

From NYYM Faith and Practice, p. 125:

The State of the Meeting report should be a *searching self-examination by the meeting and its members of their spiritual strengths and weaknesses and of the efforts made to foster growth of the spiritual life*. Reports may cover the full range of interests and concerns but should *emphasize those indicative of the spiritual health of the meeting*.

State of the Meeting Report Old Chatham Monthly Meeting

In preparing this year's State of the Meeting Report, the opportunity to examine our community from the perspective of its overall spiritual strengths and weaknesses rather than the usual focus of a relatively narrow query has yielded the unexpected benefit of expanding our understanding of the spiritual life. To the more commonly recognized fruit of the Spirit "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" identified by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23, we might also consider adding the qualities of courage, imagination, and discernment.

But we will begin with love. For in searching the life of our Meeting, we find we do love one another. We may have failings in expressing and demonstrating our love at the time and in the manner it is most needed, but overall most of us treasure the love that grows in us through Meeting life.

Having completed our first full year in our own meetinghouse, we can note significant changes in our Meeting life. As we had hoped when building the meetinghouse, we have the opportunity to welcome visitors and newcomers to our Meeting more frequently. The building itself, visible to the surrounding community, is very welcoming, and newcomers remark that its beauty is conducive to worship. Children find the new meetinghouse inviting and comfortable, and we all appreciate the openhearted generosity of Friends and their families who have constructed and donated appointments to the children's area that make it particularly appealing to them.

Self-reflection reveals Old Chatham Meeting extends an abundance of spiritual hospitality. We are eager to get to know newcomers and to draw them into the life of the Meeting. We might consider how we can further extend our hospitality to better attend to the needs of those new to Quakerism with means set in place for them to learn more about Quakerism and the specific ways our Meeting is organized that may not be obvious to them.

We have been occupied pursuing ways to build and consolidate the life of our Meeting community. Monthly rise-of-Meeting potlucks, monthly evenings of movies and of supper and singing, Meetings for Healing, a summer picnic with swimming at the Powell House pond, and weekly Worship Sharing have all given us time to be together while our spirits have been nurtured and uplifted. When a concert or play or presentation has brought the wider community into the meetinghouse with us, we experience as a body the sense of sharing the gifts given to us with the wider world. This last year we have joyously received a long-time attender into membership, overseen the loving marriage under the care of the Meeting of a member since birth, and have begun to prepare for the marriage under our care of another beloved young member.

With a number of the young people who have grown up in our Meeting now young adults, and

several of the newcomers young families with children, we yearn to draw them all into a Meeting that meets their needs. We have taken our concerns to the Yearly Meeting Young Adult Field Secretary. Much discussion and discernment have led us to know that needs of our young adults should not be addressed separately from the Meeting as a whole, and with the assistance of the Young Adult Field Secretary, we are planning a Meeting retreat to deepen our relationships with each other and with the Meeting for the coming year.

Further self-reflection tells us there is a strong drive in our Meeting to witness to the societal expressions of our core beliefs in the wider community. We attempt to be faithful in making our witness. As it has for many years, the Outreach, Peace, and Justice Committee sponsors a film series with monthly screenings of films featuring themes of social justice. The Meeting continues to support war resisters in Canada by collecting donations and sending a monthly check. The Meeting maintains regular communication with FCNL and AFSC with designated Meeting liaisons. The Outreach, Peace and Justice Committee has sponsored a letter writing campaign on the subject of the Peace Tax, and after careful study of the FCNL-AFSC working paper "Shared Security, Reimagining U.S. Foreign Policy," submitted a thoughtful letter to the editors of local newspapers. When registering Old Chatham Monthly Meeting's support to Stop NY Fracking, the Meeting was also led to consider the obvious ramifications of opposing fossil fuel development for the Meeting and our personal lives. With the intense interest in issues of social justice and earthcare in our Meeting, it is not surprising that there are some who feel that our witness is not strong enough and that more could be done.

The heart of our Meeting life is Worship. Although there have been periods of time when vocal ministry is minimal in our Meetings for Worship, most Old Chatham Friends have experienced spiritual depth in our silence. Old Chatham Friends come from a spectrum of spiritual traditions, and references to a range of spiritual beliefs are gratefully received in our worship. However, over the years, there has been the impression among some Friends that references to the Christian tradition are not uniformly welcomed. We have noted over the past year that Friends have begun to practice spiritual courage to give vocal ministry in the language of the Christian tradition from which they draw inspiration and find truth.

We can also attribute spiritual courage, as well as free flowing imagination, to our efforts to rethink and reshape the care and attention we offer to our children and youth during the period of time we have traditionally held First Day School. We have come to understand that our traditional First Day School, indeed any approach with the structure and feel of "school," no longer energizes and appeals to the young people, as well as potential adult teachers, in our Meeting. Deciding to change the emphasis from school-like education to facilitation of spiritual experience and development, we now offer children and youth three options: joining the youngest little ones for story time with talk and play about the day's book, participating in an alternative, intergenerational, experimental worship, or participating in traditional Meeting for Worship. So far our experimental option has included worship while in different physical positions and unusual arrangements and placement to each other, worship while walking or sitting in a tree or doing art work, yoga, meditation, and discussions of Advices in Faith and Practice and other readings.

An often encountered weakness in our Meeting is the reluctance of Meeting Friends to take responsibility for facilitating programs with our children and youth, and this last year has been no exception. What can we do to inspire adults in our Meeting to take responsibility for this? We are monitoring our experimental replacement of First Day School and are optimistic, but not yet ready to recommend it widely to other Meetings.

Meeting Friends have demonstrated their love and generosity of spirit over the year responding to a particularly high incidence of very serious illnesses and to the needs of some of the elderly in our Meeting. However, on those occasions when requests for meals or home assistance and respite to caregivers have received little or no response, some Friends have questioned why our Meeting is able to extend our concern and resources to the needs of those far removed from us, but is not always ready to respond to the needs of those in our immediate spiritual community.

We consider too all the energy, care, time, and labor that have been extended by everyone in the Meeting to make our new meetinghouse a true home. Friends have taken on many new house holding and home keeping tasks. Our financial obligations are responsibly met. We are now appreciating the courage and faithfulness we exercised through the years of discernment in moving forward to build and pay for the meetinghouse. Even though our yearly budget has increased exponentially over the last decade, our finances are healthy and in good order. Enormous generosity has been fed into a structure, a building, to make it into a home where we can offer hospitality both physical and spiritual, care for our children and for each other, learn and expand our spirits, and grow in love and faithfulness in our evolving life as a community.