

State of the Meeting Report 2014 Old Chatham Quaker Meeting

“How are faith, love, and ministry evidenced in your meeting?”

“Look, we did it!” Raising her arms and looking upward in the meeting room of our new meetinghouse, this Friend spoke the minds of many of us. Faith, love, and ministry are evidenced in how we built the meetinghouse, moved in, and began to experience a new beginning in our Meeting.

We are grateful that we accomplished this tremendous project with harmony, love, and faith that we were being led by the Spirit. We discovered that the more we came to know one another, the more love there was. Taking on such a challenge and facing problems together, we grew into deeper relationship with one another. We found ways to get along, keep our sense of humor, and find creative solutions together. We also found that while each person may have a vision for the meetinghouse, in love we can step back from our own personal visions and move forward in cooperation. Since we have moved into the meetinghouse, that love continues to be manifested in the care we give one another at times of special need, often unasked and unrecorded.

Our mid-summer Dedication Open House brought many visitors who celebrated with us the completion of our new, beautiful, spiritual home. Many people from the surrounding community came, reflecting the fact that we had done due spiritual diligence during our long journey, from planning and zoning approval through working with many local service and building supply providers to receiving our Certificate of Occupancy. A few weeks after our Open House, our fundraising Book and Art Sale again brought even more of our neighbors and the surrounding community together.

We had faith that more people would come to Meeting for Worship at our new meetinghouse, and indeed they are, including families with young children. We feel our faith that our new meetinghouse would attract newcomers to our Meeting has been affirmed. Many of them are returning. We also welcomed a long-time attender into membership. We have faith that our Meeting will continue to grow.

Ministry proceeds from faith and love. Our project of many years to build a meetinghouse of our own has been the rich occasion for identifying, encouraging, and letting shine the diverse gifts, talents, and skills found among those in our Meeting. Although somewhat infrequent, vocal ministry is from the heart. Knowing that love and acceptance are present within our Meeting, people speak their experiences.

We are even witnessing ministry practiced by the very youngest among us. When the children come into the meeting room toward the end of Meeting for Worship, they bring with them their own gifts. In their wanderings, the younger ones often connect with people worshipping, further opening their hearts to the Spirit. At the close of Meeting for Worship, the older ones gain experience and confidence in relating their experiences in First Day School.

We have a monthly evening for singing and sharing a meal together, and have recently resumed weekly worship sharing, dormant for almost two decades. We consider both of these activities forms of ministry. We are ministering to an attender who has conscientious objection to paying taxes for war and is serving time in jail. Some efforts have remained constant throughout the transition from Powell

House, such as supporting war resisters in Canada and the local food pantry with weekly cash/food donations. We continue offering our monthly film series to the public, witnessing to issues of social justice.

We appreciate more and more the possibilities arising from having our own home, a space now filled with beautiful benches, tables, cabinets, and book shelves built by a beloved member. After many years of devoting the greater part of our Meeting's efforts to countless meetings for discernment, multiple committees for the fundraising, planning, and implementation of the building of the meetinghouse, and the individual and corporate work to accomplish everything that has brought us into our new spiritual home, we look now to the future with faith that new energies will be released to direct our vision outward.

One of our hopes and intentions when beginning the meetinghouse project was to provide a space for the wider community to participate in a variety of activities – whether yoga, music making, peace initiatives, dance – that might expand the spirit and inspire the imagination to a larger vision of the world of anyone taking part, all without the expectation that their participation would lead to attending our Meeting for Worship. We now hope that we may be led and strengthened by the Spirit to go forward with purpose and vision.