

State of Old Chatham Monthly Meeting March 2019

Our meeting is thriving. We have a wonderful blend of friends who have been part of meeting for decades and others who have joined us in recent years. We have a number of families with young children. There is deep appreciation for how this meeting welcomes all friends of all ages. We support one another with care committees, worship sharing and spiritual discussion groups. Meeting for worship is often gathered and many find renewal and support in our time together. Individual friends report that they are going deeper in their spiritual practice and connecting well with the community as a whole. Financially we are strong. We've substantially reduced our debt and, thanks in part to a bequest we received in 2018, have established a reserve fund, investing in the Friends Fiduciary Corporation Green Fund. We dream of generating enough funds to send more people to yearly meeting sessions, Powell House conferences and other spiritually enriching events and of growing the reserve fund to the point that its returns cover meetinghouse operations.

While we are a strong, vibrant meeting that nourishes those of us who call it our spiritual home, there is a desire for continued growth and maybe even change. One friend shared, "I suppose that I would find it wonderful if people with different political leanings than ours could feel comfortable in our Meeting so we would be more diverse. I wish we could share what it is to 'be' together beyond the political." Another said, "more deep spiritual stuff, movement in the spirit might be nice" as a way to respond to the condition of the world. We have been exploring the tension between those who wish us to live more radically into our testimonies as a community and those who seek meeting to be a place of refuge and rest.

We have been working on deepening our worship through Meetings for Learning and intergenerational worship activities and are planning a daylong retreat focusing on this. Our children settle more easily into worship and seem prepared to stay longer, perhaps as a result of the Godly Play and Faith and Play themes that have been carried out over the year with our younger members.

Workdays are well attended. They foster community spirit and accomplish goals in a positive atmosphere. We have been able to deal with all maintenance issues presented to us. We have not met our long-range goals of extensive landscaping around the building, which would call for extensive labor and follow-up maintenance. We have talked about parking lot problems and how to deal with intruding weeds and grass, and we may need to reassess our current position of letting it go and possibly eventually mow it. Would we ever want to use asphalt even though it is environmentally damaging? This issue is emblematic of choices we face for expedience or greater good. We want to be as "green" as we can but it does not always seem possible. We faced those choices in building the meetinghouse earlier this decade and will continue to do so as we maintain

it. We are also considering our carbon energy footprint and if we are doing the best we can to limit waste and distribute our resources effectively.

Our committee structure functions well within and across committees. Committees help us create a space where people are able to nurture community by keeping the meetinghouse supplied with paper and cleaning products and coffee and food-related supplies, helping with set-up and clean-up of potluck lunches, working to improve the quality of water and providing bagels and cream cheese after meeting for worship. Ensuring that a greeter is always on hand to warmly welcome newcomers, that printed materials are available and provided to them, and that conversation is initiated with them after worship helps many first-time visitors feel comfortable enough to return and begin developing a sense of belonging.

We would like to increase the number and variety of rentals. We would like to share our beautiful meetinghouse with others (a limiting factor is the alcohol prohibition). The more often we can welcome other groups carrying out their work, whether spiritual, creative, peacemaking, etc., the better we can foster relationships that help us respond to the world as a meeting.

Our meeting's film series continues to bring in members of the wider community with one recent film having 70 people in attendance (which is a lot in this rural area). We have accomplished many of the things we set out to do this year, including having a booth at the Columbia County Fair. From August 29 through September 3, 2018 members from four monthly meetings plus additional volunteers staffed the booth exhibiting a replica of a solitary housing unit for a total of 65 hours with 26 people participating. The exhibit was funded by a grant from NYYM's Witness Activities Fund, an allocation from OCMM's Bacon Fund for Peace & Justice and with additional support from OCMM's Special Projects budget. Our goals were to advocate for passage of the Humane Alternatives to Long Term Incarceration (HALT) Act, to educate about the problem of mass incarceration in the United States and to raise the profile of our meeting in the community. We hope to engage more vigorously with social and environmental issues such as anti-racism and reforestation in the coming year.

Our Bacon Fund for Peace and Justice Committee worked on updates in terms of both policy and interpretation. With support from the monthly meeting, the fund's name was changed from the Bob Bacon Fund to the Bacon Fund for Peace and Justice to appeal to a wider audience and to more clearly identify its purpose and mission. Our hope is to continue building both the permanent fund, whose interest income is used for grants, and to reach more potential donors and recipients. We see the Bacon Fund for Peace and Justice as one clear way of responding to what is going on in the world.

This past year we hosted memorial meetings for Elisabeth Grace and Larry Marinelli. We wrote a memorial minute for Susan Roberts. We welcomed new

attenders as well as ___ people into membership.