

## Old Chatham State of the Meeting Report 2017

“What is the current state or condition of our meeting?”

We held a meeting session after Meeting for Worship to ask ourselves, “How has the meeting changed me?” and “Are there ways we would like the meeting to change us?”

We are deeply appreciative of the nurturing space our meeting provides. We expressed gratitude for the openness and support that members show one another. There is a nonviolent perspective that influences both our messages and the silences that we share. We recognize that the warmth, devotion to Quaker values and determination to move forward in the Light have made us feel welcome and encouraged us to reach out to people in need of extra care. We have become more sensitive to a broader view of accessibility, and this year we have endeavored to use microphones in our meeting to ensure that messages are heard by all.

Our worship is often deep and gathered. Messages from divine love knit us together towards a common practice. We reflected that our relation with the divine, with that of God within us, is exponentially better when shared among friends. Being part of our meeting community enriches our lives and that of family members.

Many times we heard, “Our meeting helps me realize I’m not alone - spiritually, politically, etc.” We feel stronger and gather courage to grow and act. In our meeting we find silence from the empty noises of the world. We like how our meeting takes collective action to heal the world but also helps us in our individual efforts.

The meeting has opened us up to making new friends. It has made us more appreciative of activist friends and the struggle to make the world a better place. We find ourselves striving to anchor the “doing” of service in the deep “being” that changes even our neurons in the direction of compassion, trust and service.

The meeting has made us “better” as we nurture contemplative practice and grounding in Spirit. We have learned to listen deeply, to be more tolerant of views that are not our own, to value being in community. We have accepted the gift of seeking to serve our friends who can be temperamentally and ideologically different from us. We have the opportunity in our meeting to practice acceptance of a diversity of beliefs and spiritual viewpoints. It grows easier to integrate an acceptance of a viewpoint different from our own. Our world needs that capacity.

There is a tension between deepening our spiritual leadings and “doing” the acts that help change our society for the better. Some of us talked about wanting the meeting to help us deepen our spirituality. Others talked about how the meeting could do more about social justice issues and outreach. We were deeply encouraged by so many people coming on board for the solitary housing unit display that we hosted at the Columbia County Fair and how many members of the public we engaged in dialogue there. We will display the solitary housing unit again at this year’s fair.

Our Outreach, Peace and Justice Committee continues to sponsor monthly films and programs on social justice. We have a large community audience outside our meeting at our film nights, which also provide an opportunity for people to learn about Quaker values and our meeting. Outreach, Peace and Justice Committee participates in the bi-monthly NYYM Outreach Practitioners Circle, which shares ideas with 15 Quaker meetings about in-reach and outreach, including how to be a welcoming meeting and

increase our meeting's diversity. Outreach, Peace and Justice Committee connects us to national Quaker organizations such as the Friends Committee on National Legislation and American Friends Service Committee as well as to local immigration, peace, interfaith and environmental groups.

The spiritual condition of our Meeting benefits from many related activities, including weekly worship sharing, committee work, potlucks, work days, Meetings for Learning, and the annual picnic and swim at Powell House. The spiritual book club begun in 2016 continues to meet to read and discuss books of relevance to spirituality and Quakerism.

Our monthly business meeting continues to meet with attention to the spirit of worship. We are sensitive to the importance of hearing all voices in our midst and following longstanding Quaker practices which allow for ideas and programs to develop in a thoughtful and considered way. We have recently begun renting out our Meetinghouse, which has led us to reconsider some of the policies we have adopted and whether they need to be changed in any way.

Our Women and Aging Group, which began in 2015, continues to meet monthly and has added some informal bi-monthly "porch conversations" as well. We have welcomed new members, both from within and outside our Quaker Meeting, and provide both spiritual and concrete support to one another on many different aspects of this stage of life.

The Children and Youth Committee works to meet the needs of both younger and older children. Changing our usual pattern, we began having children join in meeting for worship at the beginning of the hour instead of at the end. The idea was for children to experience the deep waiting in silence when they first arrive, before they leave for their children's group. We have been pleased at the response of children and parents to this change.

The Finance Committee keeps us up to date on our financial responsibilities and the significant progress we have made paying off our loans to build the Meetinghouse. The Welcoming Committee and House and Grounds Committee take care of big and little issues concerning the upkeep of our Meetinghouse. Our Communications Committee helps to keep us updated on current activities that nurture our spirit and invite us to activism. The Rayville Burial Ground Committee has done a great deal of work in the past year to professionally restore many gravestones. The Bob Bacon Memorial Fund Committee, which grants funds for scholarships and other needs, is considering changing the fund's name to better reflect its peace and social justice focus.

We look forward to exploring the ways our Meeting can help us grow both in "being" and in "doing" in the coming year.