

State of the Meeting 2024 (OCMM)

Old Chatham Friends are confident that Spirit is active in our community. In Worship, we feel stirrings in the silence, from which vocal ministry rises with good effect. Spirit has also guided our Meetings for Learning on vocal ministry, Palestine, listening in tongues, and Quakerism 101. Our memorial meetings reach out to grieving family and Friends. We also hold regular meetings of our Healing and Worship group, Women and Aging group, and a newly re-established Worship Sharing group. Our Ministry and Counsel Committee seeks to support Friends who are in crisis of any sort. In addition, Ministry and Counsel—using an online survey and informal conversation—has conducted an extensive evaluation of our hybrid meetings. We concluded that the hybrid option offers an excellent way to connect with members of our spiritual community who cannot attend in person. We have established a Technology Committee to maintain and improve our use of technology for gatherings and communication.

Our monthly potlucks forge spiritual connections between old attenders and new and are frequently attended by families with children. Other potlucks center around social and earth justice as we see films and read books about these topics. We are also looking for ways to support sanctuary for undocumented people, and we are struggling mightily on how to engage the federal government over the genocide that has been occurring in Gaza.

We make a special effort to meet the needs of the larger community by supporting the local food bank and participating in interfaith dialog. This year our Bacon Fund for Peace and Justice made eight grants for a total of \$4,000.00 towards projects as diverse as a documentary related to LGBTQIA+ rights and a Young Peacemakers' Camp sponsored by Albany Friends. Our Finance Committee has been instrumental in maintaining a strong financial basis for the Meeting. Thus, we were able to financially support our committees as well as make an increased covenant contribution to New York Yearly Meeting and a substantial donation to Powell House's capital campaign.

One contributor to our strong financial base is the low-cost maintenance of our meetinghouse, which at 11 years old, still feels new to us. Our visitors notice and we regularly feel the spiritual calm and openness evoked in the timber-framed structure and the surrounding meadow. Still, upkeep is necessary; and our House & Grounds Committee ensures maintenance of the parking area and fields,

enhancement of safety features as identified, and tending to flowerbeds, plantings of bushes, and pruning of trees.

In our spiritual community, we keep Friends informed through the *Meeting Update*, a weekly online newsletter which includes a calendar, articles about upcoming meetings and events, and news from Powell House and New York Yearly Meeting and other Quaker bodies. Our online presence includes a web site, a blog, a Facebook Page, and a new Instagram account. As we examine our email distribution list, we see that we are reaching people outside of our Quaker community. Our Children and Youth Committee uses text messages to keep in touch with parents about upcoming Meeting events.

We are especially encouraged by an influx of newcomers of all ages, seemingly attracted by the diversity and vitality of our Meeting. Our Welcoming Committee and—for adults arriving with children—our Children and Youth Committee make a special effort to recognize newcomers and ensure that they feel appreciated and welcomed. We want to know what brought them to our Meeting and encourage them to return often. Parents especially appreciate being able to count on the programs we offer our children and youth and our paid childcare person.

After the Covid pandemic, we felt spiritually drained and somewhat concerned for our Meeting's vitality. We were particularly saddened by the passing of Bev Thompson, who contributed so much to our community. Now, we feel optimistic as seeds planted in former years begin to bear fruit, and we hear the sounds of babies breaking the silence. We are thankful to Spirit for the opportunity to serve both Friends and people in the larger community. We are humbled that Spirit has lifted us up and brought new energy to our Meeting.