

State of SAYMA – 2016

Prepared by SAYMA M&N April 2017

We appreciate the time each meeting gave to creating their State of the Meeting report. We will be highlighting what we found to be the themes throughout the YM and encourage each Friend to read each MM's report and share them with your MM. There is much for meetings to learn from others' experiences.

We received 20 reports out of 21 MMs.

From Asheville:

Asheville Friends Meeting is suspended between where we are and where we hope to be.

From Columbia

We are considering how to respond to Executive Orders and other proclamations from the current administration that are in conflict with Quaker values. At this point, we are in a fact-gathering mode. We have not yet been faced with the choice between obedience to civil law and obedience to a higher law, but it is becoming more clear to us that such a choice may soon be thrust upon us. As more communities of faith harbor immigrants to protect them from detention or deportation, in defiance of state and federal law, we expect that we shall be called to choose whom we shall serve, knowing we may well place our own liberty and property, both personal and corporate, at risk. We pray for the courage to live out our conviction that no material thing is indeed ours, but that our conscience can never be taken by force - nor should we yield it to any vaunted authority.

The following themes recurred throughout the YM:

Community:

The reports gave witness to the work individuals and meetings are doing, to clothe the naked, feed the hungry and give shelter to the homeless. Many meetings are opening the conversation on race, and are opening meetinghouse doors to the wider community.

Conflict:

The reports gave witness to the willingness to acknowledge and share Monthly Meeting conflict with the YM.

Commitment:

The reports gave witness to the MM commitments to the Quaker way, preserving unity, patient waiting and what we are called to be a part of. Living in community, while not always easy, we see a resilience and determination in valuing our communities even in the midst of conflict. Small meetings honor their commitment to continue as a Quaker presence in their communities.

Challenges:

The reports gave witness to and ask, what is a critical mass, too large, too small, aging, lack of diversity. Our predominantly white Monthly Meetings are challenged to examine and address concerns of race and privilege in both MM and wider communities .

Catalyst:

The reports gave witness to last year's YM acting as a catalyst for MMs to look at issues of race and privilege. The mood of our country and outcome of the election has moved many meetings from an inward focus to an outward focus.

Words and phrases that stood out:

AVP

NAACP

Tenderness and patience

Love flourishes in laughter

A candle burns brightest in the darkness

Looking at the meeting through the eyes of an outsider

In reflecting on the MM State of the Meeting reports, we were reminded of Margaret Mead's words:

Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world, it's the only thing that ever has.

Finally, from a Friend speaking in Memphis MWAB

“We must remember that tension is different from conflict. Tension occurs within some intrinsic context of unity. Tension in the meeting is a natural part of the meeting's momentum towards unity - an enduring goal of all Friends.”