SAYMA
State of the Society Report 2010-2011

Friends on the Ministry and Nurture Committee prayerfully read twenty monthly meeting reports in order to discern how the Spirit has moved through our Society this past year. We were moved ourselves as we experienced the deep, thoughtful process of Friends as they prepared their reports.

The Committee discerned four major themes running through the reports.

Friends Meetings experienced losses throughout the year, but there is no sense of diminishment. The losses included the deaths of seasoned Friends who were core members of their meetings. The recession has affected meeting incomes and budget needs. Individual meeting needs and gifts to Wider Quaker Organizations were sometimes affected. Several meetings experienced losses in membership. With these losses frequently came gains, including increased commitments of members, increased financial commitments, and plans for growth. Some meetings were able to meet their budgets, and one meeting reports that though the meeting is small, to some extent that enforces a discipline of simplicity. Meetings noted that in times of loss and trouble, seeds of rebirth have been planted.

Friends are dedicated to service, both among other Friends and to the community. Meetings participate in relief and social justice efforts within their home towns and nationally. In addition to Friends collectively participating in projects, individual Friends service efforts are supported. Service includes interfaith work, anti-death penalty work, and work on ant-racism and immigration issues. Friends visit places of worship led by those of other faiths and write letters on their behalf. Work especially has extended to Muslims and Hispanics this year in light of strong prejudices expressed informally and through legislation. One meeting had a community dinner concerning immigration reform which 150 people attended; another supported two undocumented local college students. Friends have also worked with the LGBT community in lobbying for equality.

Friends are concerned with building community within their own meetings and as outreach into their surrounding communities. In some cases a few people do much of the work and find it a challenge to bring in new people to share in the labors. However, Friends have planted gardens, participated in retreats and friendship circles, and have been creative in their building of friendships within their meetings. There have been Friendly film series, foodie discussions, and simple suppers. In fact, many of the community events show Friends' creative ways of bringing food into their community building; in addition to the Soup Angel of one meeting, others have Meetings for Eating and Sandwich Sundays. Friends have also seen the need for visitation, and one meeting has a transportation and visitation team. Finally, Friends find great joy in caring for the inexperienced and in introducing new attenders and members into the spirit and the processes of meeting life.

As for community outreach, Friends have found such things as developing websites, relocations to a more visible and hospitable meeting place, and working on community concerns with African

Americans, Muslims, Conscientious Objectors, LGBT persons and Hispanics increases visibility and helps with growth, in addition to the opportunities given for service.

Friends find great joy as well as promise in our children. Some meetings have as few as one child; the majority of them have two or three; some meetings have many. There are vibrant youth groups among some meetings. Several use the Godly Play curriculum both for children and as intergenerational opportunities. Young Friends appreciate SAYF. With few children, some meetings have First Day School two times a month. Recognizing the importance of the spiritual development of our children, each meeting works to include them in as many ways as resources allow, frequently stretching themselves in creative ways to ensure this development.

SAYMA Ministry and Nurture committee members know "experimentally" that the Spirit has moved among SAYMA Meetings in deep and creative ways this past year, as it moved through us as we pondered the monthly meeting reports. We are grateful to all SAYMA Friend for this gift of the Spirit to us. We encourage all Friends to read the individual reports to truly experience the depth of the Spirit's work on our Society.