

## 2022 State of the Society for Old Chatham Monthly Meeting

(For 2<sup>nd</sup> reading)

As the country moved into a post-pandemic stage, attendance at our meeting largely rebounded, averaging about 25 to 30 attenders in person and by Zoom. As COVID risks rose and fell, our Meeting shifted the type and level of precautions according to the CDC community level (low, medium, high) for Columbia County.

Many attenders chose to mask even when not required, and others frequently chose the Zoom option out of an abundance of caution and for other reasons.

Zoom continued to work well for Friends who need to stay at home either temporarily because of weather conditions, because of distance, or because of health considerations. In fact, as Zoom is left open for a while after the rise of meeting, people on the platform have the opportunity for light-hearted or serious conversation. We can even speak of an Old Chatham “Zoom Community,” which--while a positive development--does divide OCMM into two different groups that don't interact with each other as much as we would like.

Refreshments were not served in the meetinghouse during high or medium COVID levels. However, coffee was always available; and people did have the opportunity to socialize either inside the meeting house or outside on the porch. However, attenders did not stay as long as in pre-COVID days while Zoom participants stayed online longer than we expected.

Of note is our complete redesign of the weekly newsletter in March 2022. Previously formatted in Gmail, the newsletter (*Meeting Update*) is now produced and designed in Mailchimp, which allows for a more attractive, readable format. Sent by email every Thursday, the newsletter includes a calendar of upcoming events, what's going on in our Meeting and also locally (if relevant to Meeting concerns or members), plus news from NYMM and Powell House. With the lack of in-person meetings, it provided a much-needed vehicle for communicating updated information to the whole Meeting.

Of concern to some Friends is the increasing age of our membership. Many of our most active members are in their 70's. Although our membership has held steady during the past several years, if we do not have even better success at attracting new members and attenders, the core active membership of OCMM will have significantly declined in a decade or so. Then again, many of our members believe that we will always have enough “workers in the vineyard.”

There have been financial challenges this past year. Our basement flooded. Sump pumps, exterior gutters and drainage were required to solve the problem. We needed to replace the dishwasher. Fortunately, surplus funds left from previous years and a grant from New York Yearly Meeting, supplemented with generous giving during the year, took care of these unexpected expenses. OCMM members are very reliable in responding to the Meeting's financial needs.

In our post-pandemic world, we have not had much luck at resuming in-person meeting events. Our formerly successful monthly film series, without a potluck and amid a general post-pandemic malaise, recently attracted no participants at all. We have done better at an in-person (and virtual) response to the Urgent Call of Quaker leaders alarmed by threats to American democracy. To answer the call, we held two in-person, well-attended workshops to hone our listening skills and make difficult conversations easier.

If we divide Old Chatham's activities somewhat artificially into social activism and spiritual deepening, the socially active sphere includes our response to the Urgent Call and one member's informative workshop on how to support humanitarian organizations in the Ukraine conflict. Also, we should include our Bacon Fund for Peace and Justice, from which we are granting scholarships to young people who want to attend FCNL's annual lobbying event. Our book club frequently reads books both on socially and spiritually relevant topics, and our Meeting blog also straddles both areas.

In the spiritual realm, we have a vibrant worship sharing group. Despite having failed to start a meeting-wide Faithful Meetings program from Nashville's School of the Spirit, a group of us will soon participate in a smaller, streamlined Faithful Meetings program. Participants expect to learn more about the spiritual paths of fellow Friends. Of course, we are a non-programmed meeting, and our members represent a variety of spiritualities.