

State of the Meeting Report 2016

“What is the spiritual condition of your meeting?”

As a way of responding to this question, we held a session after Meeting for Worship to ask ourselves “How do we feel when we are in Meeting?”

We treasure the presence of the Spirit in Meeting for Worship. Sitting quietly alone is not the same. We are grateful for and supportive of those gathered as a community. We feel receptive and calm, with a sense of mental clarity. We feel centered and mindful, sometimes emptying our minds, sometimes focusing on a particular thought. Even if it’s hard to center, we feel at home.

We come to Meeting with a hunger and an openness, and we breathe together in the deep silence. We feel the weight of the sacred. Other words that we use to describe our time in Meeting for Worship include: softness, heartbreak, holding, solid, stretching, alive, warmth. For some, prior reading supports the Meeting experience.

We also note challenges. It can be distracting to hear voices in the greeting room, or settle after latecomers. The biggest distraction may be internal—a wandering mind, thoughts that surface, or how the prior week has been. Distractions may be positive—a reminder that life goes on all around us. It can be a challenge not to judge a message, to see only its form and not its substance. Sometimes we need to “let it go” if it doesn’t speak to us.

Vocal messages are encouraged, and we would like to find ways to empower others to speak. As we noted last year, Old Chatham Friends come from a spectrum of spiritual traditions, and references to a range of spiritual beliefs are gratefully received in our worship.

We also asked ourselves, “Where and when do we feel the spirit? What feeds your spirit? Are you getting enough to eat?” In addition to Meeting for Worship, a sense of connection to one another feeds our spirit, and we welcome opportunities to better know each other in deeper conversation and the sharing of our stories and spiritual journey.

A new group on Women and Ageing meets monthly, focusing on many different aspects of this stage of life. Being part of a community of people who are taking care of each other in whatever ways are needed feeds our spirit. Newcomers and visitors add immeasurably to these conversations and connections. We welcomed three new members this year. We also gave a warm farewell to a long-time member who moved to a retirement community.

We learn and celebrate in multiple ways.

As a Meeting we came together to celebrate the loving marriage of a long-time member (the first wedding in our new meetinghouse). We gathered in memory of two lives that have passed.

The spiritual condition of our Meeting benefits and deepens from all our related activities, including weekly worship-sharing, committee work, potlucks, the annual picnic at Powell House, work days, Meetings for Learning, and more.

Those who have served on clearness committees noted how that experience deepened their understanding of the spirit. Outreach, Peace and Justice Committee continues to sponsor monthly films and programs on social justice. It connects us both to national Quaker organizations such as AFSC and FCNL, and to local peace, justice, environmental, and interfaith groups.

The Finance Committee connects us to our shared financial responsibilities and witnesses the great generosity we have experienced. The Welcoming Committee and House & Grounds work hard to keep our home in good order. The Children & Youth Committee keeps our focus on nurturing the younger generation.

Two committees with specific “outward” tasks, the Rayville Burial Ground Committee and the Bob Bacon Fund, extend our connections to the world beyond the meetinghouse. Communications Committee helps to spread the word about all these activities that benefit and deepen our spiritual condition.

Some feel the spirit more in “doing”, rather than “being”. “Making things better”, whether it’s doing the dishes when needed or helping in more complex ways, allows us to feel the spirit.

We noted other places and times that nurture the spirit.

Dance, music, writing, and art inspire us. We want to celebrate each other’s gifts in these areas. Many of us are drawn to nature—observing, walking, just being outside. How can we incorporate these experiences to enhance our spiritual condition?

This year the spirit has led us to focus on several different issues, in special sessions or in Business Meeting.

The Child Protection Committee led two well-attended sessions on how best to protect our children from abuse. We now open Business Meetings with advice and queries, followed by a time for reflection, which helps to center us.

Nominating Committee’s questions about our practices in requiring membership for various positions sparked an ongoing consideration of what membership in the Society of Friends means to each of us. Brooklyn Meeting’s minute on the personnel policy of Friends United Meeting led us to revisit our actions on that topic. Both of these issues—on membership, and on a discriminatory Friends’ policy—required us to listen closely and lovingly to one another even when we differ, to speak from heartfelt convictions, and to continue to seek unity as a spiritual community.

We look forward to the directions the spirit will take us this year!