This minute was hand delivered to our two senators' offices in Chicago. A few months later, we signed on to the Apartheid-free Pledge in support of Palestinians' suffering. A representative from DuPage United worshipped with us, then gave a presentation after potluck.

We reinstated collecting financial contributions at our once-a-month potlucks; we had not done this since COVID began. We now collect money for a specific group consistent with our beliefs for three months at a time. We also collected warm coats for immigrants and mittens/gloves, hats and scarves for the needy.

An aging membership impacts DGFM's ability to maintain the building and grounds, so stewardship of these things was the focus of one of our discussions. The membership resoundingly want to keep our building and grounds and gave voice to numerous ways to maintain both.

The Christmas cactus is not as big and gangly as it used to be, but it did live up to its name and was in full bloom in December. It continues to thrive and Friends are able to take cuttings to begin growing plants in their own homes. At the same time Friends began the new year not only overflowing with ideas to grow the meeting but also reaffirming their commitment to keeping the building and grounds as our place to grow in our faith in God. The spirit is indeed working among us.

Duneland Friends Meeting

2024 was a good year for Duneland Friends Meeting. We continue to be a small meeting, growing in appreciation and love toward each other. We meet twice a month in person and virtually for worship on Sunday and again for fellowship, study, and worship with a different emphasis each Wednesday.

Due to the unusually contentious and hostile political developments of the past year, many members were concerned about the direction we were headed as a nation. Our meeting provides an opportunity to discuss those concerns while holding them in light of our values and beliefs. We continue to lovingly worship together in the midst of our spiritual and religious diversity. Members shared the spiritual wisdom they received during silence, which was very helpful.

Like many Quaker meetings, our membership is composed mainly of seniors, but we are young at heart and committed to reaching out to younger seekers. We want to be ready and welcoming when children return to be part of our community.

Some Friends have experienced serious health issues this past year, and we have supported and held in the Light those who have experienced health setbacks. Those who confronted health challenges expressed how the love and spiritual support from other Friends helped them cope.

Duneland Friends live far apart, and congregating in person can be challenging. We may have relied too much on conducting our meetings for worship with a concern for business virtually which, although a great resource, lacks the benefit of worshipping in the same room and seeking Divine guidance together.

Working towards peace and alleviating human suffering is part of what Quakers are called to do consistent with our testimonies and vision of that of God in everyone. A concern has been raised that as a meeting we could do more to seek engagement with the national and international issues of our day. We have not collectively engaged in a significant way in dealing with these complex issues, although many Friends have done so individually.

Most of the financial contributions to the meeting are dedicated to supporting Quaker organizations and various humanitarian causes including those in the Valparaiso community. We have a

carbon tax fund that supports different projects to abate the ecological damage humanity is inflicting on our home, the Earth.

In all, we praise and give thanks to the Light. In 2025, we hope to further our spiritual growth both individually and as a meeting, and caring for the people and planet in the years to come.

Elkhart River Preparative Meeting

We are a small worship group with a core of frequent attenders and others who come sometimes and others who have expressed interest in coming. While our complex lives can make it difficult to make it to worship as regularly and fully as we might prefer, the space of worship and support around us consistently provided nourishment, opening, and guidance.

We feel deeply humbled and grateful for the sacred gift of meeting—where hearts gather, and Spirit breathes among us. While we may spend our lives seeking Spirit outwardly, it is through the tender inward journey that we have come to rest in both the light and the shadow. It is within the deepest darkness that we have been most held—where Spirit, with unfathomable patience, has waited...not to be found, but to be remembered.

Our meeting is supported by Illinois Yearly Meeting, the Ministry and Advancement Committee, and Faith Mennonite Church, which graciously provides the space where we gather.

Our children are on our hearts a lot, and we work to nurture them and their spiritual formation. We support each other as parents. We do not have everything we would like for the children and First Day School, but we attend to these our children as if each were our own, because they are all our children.

There, in the quiet ache of shadow, we came to know that even our wounds were sacred. Triggers become gentle messengers, inviting us to return to the altar within. The path to balance is not through denial of the ebb and flow, but through loving discernment. We do not always live up to our best intentions—but there is grace in each fall into difficulty, each hurt each straying from the path, and always the promise of return.

As the seasons shift and life moves through its sacred cycles, meeting—this space of communion—remains constant. A sanctuary. Alive with Spirit, it welcomes us just as we are, again and again. Whether we arrive in stillness or in storm, Spirit meets us with open arms, embracing us with a love that asks nothing and offers everything. The beauty of the return is not in having never left, but in finding that Spirit, and the soul of this beloved community, has been patiently holding space all along—silent, radiant, and ready to receive us.

Evanston Monthly Meeting of Friends

How is the Life of the Spirit faring in Evanston Meeting? Individuals would vary in how they would answer this query. The quality of our Sunday worship changes from one week to the next. Often there are fewer people on the benches at 10:00 a.m. compared to 10:15 a.m., with the late arrival of attendees bothering some people more than others. A truly "gathered" meeting is unusual, but in all meetings for worship we seek to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit both individually and as a community. Usually there is some spoken ministry during our Sunday worship, with Friends following various journeys in their efforts to grow spiritually.

A number of years ago, Evanston Meeting made a conscious effort to try to increase the number of children in attendance. A financial commitment was included in the annual budget, and an experienced children's teacher was hired. This investment has brought many families and abundant joy to our community. Over 20 children are currently registered, and a typical Sunday has around 8-12

children in attendance. We are fortunate to have a dedicated Head of First Day School, and several members volunteer to help teach the classes. Although a few children worship for the initial 15 minutes in the main room on the upper floor, most sit on the lower floor with their parents to have quiet time together, share their joys and sorrows, and do a bit of yoga before dispersing to three different classrooms for First Day School. The membership of Evanston Meeting has not changed much in the past few years.

We typically have between four and eight Friends who join us via Zoom with around 30 people in attendance at the meetinghouse. In the last year we have had no marriages, no births and no new members officially joining The Society of Friends. Evanston Meeting has many attenders who have been with us for several years, and we are exploring various ways to encourage them to seek formal membership. Ministry & Worship is also reaching out to inactive members to learn if they wish to continue their membership.

We held memorial services for our member, Steve Durham, who died in December and also for long time attender, Tom Jager, who passed away in January. We anticipate providing memorial services for Dianne Atkinson and Phyllis Reynolds who died just days before this report is being submitted.

Many members of Evanston Meeting connect with the wider Quaker world. Over a dozen people from Evanston attend Illinois Yearly Meeting held in June in McNabb, Illinois. Individuals are actively involved with American Friends Service Committee, Friends General Conference, Friends World Committee for Consultation, and Friends Committee on National Legislation. Our service goes beyond the Quaker world with members involved in Interfaith Action of Evanston and numerous other local charities. A member of our meeting is the longtime head of Chicago Friends School, which teaches Quaker values to children in the Chicago area.

Evanston Meeting seeks to bear testimony against oppression, war, and acts of cruelty. A significant form of witness by our meeting for the past couple of years has been to provide hospitality to migrant families. Other Quaker meetings and individuals have helped in numerous ways including with financial expenses. The meeting struggled to come to unity before coming to a response to the crisis in Gaza in the last year. Our faith community is a source of comfort, friendship, and inspiration for each of us as we seek to grow in both spiritual understanding and our ability to lessen human suffering.

Fifty Seventh Street Meeting of Friends

57th Street Meeting remains small but strong. Friends speak of a sense of joy and welcoming, a growing sense of trust and belonging; the dynamics are much less fraught than in the past.

While we acknowledge our responsibility to respond to needs and dynamics in the larger community and world, as a meeting we are growing more spiritually-centered, rather than action-oriented, realizing that this gathered centeredness is the work of the meeting, and that it is in prayerful silence and corporate worship that the seeds of insight grow into leadings and action.

As a meeting in a university community setting, we have many visitors, often young, often new to Quakerism, looking for guidance or models of how to behave, especially in difficult and challenging times. Some may come for what they perceive as politics, but stay for the deepening. Some join us in silence and at close of meeting, share some grief or pain, having found in the shared silence something of comfort and peace, something that allows them to feel safe. Some, led and inspired by the Quakers' history of activism, come to learn more about Quaker practices, and find, meeting gathered in silence, that "this is what we do"—our meeting is seeking to find and nourish "that of God in everyone," to nurture the deep seeking, centeredness and community that guide, inform, and sustain right action in the world.

We are challenged by our small—though growing—cadre of seasoned and active Friends and attenders able to serve in formal roles, but even as we struggle to maintain our administrative structure—the scaffolding that holds the meeting together and allows deepening worship, fellowship, community, and outward action—we find comfort in our sense of community, mutual care, and belonging, and we welcome with joy an increasing sense of fellowship and participation as our meeting grows.

Fox Valley Friends Meeting

We are a small meeting with regular involvement at Meeting for Worship of 6-9 people, mostly members, at Pioneer Farm in McHenry. Judy Gottlieb is our capable clerk. We are always glad to see Chuck Howenstine, who greets everyone and keeps the physical plant going, along with his venerable Dad, Bill. We gratefully welcome new members and attenders, Kunaka Pearl Ratunil and husband, Jeff/Achala; Marypatrice Wendt (Mp); Thomas Chesser; and occasionally others.

Our meetings are often quiet, but what gems of sharing arise, are sustaining. We endeavor to maintain contact with those who have moved away or who cannot easily make it to meeting. Our social action is individual (recycling, community gardening, etc.) rather than corporate, but we often see each other at local, peaceful demonstrations for democracy. Our non-resident member, Mark McGinnis, who is ILYM Co-Field Secretary, faithfully attends our Meetings for Worship for Business and keeps us updated on ILYM matters. On First Days, a sign is posted out front welcoming all.

Lake Forest Friends Meeting

Lake Forest Friends Meeting is a lively place and a delight to our senses. As we enter the meetinghouse on Sunday morning, we will be greeted with a friendly smile, handshake or hug and are likely to hear the joyful sounds of our children and/or music. Flavorful smells from the kitchen may tantalize our tastebuds. As we join others in worship, we may be greeted by a crackling fire or the chirping of birds outside. If we are lucky, we will see birds, small critters or even deer as we worship together.

Meeting for Worship on Sunday is the heart of our community as we meet each First Day to celebrate our lives together and our thankfulness for what the earth has to offer us. Vocal ministry varies, and sometimes we enjoy complete quiet during our hour together. Our meeting closes with introductions, the sharing of joys and sorrows, and announcements. Visitors are asked to introduce themselves and say a little about themselves as they wish. We have had several newcomers, some of whom have become regular attenders, adding their spark to the meeting. We also grieve the deaths of three of our members: Aileen Tyson, Paulette Leonard, and founding member Emma Cadbury.

LFFM continues to be concerned about the many social and earth injustices in our world today. Such issues are addressed by our youngest Friends in their First Day school classes and by our meeting as a whole. The Peace and Social Action Committee provides leadership to act on these problems. We continue to provide lunch monthly for a homeless shelter, collect provisions for a refugee family, and do a yearly bedding drive for those in need. We often support other organizations with their endeavors, and several Friends have been felt led to participate in social actions in their local communities. Recently, two Friends shared their talents and provided entertainment events, one to raise money for scholarships for needy Lake County college students and another to raise funds for a shelter for homeless women. In an effort to learn how to better work across the political and other divisions that seem so prominent in this time, we asked FCNL to hold their workshop entitled “F/friends in Unlikely Places.” All of these events were open to the community and were well attended.

Potluck Sunday has evolved into Sharing Sunday, with the expectation that we not only share our culinary delights with each other but support the physical needs of our community. Two baskets are ever present in the foyer, one labeled “The Haven” and another “Refugees.”

And we do take time for fun at LFFM. The Christmas pageant is always a spectacular event, with Friends of all ages participating. An Easter egg hunt, a barbecue and a Halloween party bring Friends of all ages together. Monthly game night, monthly Music and Muffins, a Saturday night reading and discussion group, and an occasional old-fashioned hootenanny offer more opportunities for us all to enjoy each other’s company.

Our First Day School is small but mighty. Our young Friends grapple with issues that affect our environment and the world around them. This year they have learned about several historical figures who made major contributions in alleviating social injustices in our world. Their discussions are lively, and often we adults learn more from them than they learn from us.

LFFM is a thriving community. I think we all look forward to another year of sharing, fun and learning.

Northside Friends Meeting

Northside Friends (NFM) relocated last year to sublet space in a 100-year old church located in Chicago’s Edgewater neighborhood. We worship in a room filled with natural light; our windows open onto a residential street. We have grown into our new home which we share with Chicago Friends School (CFS).

Our current location better supports families: After a pandemic dry spell, parents and their children are returning to on-site worship. Two Northside families have been blessed this year with the arrival of babies.

Along with the joys of joining together with CFS we are responding to persistent issues. Sometimes, other users’ events preempt access to our worship space. Meeting does not hold a lease with the landlord; there are no formal methods to contact and interact with him. In April 2025, NFM learned that the building owner intends to end all existing leases which requires us to vacate no later than summer 2026. We are unsure whether we will be able to move together with CFS to their new—aalso undetermined—home.

Meeting for Business (MfB) has offered a mirror of the easiest and grittiest of Northside. MfB has become more transparent and is marked by a willingness to communicate. However, they can also be messy. In these deep conversations, we create a space where we can have healthy conflicts. A three- or four- hour MfB is not unusual.

Nevertheless, our hybrid Meeting for Worship continues to attract new members and attenders as we welcome weekly attendance of up to fifty people, nine of whom attend online. One Northsider observes: “I’ve been a Quaker for ten years. As a new-to-Northside Friend, I’ve learned more about our faith practice in the last 18 months than I had all that time.”

We have made significant technological adjustments to improve the sound quality for online attenders. When we first arrived at CFS, the online sound clarity was muddled. Technology committee tried multiple configurations and found a workable solution. After benefiting from a university listserv for many years, Technology Committee also moved to a new provider.

Our committees continue to flourish. Adult Spiritual Formation provides newcomers and seasoned members opportunities to reflect and grow. Ministry of Mutual Care assists our meeting in formal and informal ways. Ministry on Racism’s (MoR) work attracts attendees to Northside. Ministry of Worship provides many opportunities to learn about and season Quaker faith and practice, including Quaker 101. House Committee stepped up to manage our new space by hiring a Northside Friend who prepares and takes down meeting’s space every week.

Northsiders thank Friend Wil Rutt for his decades-long servant leadership as Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) representative, a role from which he recently stepped down.

Following Rise of Meeting, Friends are invited to eat brunch together at a cafe down the street. To encourage inclusivity, meeting anonymously covers meal costs, if needed, so that financial obstacles prevent no one from attending.

After several cautious pandemic years, we revived our annual picnic with a well-attended July trip to Edgewater beach.

Northside is responding to wider world events. Northside provided a donation for Hurricane Helene disaster relief. We advocated that the State of Illinois divest from Israel Bonds. Several attenders responded to the genocide in Gaza by participating in Palestinian coalition actions in Chicago. For many months Friends labored over joining the Apartheid-free Communities Coalition convened by the American Friends Service Committee. Although MoR was able to join the coalition as a signatory, NFM has not reached unity on the issue and we continue to season it. Northside whole-heartedly endorsed the Quaker Vision for Peace pledge. Tensions around how to live out our endorsement of this Vision over Palestine/Israel continue.

Our thriving condition might be best expressed by a long-time Northsider who observes: "... our strengths express in free-form, spirit-driven ways of managing spiritual affairs. Our understanding of abundance vs scarcity underpins everything. Inclusivity is core—it's like a live wire—it's natural, intuitive fellowship. Communal spirit informs Meeting for Worship, committee work, social gatherings. It encourages growth and nourishes spiritual energy and purpose. It's an exciting thing to witness."

Oak Park Friends Meeting

Oak Park Friends Meeting is content and stable. In going through ILYM queries we have arrived at areas of strength and areas that need improvement.

We are content with the quality of our meetings; often we feel our meetings are gathered in worship. We have a good balance of silent worship and of spoken, spirit-led ministry. We feel a lot of love and fellowship towards one another. Our membership is mostly stable and we have also had visitors.

We have two excellent co-clerks who have fortunately agreed to serve for another two-year term. We also have an excellent treasurer who has served well and faithfully for many years, and a skillful and experienced recording clerk who for several years has also served well and faithfully. Our connections with the wider Quaker world include participation in ILYM and with the two Field Secretaries, and we also have relationships with the Care Children's Academy (a Quaker school) in Uganda and with Scattergood Friends School. With the stewardship of our Peace, Justice & Environment Committee, we donate to various Quaker organizations.

Our connections have grown through a number of continuing events and activities this year. We have an ongoing spiritual group that meets 2-3 times a month. After several years of inactivity due mostly to COVID, we have resurrected our Adult Religious Education (ARE) Committee. Our weekly newsletter keeps friends and visitors abreast of monthly and yearly meeting activities, as well as of events in the wider world. Recently we started having a lunch once a month at a local restaurant, giving us an opportunity to meet in a more informal group.

We felt sad about the death of our long-time member, Helen Dickinson. We hosted a traditional Memorial Meeting, which was well attended and was a very beautiful celebration of her extraordinary life.

Of course, there are areas of our meeting life we would like to improve. Although we have deeply moving vocal ministry, we may want to explore opening to more personal sharing of experiences and their ensuing insights. Perhaps an ARE program could help with queries or resources.

Although we have a steady stream of visitors, we feel that we need a plan for talking to newcomers, and for moving from visitor to attender and from attender to member. We may attract more visitors if we increase our visibility.

We have a high level of love and fellowship with one another, but occasionally there are conflicts. We are working at handling them better. All in all, the state of our monthly meeting is healthy.

South Bend Friends Meeting

South Bend Friends has been focused on developing relationships within the meeting and with the wider community. With the restart of both monthly potlucks and snacks and beverages at the rise of meeting, Friends linger and connect, strengthening a sense of community. We read *Hope and Witness in Dangerous Times* by J. P. Brent Bill and *Spiritual Gifts, the Beloved Community, and Covenant*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 461 by Emily Provance.

As fewer Friends are led to committee service, individual Friends have stepped forward to volunteer for the work of the meeting, assisting with snacks at the rise of meeting, being with children in First Day School so that parents can also participate in Meeting for Worship, and opening/closing the building. The life and work of the meeting has also become more organic and cooperative by holding less tightly to committee structure. Two committees are using the model of sharing the role of clerk among all committee members.

Children's Religious Education continues to be an active part of the life of the meeting. While our First-Day-School class for teens has phased out this year as older Young Friends have chosen to attend Meeting for Worship for the full hour or assist with the younger class, our class for nursery-school-age Young Friends has grown in activity and participation, combining Friendly play with learning about Divine love and Friends' testimonies.

The first of two worship sharing events explored the roles of Clerk of Monthly Meeting and the role of a clerk in general. This second hour came out of a two year discernment process between the Nominating Committee and Ministry & Council. The other event was a time to share concerns and grief over election results.

Many of us expressed deep concern regarding President Trump's executive order that churches are not sanctuaries during a monthly potluck. That conversation led to a second hour during the next potluck where we met with other concerned community partners (United Religious Community of St. Joseph County, La Casa de Amistad, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, and First Presbyterian Church) to hear what our undocumented neighbors need.

Meeting has been discerning its role in relationship with community organizations, rejuvenating our relationship with the United Religious Community of St. Joseph County, a multi-faith group also focused on helping refugees resettle in our community. We continue to discern our relationship with We Make Indiana, a local multi-racial, multi-faith movement working with local public officials on policy changes to ensure all can thrive. We also partnered with First Presbyterian Church on one of its Matthew 25 projects, Guns to Gardens, providing a safe place to relinquish guns that were turned into sculpture and garden tools. Intergenerational craft and music activities invited celebration and connections.

We have been closely following the activities of other Quaker communities, especially the lawsuits that have been filed in opposition to executive orders that attempt to forbid the use of houses of worship as sanctuary spaces. Most importantly, we continue to create space to be open with each other, to listen and strengthen relationship bonds with each other and the wider world.

Southern Illinois Quaker Meeting

Our small meeting continues to gather at Gaia House, a space we rent for Sunday mornings. Gaia House began as a Christian campus ministry and has continued as a multifaith center and community meeting space for diverse groups, including several recovery groups, two Buddhist groups, a pagan group, a west African drumming group, a downstate trans support group, among others. Although individuals within our meeting have connections to some of these other groups, our interactions as a meeting with these other groups is only occasional. Nevertheless, sharing this space seems appropriate. Gaia House's mission statement says, "Gaia House Interfaith Center is a welcoming community committed to Spiritual Awareness that integrates Peace, Justice and Ecological Sustainability...." It feels like home to be part of this larger community.

Our Sunday gatherings are small, rarely having more than ten people and, more often, only five or six. We come most Sundays to a gathered silence that can be profound. That silence deepens as we jointly sit in expectant waiting. Vocal ministry is sporadic, with only silence during many of our gatherings. That ministry though, when it does occur, often seems to speak to the unasked questions or inchoate thoughts another in our gathering may have. After silence, we may share the messages and thoughts that came to us but did not quite fully develop to a vocal ministry. These sharings enrich our closeness and our spiritual life as a community.

We continue to share potluck after the first meeting of the month and to Meet for Worship with a Concern for Business on fourth Sundays. Often these concerns are routine but we have also struggled this year to come to unity on a statement on Gaza. We have regularly made modest contributions to support community homeless shelters and some of us have stood together during protests against the radical changes being made in our country. Some of our signs declare "Quakers Will Not Be Silent."

We continue to have occasional potluck "Life of the Meeting" gatherings in homes that include those who gather together for worship, but also those whose schedules may keep them from attending meeting and those who are "Quaker adjacent," spouses and partners of those who attend meeting but who do not attend themselves. This too enriches our closeness as a community.

We go forward together uncertain and troubled about where our nation is headed, but committed to both our own community and to finding ways to reach out to bring our commitment to SPICES—Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship, to make a difference in a wider world.

Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting

In many ways the State of Society of Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting is much the same as it was at this time last year, and that is a good thing. Once again, while we mourn the loss of valued Friends, we joyfully welcome new members and attenders to Meeting for Worship, and our meeting is enriched by their presence and ministry.

As we move on from the pandemic years, our meeting is growing and changing. The many threads that held us and sustained us during those difficult years are now lengthening and strengthening. New formal and informal groups meet regularly, not only in the meetinghouse, but in homes and in public spaces. These groups meet for Bible study, to knit and crochet, to walk in our public parks, and to share meals. These gatherings allow us to not only talk about our lives and get to know each other on a deeper level, but also let us weave together stronger spiritual connections. We feel that we are part of a growing community.

Among the threads that we feel binding us together are both our children and our older members. We enjoy the children's close of meeting reports on First Day School activities and delight in their spiritual development. Although we wish for more young Friends, we hold close the ones we have. For

some of our older members, it is difficult or impossible to come to meeting, yet these Friends are an important part of our spiritual lives and our meeting's history.

The decision to join the Apartheid-Free Communities Campaign was not an easy one, but we are stronger for holding fast to our Quaker decision-making process. During two called business meetings, we listened patiently to each other's concerns and labored to come to a sense of the meeting.

We feel bound together as a meeting as we consider our responsibility for the stewardship of funds that were left to the meeting last year, and we strive to make our meetinghouse and our local and broader communities healthy and thriving places for us all. Among our efforts last year, we installed a geothermal heating and cooling system at the meetinghouse, we donated funds to the Urbana Neighborhood Connections Center for after-school and summer enrichment programs and also donated to the Education Justice Project for a new college-in-prison program at Decatur Correctional Center, a women's prison not far from Champaign-Urbana.

We continue to discern how best to use the funds from the aforementioned bequest. Our original process for making decisions was somewhat divisive, but a new process born out of the dissension is carrying us forward in greater unity in our mission to be of peaceful service to the community. We consider this a Spirit-led development.

We look forward and pray for another year of growth and stronger spiritual connections. As we look around us, in our own community and around the world, we know that there is much more we can do.