

## **Attachment B: State of the Meeting Reports**

Asheville Friends Meeting  
Athens Monthly Meeting  
Atlanta Friends Meeting  
Berea Friends Meeting  
Birmingham Friends Meeting  
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### **Asheville Friends Meeting**

Asheville Friends find a number of factors indicating the overall good health of our spiritual community, despite the challenges of diminished numbers. Attendance was about thirty-five Friends on the average First Day last year, compared to about 45 a couple of years ago, but we feel that the quality of worship each First Day is as consistently deep as ever. In the past year we have had two beloved Friends pass away, but we have added seven new members or transfers from other meetings.

A year and a half ago we changed our First Day schedule to pair religious education with adult spiritual enrichment at 9:30, followed by all-ages worship at 10:30. We use the library for family worship, affectionately called “wiggle” worship. A speaker and radio arrangement allows those worshipping in the library to hear vocal ministry. Our Library Committee welcomed the children who worship with their families in that space by moving adult materials up, which gave adult materials better exposure; and by providing space for items appropriate for small hands on lower shelves. Two standing committees, Peace & Earth and Religious Education, have led social action and all-meeting activities during the first hour on fourth and second First Days, respectively, each month. On the remaining First Days we have explored Quakerism and meditation practices. An occasional fifth First Day has given us the opportunity to sing together.

The children’s program has also become smaller. We are unsure of the reasons for this decline, whether it is due to the schedule change or natural attrition. The committee has attempted to bring Young Friends of middle and high school age together for events, but hasn’t yet been successful in that endeavor. Those who attend or teach First Day School with the guidance of the Religious Education Committee continue to have great ideas and share plenty of love and care.

Community building has been a concern the whole meeting has worked on this past year with some success. In addition to our monthly Sandwich Sunday, on many First Days a group of Friends eat lunch together at a local health food café, sharing stories and passionate conversation. We recently had our fourth annual Secret Pals month, with older and younger Friends paired to secretly give their pals handmade items, favorite recipes and stories, or origami, for example. Our Communications Committee revived the newsletter after a three year

hiatus, providing a colorful format, distributed largely by email, but with several hard copies made available at the meetinghouse for those who do not receive electronic documents and as outreach to visitors. The Communications Committee also set up a computer in our meetinghouse office to help Friends to send and store meeting information. We have not had a meeting retreat longer than a day in two years. An Ad Hoc Retreat Committee is planning a residential retreat in the fall, to provide an opportunity for additional quality time together. Thus, community has grown among us in Asheville Friends Meeting.

Our Ministry and Counsel Committee meets monthly to take the spiritual pulse of the meeting. It has initiated the formation of a handbook for the meeting for practical use, and has taken on the topic of membership and its meaning among Friends. The feeling persists, however, among those on the committee, that it never quite covers all the important items on the agenda, often preempted by time-sensitive items. We found that our Pastoral Care Committee, a sub-committee of Ministry and Counsel, had become less active, and effort was put into reorganizing our care of Friends in need. Committee members took on the responsibility of checking on specific Friends who are ill, isolated or in need in some way.

Peace and Earth Committee is encouraged by the success of their monthly Spiritual Enrichment sessions and the fact that our budget has allowed the committee to contribute financially to both Quaker organizations and local, like-minded agencies. A mid-week meeting for worship for peace followed by stone soup has a core membership for whom the evenings have been deeply rewarding.

We have had fruitful meetings for business, as well, as we worked on a minute of welcome to all those who come to us, regardless of their sexual orientation. As an extension of that, we have worked on a marriage procedure guide which reflects the practice of treating equally all couples who come to us for support. Our Finance Committee has struggled with major shifts in membership and software challenges. The new meeting computer may help us to improve our record keeping and reporting capabilities.

We struggle with our smaller numbers to have as many members on committees as we would like. Several committees have demonstrated that even with fewer members, fewer meetings, and fewer reports to business; much can be accomplished by a small group primarily by means of electronic communication, holding face-to-face meetings for discernment only as often as needed. Despite the tension of seeing many things to be done and not always being able to clerk our own concerns, Asheville Friends enjoy each other's company and benefit from working in community. We have faith that if we follow the Spirit's leading and take right action, that we will be able to sustain our meeting's health, even with fewer people. We continue to feel power and love from the Light each time we settle into worship. That power and love has been carried over into our daily lives. For that, we are very thankful.

### **Athens Friends Meeting**

“As many candles, lighted and put in one place, do greatly augment the light, and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together in the same life there is more of the glory of God.”

Robert Barclay (1678) in SAYMA Faith and Practice 1998, p. 32

We decided to examine the state of the Meeting in light of the Quaker Testimonies.

### **The Meeting Community**

We are grateful for two new active people, one of whom we have welcomed as a new member and the other who serves as our SAYMA representative. About eight people are in attendance at Meeting each week. Occasionally a 3-year-old and a teen attend. We continue our practice of singing for 15 minutes before Meeting for Worship. We were pleased to have a member of SAYMA's Ministry and Nurture committee visit this spring.

We started a mid-week Meeting at a Friend's home, sharing supper and silent worship or worship sharing. It is a wonderful fellowship time with about six people attending.

Our Christmas and Easter celebrations were very well attended by young and old members, attenders, friends and families.

When the parents of one of our members died, the Meeting supported him by making a donation to the family's chosen charity that fights Mitochondrial Disease.

Today at Meeting for Business, a member asked the question, "Should we return to being a worship group?" Due to our small size, we don't have the critical mass to sustain our previous level of activity. Our website is dormant at present. We have a temporary clerk. We miss four members/attenders who either left Georgia (3) or stopped attending (1).

### Peace

Two members are very active in Women in Black, and other members join in for special vigils. Letters to the editor have been written regarding our government's military action in Afghanistan and Iraq. Our Meeting helped with AFSC's State of Hope & Eyes Wide Open Tour when it traveled to Athens and UGA.

We continue to discuss immigration policies, attended a play in which one member performs, and watched AFSC's video on border security.

### Simplicity

We rent the parsonage of the Oconee Street Methodist Church for our Meeting house. Some members feel this leads to simplicity.

### Equality

We have a micro loan with the Center for Development in Central America. We periodically provide Sunday Sack Suppers for 75 homeless people through a program of the local soup kitchen. The meeting also prepared hygiene kits which were distributed through the soup kitchen. Several members have participated in Hip Hop Community Clean-up Days and Discussions.

### Education

Our Meeting helped with a SAYF retreat at Hard Labor Creek State Park in April. A meeting committee assisted our teen planner. We have Second Hours a couple of times a month in which we have worship sharing or a discussion of a Quaker topic, such as the life and good works of Rufus Jones and Quaker history.

### Sexuality

Our Meeting discussed the changes in wording of the marriage portion of Faith and Practice, and we agreed with the changes, after much discussion.

### Nurture of Children

We have one room for First Day school, filled with books, toys, play dough, etc. Currently a 3-year-old attends occasionally. One teen attends SAYF retreats and gatherings.

"SAYMA Friends know experientially that all people moved to worship God in the manner of Friends and who hold to Friends' principles and testimonies are strengthened and enriched through worship with each other" (in SAYMA Faith and Practice 1998, p. 21), therefore we will continue to strive to keep our Meeting vibrant and alive.

Submitted by Betsey Collins, Janice Pulliam, and Cathianne Watkins

## **Atlanta Friends Meeting**

The gifts of our community are many and varied. The spirit moves amongst Atlanta Friends Meeting to support the ministry of our members, their well-being, and the material stability of the Meeting.

Ministry and Worship committee focused on ways to deepen the worship experience. There was increased interest in membership and many requests for clearness committees to nurture seekers. Conversely, a couple of persons left the Meeting over issues of religious education and eldering. Committee-sponsored forums included topics like "Nurturing young Friends" and "What do you do in meeting for worship?" A call was put out for people whose vocal ministry should be nurtured. Mary Ann Downey received a traveling letter for her work in other meetings. Mark Wutka received a traveling minute to attend the Yearly Meeting of North Carolina Conservative. An ongoing "Stories of the Elders" series, where experienced Friends share their spiritual journeys, has been very well-attended.

An ad hoc group on nurturing our young people began work in the summer to evaluate our youth programs. Attention was given to Religious Education staffing curriculum and supervision, among other areas. Recommendations include a new process for recruiting and approving teachers, a new leadership structure, and a new RE committee. Young Friends in middle and high school continued participation in the Southern Appalachian Young Friends retreats.

The Meeting assisted outlying worship groups, including Gwinnett Preparative Meeting and Canton worship group. Gwinnett requested we appoint a special committee to oversee their intention to become a monthly meeting. However, eventually the group split, with one part arranging affiliation with Ohio Conservative Yearly Meeting and the other retaining affiliation with AFM. Also, at year end, the Anneewakee Creek Friends Worship Group was laid down, at the request of Free Polazzo and Janet Minshall, after it had been meeting in Douglas County. The Meeting thanked them for their faithful service in founding and nurturing the worship group for the past 9 years. A new worship group, meeting once a month, has formed in Sautee GA, led by Mike and Duane Kaiser, long-time members of AFM. Finally, with no contact yet initiated, a new worship group now meets at the Unitarian church in Dahlonega.

The Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting (CURAFM) continued to raise awareness of racism through a Listening Ear for concerns about racism, a showing of the series, "Africans in America," and writing materials for the welcome packets, the AFM website, and the newsletter. In conjunction with Our Roles As Individuals in America's Racial History. CURAFM held a forum on becoming a multicultural, anti-racist institution, sponsored anti-racism workshops using the book, White Awareness, for Atlanta Friends Meeting and SAYMA, and wrote an article for the online version of the FGC Connections issue on "Friends, Race and Racism."

ORAIARH continued to meet weekly to support each other in our individual and collective witness against racism. They cosponsored work mentioned with CURAFM. They provide a literature table in the Greeting Room on first days.

Care and Counsel Committee continues to be a nurturing force in the Meeting. We have gone beyond the duties listed in the AFM handbook to include an inspiring Couple Enrichment Session, a six-week class for those who struggle with chronic illness, a new Guide for Sunday Volunteers, and a Volunteer Appreciation Pancake Breakfast. We care for our members and attenders with get well cards, hospital visits, our Quaker Care quilt, and meetings for worship for homebound members. We welcome newcomers with volunteer greeters, welcome packets, and monthly Newcomers Dinners. We also welcomed six of our youngest attenders into meeting with hugs and a book. The annual Gathered Meeting Retreat was facilitated by Peter Crysdale and Linda Lyman with a focus on nurturing a healthy meeting as a sacred community and listening for the still voice within.

Nominating Committee worked to discern existing talents and leadings of individuals in our Meeting community, to find ways for individuals to serve the Meeting, and to help the Meeting foster individual and spiritual growth. We also worked on ways to make Friends more aware of service positions and to give them a specific person with whom to talk about a position that they might feel led to consider. Nominating ended 2007 with heavy turnover, partly to allow seasoned Friends who have been recently released from other responsibilities to lead this important work.

Social Concerns Committee held a forum featuring Chuck Fager of Quaker House on its support for soldiers desiring to leave military service early. They also held a forum on Women's Unwaged Work featuring Selma James and Andaiye. Both were attended by more than 50 people and provided opportunities to educate Friends and for Outreach on our testimonies of Peace and Equality. A minute was sent to Congress demanding an end to the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The Administration Committee supported the Landscape committee in its work. The meeting approved its minute to pay our employees by Living Wage standards. It completed performance reviews on employees and continued work on the Employee Personnel Handbook. Sylvia Turner, resident manager, stepped down from her position after ten years. We affirmed our practice that AFM rents space to those compatible with our beliefs. The committee continued to preface each meeting with a discussion intended to combat personal racism. It began consideration of additional signage at the street to let people know the Meeting is inclusive, open and welcome to all.

The Finance Committee addressed several concerns in 2007. One was the lack of rental income, and by August, the unusually large deficit. The operating budget did end in the black. A Fundraising Committee was set up to increase rentals and design fundraisers when needed. Efforts continue to upgrade and refurbish an aging building. The Raise the Roof capital campaign also ended the year with a small positive balance. The Cabin Committee finances were brought into the Meeting budget. We cleared up a tax issue on that property so we are listed as a church that does not have to pay property taxes. The treasurer also created a comprehensive financial operations manual which can be used with confidence by future treasurers.

Atlanta Friends Meeting welcomed Pete McCaughan, Dwight Harriman, and Hannah MacDermott as new members in 2007. We also accepted the transfer of Barbara Seal's membership from Eastern Hill (Cincinnati, OH) Friends Meeting. Seven members moved away from Atlanta but remain members. The marriage of Julie Meadows and Jim Thompson took place under the care of the Meeting. Three Memorial Services (for William Squire, Lurline Squire and Sheila Degler) were held. With great sadness, we recorded the resignation from membership of Amy Pritchett and the transfer of Debra Johnson's membership to St. Bartholemew's Episcopal Church. We also recorded the transfer of Mariana Garrettson's membership to North Branch (Forty Fort, PA) Monthly Meeting. At the end of 2007, Atlanta Friends Meeting had 127 active members and 23 active (but away from the Atlanta Area) members for a total of 150. Each first day averages 120 or more attenders, and the reported number of active members and attenders is 170.

### **Berea Friends Meeting**

Berea Friends Meeting has been growing in numbers over the past two years. We have been blessed by the addition of several families of experienced Quakers who joined us as soon as they arrived in town. Other seekers have also found us, and several classes of Berea College students have been assigned to attend, offering us a new outreach opportunity.

Our children and teens program has grown from half a dozen to about twenty participants. The school-age young people take turns working with adults to plan centering activities for their group, a practice which has led to a variety of meaningful experiences. We are grateful for the impact of SAYF in our teens' lives and on their participation in meeting.

Two years into meetinghouse ownership, we are experiencing the commitment required for responsible property ownership. Last winter we planned and planted a peace garden of shrubs and trees on the meetinghouse grounds. Due to a late spring cold snap followed by a severe drought and our inadequate plans for care, we lost many of the plants. Late in the summer, we purchased tree-watering bags to ease the work. This winter, a vacancy in the meetinghouse apartment provided an opportunity for much-needed repairs, which have required many hours of volunteer labor as well as the expense of contractors.

Our ministry and counsel committee has been particularly stretched this year. In the fall the committee wrestled with troubling communications from and among a few Friends. Eventually two long-time members withdrew from active participation in the meeting. Health problems among ministry and counsel members themselves have put further strain on the committee. Nevertheless, the committee visited with individual members for this year's annual membership review. In April a visioning retreat revealed enthusiasm for greening the meetinghouse, a renewed commitment to outreach and inclusiveness, and interest in using small inward-outward-journey groups for spiritual growth and testimony-based projects.

Following yearly meeting 2007, we took up the question of participating in civil marriage when this legal institution is not available to same-gender couples. After several months of thoughtful consideration, in December 2007 Berea Friends found unity in a minute stating that we will not perform the legal function of officiating civil marriage until equal treatment under the law exists for all couples. An ad hoc committee has been following up by sharing this minute with elected officials, Quaker bodies and other organizations.

In the fall we set up a peace pole in front of the meetinghouse, with the message "May peace prevail on earth" in eight languages. At the dedication, meeting attenders and guests from the Berea College community read the message aloud in each language.

We have benefitted from the participation of members in wider Quaker work within SAYMA and beyond, with FCNL, FWCC, the SAYMA Faith and Practice Committee and the Quaker Committee on Kentucky Legislation. We are grateful for way these connections feed us with new perspectives and insights.

### **Birmingham Friends Meeting**

Birmingham Friends met numerous challenges this year, with the effect of making us a stronger, more resilient community, we feel.

Our meeting's commitment to witnessing for peace and justice commanded a great deal of time and energy, but brought us great rewards as well. We were very gratified to get to know the family who left New Orleans for Birmingham because of Hurricane Katrina, whom we met through the Listening Project when they were interviewed by Birmingham Friends. The couple's attendance at our Christmas party, along with their six children, was a special delight to all of us. We have not only come to a more immediate understanding of human suffering through the eyes of this family, but we have come to admire their grace and cheer in the face of adversity. As one Friend noted, that Listening Project experience led us to more community involvement, including our board participation in Greater Birmingham Ministries, a local social and economic justice group working with the poor. We also strengthened our understanding of the way poverty intensifies common problems through a recent second hour conducted by a member who runs a pain clinic for the medically underserved. The AFSC's Eyes Wide Open project has been another moving, if demanding, experience for all of us involved, including most Birmingham Friends along with members of the Birmingham Islamic Society. In researching the background and family contacts of those Americans killed in this conflict, and in collecting shoes to represent the thousands of Iraqis killed - some no more than a few months old - we were ourselves deeply affected by the senseless loss even as we sought to create that experience in exhibit viewers. In the process of planning the exhibits, we also were able to get to know partnering meetings and organizations, such

as the Birmingham Islamic Society and Fairhope Friends Meeting, and we will always value the friendships made through this cooperative effort. There were 2 exhibits in Birmingham, another 2 in Mobile and Fairhope and another planned for Auburn this month. While we feel that all this activity has been worthwhile for many reasons, we are also mindful of our limitations as a small meeting. We look to continue what social involvements we can while taking care to balance our needs for stillness.

There have been some changes in the makeup of Birmingham Friends in the past year due to member mobility, death or new member involvement. We lost two loved, long term attenders last year, Harold Hardwick and Marion Archer. Another attender, Anne Herman, moved to Birmingham just in time to dive into our work on the first Eyes Wide Open exhibit with enthusiasm. Unfortunately, however, she shortly fell ill with cancer and died in late fall. In addition the Haun family, including our young friends Margaret and Joe, are in the process of moving to Virginia. These losses, each special to us in its own way, are tempered by our delight in welcoming new attenders and members. We have added members from both longtime and relatively new attenders, and we have welcomed several new attenders this year. In addition to these kinds of changes, we have also struggled to deal with numerous personal issues and conflicts in the meeting in an open, honest and loving manner. This has not been easy for any of us, but we learn from one another's strengths and perspectives and gain wisdom along the way.

Our commitment to spiritual development within ourselves and our meeting continues. We have enjoyed wonderful 2nd hour discussions around our shared reading of Mark Kurlansky's Nonviolence: 25 Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea. With new members and attenders coming to meeting, we also find it useful to reexamine old ways of doing things from the perspective of someone to whom our ways are new. We have taken new looks at the testimonies and explored Friends spirituality through other readings. One Friend has recently renewed his commitment to distributing weekly queries via email, which has helped us in deepening our spiritual understanding of our faith. With so many new attenders, we are also planning on revisiting some of the Quakerism 101 lessons during the coming months.

We feel the Spirit moving as our small meeting strives to attend to so much. We are challenged to be mindful of that Spirit and to remain centered upon it as we go through our busy days.

**BREVARD FRIENDS MEETING:**

**Mail :** POB 653, Brevard, NC 28712  
**Meeting Place:** College Walk, Activity Room, Neely Rd.  
**Website:** [brevardfriends.org](http://brevardfriends.org)

**Members: 15      Regular Attenders: 17      Average attendance at Worship: 16**

Our meeting remains a relatively small but vital group. Despite the fact that the large majority of our group is somewhat older, we maintain a keen interest and involvement in our spiritual development, social responsibilities and the sense of community within the meeting.

We continue to support local community organizations financially and, as much as possible, actively. Among the local organizations we support are Sharing House, Center for Dialogue and The Children's Center. Beyond the local community we support the following Quaker organizations: AFSC, FCNL, FGC, FWCC, Quaker House, and SAYMA.

While we do not have any specific meeting projects, individuals within the meeting are active in the local organizations listed above as well as other diversified community efforts. Our regular adult forum activity continues to be a vibrant and meaningful part of our regular program and a source of richness in our spiritual

growth..

We continue to meet at the College Walk retirement center which, to some, suggests to the community that we are a group which is basically “old folks.” In order to address this issue as well as to make our presence in the community more widely understood, and to reach a wider group of seekers, we are considering participating in the Quaker Quest program currently being offered by FGC. Additionally, we have a standing committee whose purpose is to be cognizant of other possible venues for locating our meeting.

During the past year we were saddened by the death of Van Kenoyer, a long term member more recently residing in Clemson, SC.

The biggest blow to our meeting this year was the death of Dorothy Mock in November. She was a founding member of the meeting, actively participated in all aspects of our meeting, a frequent and eloquent spiritual messenger in meeting for worship, and an energetic inspiration to all who knew her.

While we have only one new member this year, Robert Brooks, who is active in peace activities related to the Palestine/Israeli conflict, we have recently been buoyed by several new attenders who have the potential to add much to our meeting.

The meeting itself is operating effectively. All of the committees are working and meeting actively. All committee positions are now filled. Although we no longer have a representative on SAYMA’s M&O committee, we do have active representatives to all organizations in place. We have made strides in connecting more to the wider body of Friends, an effort which we hope to continue and enhance through the next years.

While we have no births to celebrate, attenders Dan and Becky Ellis are in the process of adopting a second child from China.

During this year we sponsored Chuck Fager’s “Lambs War” presentation in Brevard. The event was well attended by our meeting members.

Wendell Holland is completing the second year of “The School of the Spirit” sponsored by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

In summary, we feel comfortable that our meeting continues to provide an open and hospitable space for members and attenders. We hope to enhance the numbers and continue to expand our involvement with the wider body of Friends.

### **Celo Monthly Meeting**

Celo Meeting has had a year characterized by a deepening and enrichment of our corporate spiritual life, rejuvenation and growth of our youth activities, and considerable progress in finishing our new Meetinghouse.

An adult education workshop was held in the fall focused on the Buddhist process of mindfulness as outlined by Thich Nhat Hanh. There have been follow-up gatherings for folks who are developing a mindfulness practice in their own lives. This spring, 22 attended a workshop led by Evan Richardson, a spiritually gifted Friend from Asheville, focused on the nature and process of unprogrammed Meeting for Worship, both individually and corporately. Celo Friends were joined in the workshop by Friends from Greenville and Asheville. The workshop was particularly timely for us, since we have had some problems arising from occasions when speaking in Meeting had not seemed to arise from a spirit of worship. It also proved to be an occasion for ongoing listening and healing within the Meeting, and was for many our first worship experience in our new

Meetinghouse. Meeting the following day was especially deep, and several asked for more experiences of this sort, which Ministry and Care is already working on scheduling.

Another way that Ministry and Care committee has been able to respond to the ordering of our worship has been in crafting queries responsive to our ongoing needs for deepening corporate worship. In contrast to past practice, the committee as a whole now goes through a period of discernment in its monthly committee meeting, carrying the query directly to Meeting for Worship. We have found the result to be a deepening both of the committee time and the worship experience. Ministry and Care has also written a flier for new attenders to help guide them into our ways of worship.

Celo Meeting held a baby blessing during the winter, celebrating several new arrivals, as well as extending blessing to children who have joined us since our last "mass blessing" ten years ago.

First Day School hosts a steady group averaging 4-5 children aged 2-16. We continue our practice of beginning with 10-15 minutes of Children's Meeting for Worship which helps children to settle in and listen. Different activities are chosen and led by teachers, who divide the group based upon age, activities and the dynamics of the group. The monthly "Spot Light", an interview/ testimony sharing followed by questions and discussion facilitated by one of the adults in the Meeting, is normally attended by children 10 and older.

The Christmas play, "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever," drew out children's unlimited talent and we literally filled the new meetinghouse with tears and laughter. The large cast reached out to include children from neighboring churches. The new infloor heating system worked well on a cold December night.

The children of the Meeting have held several fundraisers, for the Heifer Project, an Empty Bowls event, and for our special concern of the year, the CHED (Centre for Employment and Development) project in Bhandaria, Bangla Deshi. The substantial donation we raised for this nascent NGO arrived the day they started to rebuild after this winter's devastating cyclone. Instead of providing meals during school and support for the medical center, our donation enabled the community to provide disaster relief, including emergency food. The children dedicated their Christmas pageant to CHED.

Concerns for our teenagers have increased as the nearby middle school community has struggled with behavior problems. We have held them in the light throughout the year. Like many meetings, we have had difficulty over the years in retaining our teens. Special social activities this year have shown them that we're interested in their lives. We continue to seek ways to foster their spiritual development as well. We in Celo Meeting are blessed to have an inspired and dedicated First Day School coordinator, who has infected all of us with her love and respect for the children of our Meeting.

Though we do not have a standing Peace and Social Concerns Committee, we support our members and attenders who have leadings to pursue this work. This year, two members have played leadership roles in the Christian Stewardship Listening Project of Yancey County. The project has drawn up a set of interview questions focused on Creation Care, and interviewed pastors and lay leaders broadly representative of the faith communities in our county. Members and attenders of the Meeting have volunteered for both the interviews and processing the results. Some of the interviews have been featured in the local paper, increasing the visibility of the effort to engage faith communities in ecological concerns. The project has been a success, and is gearing up for a second year.

We continue to work on our new building, which we started three and a half years ago. This past year many hours were spent by volunteers and we are very close to being finished. We owe a huge thanks to Errol Hess, who directed the process of installing and finishing the floors, bringing his equipment to enable the job. The inside work is virtually finished, and we are now focusing on a handicapped accessible ramp and the porch

railings. Our old wormy chestnut benches have been refinished and we have purchased used church pews to increase our seating. In addition to the Christmas pageant and the spring workshop, we held our annual Christmas Eve Meeting for Worship in the new space. During the next several months we hope to invite you all to attend a celebratory dedication.

### **Charleston Friends Meeting**

How fares the Spirit among you?

Charleston (WV) Friends Meeting can see the Divine Presence manifest in three ways: in our meetings for worship, in our concern for and fellowship with each other, and in the ministry we offer to the community.

Our worship is sometimes centered and Spirit-filled, sometimes more contemplative and quiet. During the past year, we have experienced an increased amount of vocal ministry, and a rich depth of messages spoken from the silence. Some messages have emerged from the joy of being together in the presence of the Lord; others have ministered to the sorrows of individual Friends. The last few minutes of meeting is set aside as an occasion to share joys and concerns. We have felt a healing strength while holding those in need in the Light during this time. We recognize anew the infinite ocean of light that flows over and among us.

We are a small meeting on the periphery of several yearly meetings. Friends in Charleston consist of those who grew up among Friends elsewhere, individuals and families associated with other peace churches, and seekers from the Charleston area. Some have experience in other Christian denominations, and others are simply looking for a spiritual home. We welcome seekers of every background while holding to the core of Quaker values, testimonies, and practices.

Because many of us are new to Quaker meetings, we spend considerable time discussing basic Friends themes. What do Quakers believe? What do we accept as authority? How do we discern Truth? Such discussions enrich both newcomers and more seasoned Friends. We continue to focus our discussions around Mary Snyder's Bringing Religious Education Home, as well as on items referred from SAYMA and wider Quaker organizations. We also have a twice monthly evening Bible study group; this year's topics have include the book of Daniel and Matthew as well as the Gnostic gospels.

This year we have had an unusually large influx of visitors, and we are delighted that some have become attenders. Many have learned of us through the Internet. Although attendance at worship can be only a few, we have lately had occasions when we have not had enough chairs for all who arrived. Each visitor is a gift, for which we feel blessed.

Last fall, the SAYMA Ministry and Nurture Committee met in Charleston. We recognize the difficulty of bringing a group so far from home, and we were grateful for the committee's presence among us. We shared a potluck dinner with the committee, and appreciated the committee's facilitation of discussion on committee functions in small monthly meetings.

Charleston's social concerns are principally peace, social justice, and environmental stewardship. We have been active in all three areas this year. We continue our support and discernment role with the American Friends Service Committee's Economic Justice Project. We hosted a statewide celebration of the AFSC's 90th anniversary, bringing together national and regional Service Committee leadership with community leaders and Friends. Two of our members also serve on national AFSC governance bodies.

We have a special concern about racism, which is less prominent as a public issue in West Virginia than some other places, but still scars individuals and strains community relations. We continue to work and pray for an end to the war in Iraq and reconciliation among Iraqis. We have educated ourselves on global warming and

sustainable agriculture. We have continued our annual tradition of preparing meals at homeless shelters in Charleston.

This has been a challenging year for some Friends, who have confronted the loss of loved ones, campus violence, illness, or serious injury. Many Friends' families are far-flung, as children seek opportunities out of the state. They go with our blessings and part of our community goes with them. We rejoice as our children find life partners and life's work. One young Friend was married last fall in an Episcopalian service incorporating Quaker practices; Meeting will oversee the wedding of two young Friends in early summer.

Charleston has a website ([charlestonwv.quaker.org](http://charlestonwv.quaker.org)) linked to SAYMA. In response to one Friend's concern about a dearth of Quaker-related books in the public library, we made a donation of several books on Quakerism and a Friends Journal subscription to the Kanawha County Public Library. West Virginia area Friends plan a fall gathering in mid September. We have had fall gatherings for many years for worship, fellowship, and discussion. The date and location of the gathering will be on our web site.

### **Chattanooga Monthly Meeting**

The life of Chattanooga Friends Meeting over the past year has been characterized by two themes. One, about twice as many adults and children come to First Day meetings for worship than in previous years. Two, the numbers of adults and children in attendance varies between nearly forty and less than twenty. We feel heightened joy when the meeting room is filled near to capacity and several young children are being taught and cared for in First Day School. We understand fairly well why so many are not with us on the low-numbers First Days. Much of the absences have to do with family activities including out-of-town visiting. We work at keeping up contact with those we do not see for a while so we often know when ill health is the cause and offer our support. Several of our Meeting reside about an hour's drive away, some in a different time zone. For the latter, worship begins an hour earlier in their time than for the rest of us. Some times that hour difference causes excessive difficulty for making the long trip. We accept the realities that often keep so many away. Not only do we appreciate the meetings when the room is filled near to capacity and many children are in First Day School, we also appreciate the experiences of worship and First Day School when the smaller numbers are present.

The fact that we currently have near capacity in attendance every few weeks or so has galvanized us into awareness that we need to expand our space or else, in the event that more new seekers would begin coming, we would be forced to squeeze people in uncomfortably. We feel fairly sure more newcomers will be gracing our Meetinghouse with their attendance in the future. We want to have adequate space so they would not have to be squeezed. Meeting has held a few discussions about the prospect of expansion and just recently formed a new Meeting Expansion Committee. From the typical Quaker pace of the discussions so far we anticipate more than two years, and possibly longer, will probably pass before expansion construction would begin. We are, however, actively taking initial steps toward the goal.

Mid-year we lost our very dynamic Meeting Co-clerk who relocated to the west coast due to her husband's career change. Her dynamic F/friendliness has been missed and is a loss to our meeting. We carry on with the one remaining Co-clerk and a few hard-working meeting members and attenders.

We continue many activities that help to sustain, inspire and support our sense of ourselves as a religious community. Our monthly newsletter, *The Friendly Voice*, is a superb contribution thanks to the editor's excellent work. The relatively few who have participated in our Second Hour series discussing John Punshon's *Encounter with Silence* have experienced spiritual enrichment and inspiration. Bible study, other Second Hour discussions, women's separate discussion meetings, constant contributions by our active regular committees, special clearness committee meetings, monthly potluck meals or cookouts at the meetinghouse, and occasional meetinghouse and grounds workdays have all added strength to our Meeting's life .

During the past year Chattanooga Meeting has directed much attention and resources to repairs and maintenance for our aged Meetinghouse, including installing a handicapped-friendly toilet and sink in place of the not-so-friendly ones. Considerable progress has been made; the building is in a more substantial physical condition than it was a year ago. It appears that most of the needed repairs have been completed and we may finish this round of restoring our existing building at a time not very far in the future.

For neighborhood relationships and outreach we hosted a neighborhood open house in Second Month this year. Out of that get-together a neighborhood association was started. Meeting has hosted several meetings of the association in our Meetinghouse and is offering to continue to do so.

Bill Reynolds, Clerk

### **COLUMBIA FRIENDS MEETING**

“How fares the spirit among us?”

North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative has a practice at their yearly meeting to have each Monthly Meeting answer the Queries from their Faith and Practice. This year we have taken these queries and tried to answer them. This has led to trying to put words to our beliefs. This has been very difficult because trying to describe what the word Spirit, God, the Light Within means to us is like trying to describe breath which is invisible but very real and universal but each individual experiences it differently and at different times.

When asked the direct question, “How fares the spirit among us?” many answers came forth. It was said that the meeting supports each individual in their search for the spirit. Others said that there are no words to describe the reality we are searching for. Others felt that we must try to describe our search, even though it will not be complete or be the answer for every one.

One of the ways we nurtured the spirit among us was by our celebration of 40 years in Columbia, SC. This made us stop and look at what we have done over the years and reconnect with former attenders and members. It was a joyful occasion. There were about 50 people present and it was held in a new “green” building on the university campus.

Our discussions about a meeting house have also brought us together in a closer community. We have discussed the possibility of having our own building for a meeting house many times. This time we seem to be closer to a decision. These conversations have made us think about who we are and what we want to be. They have also made us look at our current setting and how it might affect visitors. We hosted the SAYMA Ministry and Nurture Committee and they helped us more completely define what we want from a meeting house.

Individuals in the meeting have become more involved with Wider Quaker Organizations. One member is now working for Friends General Conference. She is bringing her experiences with meetings across the country back to our meeting, helping us grow in the spirit. She also has told us the ways other meeting have solved problems as well as telling them about our solutions. One of our members is starting to work with Quaker Quest which she feels will help our meeting grow both in spirit and in size. Another member is active in Friends World Committee on Consultation. She attended the Triennial in Ireland in August 2007 as well as meetings in Providence, RI and in Indiana this spring. This brings additional information about Quaker faith and practice in other meetings and in other branches of the Society of Friends. Our meeting has been active in Palmetto Friends Gathering and in the yearly meeting.

Our young Friends remain active. Two of our young Friends will graduate from high school this spring, which will leave us 4 teenagers and one toddler. We will have to re-arrange our first day school program. Our young

friends continue to prepare and serve lunch to the homeless every 4<sup>th</sup> First Day. This is an on-going ministry of the young people. They also helped design a make a quilt to be given to our youngest attender who was recently adopted and brings great joy to our meeting. We continue to have one young friend serve on Ministry and Nurture Committee. She has been faithful in attendance and eager to help and brings insight into our deliberations.

Several members continue to visit the federal prison in Edgefield County. Others continue to stand with the Women In Black vigil opposing the war in Iraq every Wednesday. We have a representative on the South Carolina Christian Action Council. Several members are active in the South Carolina Peace Resource Center.

We regret that we do not have an active Peace and Social Concerns Committee, although we have many related concerns. We are considering having a committee of the whole to meet during our discussion time. However, our second hour discussions have been focused on issues that have come up in our community and in the world and they have enriched and strengthened our meeting.

### **Cookeville Monthly Meeting**

We entered the new year in June as an infant Monthly Meeting. Hector and Susie Black transferred their membership from Crossville to Cookeville. Hazel Hall transferred her membership from Nashville. In July, we welcomed a new member when Annie Black, our dedicated former Clerk, asked to become a member and went through the clearness procedure.

A healthy spirit manifests itself in activities. Our annual Fall retreat provided opportunity for comfortable fellowship and sharing with art, food, and meditation in a beautiful natural setting. The monthly supper we provide for Dismas House has let us come to know men and women who are trying to integrate with life post-incarceration. It also gives us the opportunity to have fellowship with each other outside of our regular worship. Along with Veterans for Peace, several of us maintain a monthly "Truth in Recruiting" or "Alternatives to Recruiting" table during lunch period at Cookeville, Baxter, and Monterey High Schools. We have also been initiators of, and are participants in, the continuing Courthouse Peace Vigil from 1 to 2 every Sunday. Our meeting was represented at the School of the Americas watch in November. We were joined by students met through our counter recruiting effort.

The spirit also found us well in our November celebration of member Hazel Hall's birthday. She lifted our spirits for many years with her fearless forthrightness and enjoyment of life until December 7, and we still miss her deeply. With her daughter Lesley and family, we hosted a major celebration in her memory. It was a joyous occasion, as she would have wanted, with a large gathering of F(f)riends. Hazel's spirit lives on in our Meeting.

The Meeting experience itself remains central to our core group, a smaller number than a year ago. Some attenders who had been regular are less so now, due to distance, gas prices and other commitments. Young people attend occasionally. We have formed a Facebook peace group to help communications with high school students, and two attenders participate regularly in "Second Life" Friends Meeting. Our meeting is spiritually supportive of its members and attenders. Second hour discussions are stimulating and fun (and the snacks are great). We continue to be concerned about the state of affairs in America and the world.

### **Crossville Monthly Meeting**

The past year was a year of passages, openings, and transitions. We lost our beloved Winnie Thomforde after a long decline. We began meeting again in our Meetinghouse. And we have gained a new member Joe Parko from Atlanta meeting as well as four new regular attenders. We are continuing our Wednesday evening worship sharing group that involves both Meeting members and attenders and other from other faith traditions.

The Meeting still struggles with outreach, trying to find ways to inform and invite others to learn more about us. Members and attenders of the Meeting continue to be involved in various ministries in the community, ranging from environmental and energy education to peace work on the Iraq war. This brings us into spiritual communion with others who feel the Spirit moving them in similar ways.

We had a fun Easter retreat at our local Cumberland Mountain State Park. In addition to our regular attenders, we had visitors from other areas as well. We welcome visitors at this annual retreat.

### **Foxfire Friends Meeting**

Foxfire Friends Meeting of the Holston Valley is currently meeting at the Catholic Center near ETSU in Johnson City. We have a core of regular members and attendees who are dedicated to the meeting and are focused on our mission of keeping this Meeting viable. We have had a difficult year; we have had one long-time member resign over disagreements about the future of the Meeting, following the departure of his spouse, who was a long-time, active attendee. Another attendee left to join a worship group in Abington, where he lives. We have discussed becoming a worship group, yet at this time have settled on “paring down” the business side of Meeting and focusing on our worship, while trying to remain a monthly meeting. We have gained a new attendee, a member of an Ohio meeting who is new to our area and we are glad that she is here! We also have occasional visitors to our area and welcome their presence at meeting.

We continue to work to provide each other with support and continue to be active in broader Friends activities. One family has participated in many anti-war rallies, a two-day demonstration at Aerojet General and helped at a benefit in Asheville for a wounded Iraqi girl (who they met and played with in a meaningful hour’s visit). Another family participated in the Friends General Conference last summer. Many of us attended SAYMA last June. One young adult in our Meeting attended three YAF retreats.

Over the year, there was some emailed discussion of the state of the Meeting. Members far away wrote in to support our continued existence and this is a great comfort to us. We know that rising gas prices have hampered their efforts to join us. One visitor sent a messages stating that we are “not spiritual enough” and so they stopped attending. This is a difficult phrase to interpret. It could mean that we do not match what they are used to or this could be a factor of our small size (eight adults attend at this time). Or it could be a way to describe something more serious, but we are not sure what this is. Other visitors commented that we did not meet their needs or that they needed more outreach. Individually, we all feel committed to our spiritual lives and to living lives of meaning in the community. As the clerk, it is my opinion that we are not much different from other small meetings, although a bit smaller than we would like. We also seem to be typical of other small Appalachian meetings in our liberal approach and lack of programming. I do not think that we have the resources to be other than we are.

We hope that other meetings will hold us in the light as we work to maintain our Meeting. Please tell Friends to stop by and see us!

### **Greenville Monthly Meeting**

State of the Meeting: June 1, 2007-April 30, 2008

We have continued to grow in the life of the Spirit during the past year. We celebrated the life of one of the members of the Clemson Worship Group (which is under our care) who died in November. We have also been comforted by the presence of two new attenders during the past year. Nevertheless, we continue to discern a need to attract additional attenders/members to our meeting, given its relatively small size (we have 8-10 weekly attenders).

### GMM's Activities

The Clemson Worship Group remains under our care. As noted above, the Clemson group lost one of its members this year, and her spouse has moved from the area. Thus, the Clemson group has, at most, five regular attenders, and two of these are very young children. One of our attenders has been attending the Clemson meetings every Sunday, and has provided First Day instruction for the two children. We had the opportunity to combine their meeting for worship with ours on at least a couple of occasions, which nurtured both groups.

In June, we celebrated the college graduation of two of our regular attenders, whose families were able to participate in the celebratory activities.

After much thought, we decided to lay down the mid-week Worship Group at Furman University. That opportunity for worship, which we had provided for almost five years, was not attracting any visitors from the community that it was supposed to serve, which is the main reason we decided to lay it down. We remain open to any new opportunities that might present themselves in the Furman community.

One of our members continues to be engaged in exciting overseas activities. He teaches English in a school in Mexico, and also performs volunteer work for the Vineyard Mission. We hope that he will be able to attend Meeting for Worship during his summer vacation here in the U.S., providing us with additional information about opportunities to assist those who face hardship and poverty in the region where he teaches.

GMM representatives also continue to attend programs organized by the Palmetto Friends Group (PFG) and SAYMA. We hosted the annual gathering of PFG at Camp Buckhorn on Paris Mountain in Greenville. There were almost forty attenders, and we felt spiritually and physically renewed by the chance to engage in meaningful fellowship with Friends. One of our attenders participated in a recent SAYMA-sponsored retreat at Celo Friends Meeting in Burnsville, North Carolina, and he shared that inspirational experience with the Greenville Meeting.

In February, we sponsored a Healthcare forum with the Upstate Friends Worship Group (which is under the care of the Charlotte [NC] Friends Meeting). That event gave us a chance to share with one another, and with the public, our concerns about the current inadequacies of the U.S. healthcare system. We are grateful for the gracious support and hospitality that continues to be provided to us by the Chaplin's Office at Furman University.

### GMM's Giving Opportunities

We continue to have a representative on the Board of Directors of the Greenville Area Interfaith Hospitality Network (a local group that focuses on the needs of homeless families); that person also serves as a board member of the Interfaith Forum, a local group dedicated to ecumenicalism. We continue to support Quaker House (located in Fayetteville, NC) and its witness of the peace testimony of the Religious Society of Friends. We also provide donations to several local charities. We remain eager to identify other giving opportunities as they present themselves.

### GMM's Fellowship

GMM continues to rejoice in mutual fellowship. We enjoy socializing after meeting with refreshments and conversation. We were especially heartened to be able to hold one of our Meetings for Worship at the home of an attender during the Christmas holidays.

We pray for opportunities to serve God and our community, and to continue to find joy in the Light and among ourselves.

Presented by Scott Henderson, Clerk

## **Memphis Friends Meeting**

How is the Spirit faring among Memphis Friends?

"Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There's a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." (from "The Anthem" by Leonard Cohen)

Why do the 15 to 30 of us in Memphis Friends Meeting regularly meet together? Perhaps it's because meditating or praying with others in the unstructured Quaker way opens each of us up more fully to the Light that can get in through imperfect cracks. With eyes closed and fearful egos stilled, we sometimes experience together amazing transformative moments that no human Friend controls. Smiles of relief, laughter, tears, singing, physical calming, and soulful insights all happen at unpredictable times in Meetings for Worship!

Memphis Friends Meeting has been a secure spiritual base for a long time for some of us, more briefly for others. Andre Spies and Ali Koch became members this year. Robin Koch (5 years old) and Scott Koch (born December, 2007) became associate members. Teresa Delfin, William and Wen Dolphin are members of Berkeley CA Friends Meeting who frequently worship with us since their move to Memphis. Cathy Gardner, a member of Penn Valley Friends Meeting in Kansas City has worshipped with us for several years now. The Felty family (Janet, Jim, Jeremy, and Johnny) has also been a part of Memphis Friends Meeting while Jim is stationed in nearby Millington NAS. They are returning to Seattle this summer. Quaker sojourners Bill Metz from Oregon and Jim Williams, now from North Carolina, were each with us for several months this year. In September, Bob Hayes moved to Wichita KS to work with a Mennonite project.

We celebrated and nurtured the presence of That Which is Divine in many other ways this year. Smaller spiritual nurture groups have met on Sunday evenings, one organized around prayer, and another one organized around the Thomas Kelly book, A Testament of Devotion. Our First Day School children are now practicing worship sharing most every week: their attention caught by a lit candle passed from child to child to signify who is speaking. We've enjoyed watching the maturing of a 13 year old Memphis birthright Quaker who now supervises the younger children for part of the First Day hour. One group of Quakers do Tai Chi together weekly. One generous member has established a spiritual nurture development fund for us. Meeting for Worship Attending to Business approved an outline of a process for recognizing gifts of ministry this year. Informal times for community have included coffee together after Meetings for Worship and monthly potluck meals in members' homes and on the Meetinghouse porch. Several Memphis Friends have been making visits to Oxford Friends Meeting since the first of the year. These visits have enriched us and nourished our connection with Oxford.

Clearness committee meetings continue to be very valuable sources of spiritual support. In December we established a listening committee to help us discern what direction to take once the space we rent is no longer available. Should we buy a house or should we rent? This decision is facing us soon and it has never been an easy one to deal with.

While knowing we can never do enough to respond to the needs of the greater world, support in the forms of time, money, and energy were given to a number of groups including the Darfur Cookstoves Project, Potters for Peace, Heifer Project, Manna House, Sisters of Mercy, the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center, and the Memphis School of Servant Leadership. In addition we joined Mid-South Interfaith Network for Economic Justice this year and a member played a group leadership role in a national teleconference on Religion and the Roots of Violence.

Memphis Friends also experience the Divine in our involvement in the wider Quaker World. In addition to contributing to many Quaker organizations, several members of the meeting are on boards or in leadership positions of SAYMA, Pendle Hill, FGC Traveling Ministries, Quaker Earthcare Witness, Friends Journal, and

FCNL. Our newsletter connects us with Memphis Friends who've moved, to Friends in SAYMA, and several other meetings.

We enjoyed hosting many visitors to our meeting this year. In February, Peterson Toscano, Quaker playwright and actor from Hartford Monthly Meeting, was in Memphis for a weekend of events around protests of the ex-gay movement and he took time to talk with us on Sunday morning about Spirit, Art, and Activism. A number of Friends also attended his performances, joined in public witness and offered support where we could.

We sponsored a month-long series of activities last September to celebrate 50 Years of Quaker presence in Memphis. Since FNCL yard signs have been sprouting all over Memphis, we invited Joe Volk, Executive Secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation to give an evening lecture – If War is Not the Answer, What is? Idlewild Presbyterian Church provided the space and several other churches and groups joined as co-sponsors.

We also sponsored a booth at the annual Cooper-Young Festival right in front of our meetinghouse. All day long we answered questions, discussed efforts toward peace, sold Palestinian Olive Oil from AFSC-SERO and pots made by First Day Schoolers under the supervision of Quaker artist Nancy White. The proceeds were donated to AFSC and Potters for Peace.

We also put together a photomontage of all the meeting spaces Quakers have used in Memphis over these 50 years. Two of our members – one adult and one high schooler -- enjoyed photographing the sites. They even heard some reminiscences from a neighbor who remembered her Quaker neighbor of many years ago. We displayed the collage in our booth at the festival and it now hangs in our meetinghouse.

On September 22, 2007, the actual anniversary of the establishment of the first Memphis Monthly Meeting, we had a neighborhood cleanup project, an evening meeting for worship, and then a potluck celebration at a Friend's house. More than anything, we celebrated having each other, present and past, as we continue this wonderful, rather indefinable religious experiment in realizing "...bidden or not bidden, God is present." (Carl Jung)

Seasoned in committee and in Meeting for Worship for Business  
Prepared by Robert Pugh with help from Carol Ciscel and Susan Penn  
(Approved: April 13, 2008)

## **NASHVILLE FRIENDS MEETING** **State of the Meeting 7/2007-6/2008**

Nashville Friends Meeting has been a busy place this year. Our numbers have not changed much, but our spirits and sense of community are strengthening in wonderful ways.

This year we approved continuation of our 'experimental' monthly meeting for worship with attention to business format: each month on third First Day we begin centering worship a half hour earlier than usual; after 45 minutes we consider the 'query for the month' for a few minutes and then continue in worship to address our business for 60 minutes or until the Spirit releases us. [Childcare is provided throughout this time.] Attendance at Meeting for Worship for Business has averaged 22 adults over the year rather than our paltry 7-10 in former years. Friends feel that the conduct of business meeting during our worship time has deepened the spiritual energy and awareness during our work together.

Adult second-hour planning and leadership has provided us with well-attended second hour offerings that help us know each other more deeply. Ministry and Counsel Committee continued to sponsor Quakerism classes as requested, with good participation. Two Friends initiated a spiritual formation group this year that they named

Growing in the Light. Fourteen Friends committed to a year of participation. There were three Saturday retreats for all participants, one meeting per month with all participants (leadership was shared), and at least one meeting per month with a small group of four or five Friends. This spiritual formation program has deepened friendships and supported participants spiritually through a year of intentional commitment to spiritual growth and daily spiritual discipline. There have been no dropouts, and the Meeting has benefited from the deeper relationships among us.

High school Young Friends continue to thrive with regular van trips to SAYF retreats, although attendance on First Days is again sparse. Adult Friends helped in many ways for the SAYF retreat this March in Nashville. It was well-attended: 42 SAYFers plus adults! We had the added treat of a van-load of teens from Chapel Hill, NC Friends Meeting. (It is a ten-hour drive each way.) SAYF continues to be a strong spiritual and community support for our teens, and we are very grateful for all the energy that keeps the program going and healthy.

A benefit concert was held at the meeting in Sixth Month 2007. It was a joint fund raiser for the Friends Meeting and the Nashville Buddhist community. Chris Moore and Mark Wingate presented original religious music for peace.

We held our usual two retreats this year: the Fall Retreat at Bethany Hills Center was a great opportunity for the meeting participants to reach out to one another in a relaxed environment; the Regional Gathering (RG) was well-attended by Nashville Friends and representatives of Memphis and Cookeville monthly meetings. During the RG, Hector Black brought us a concern for Friends to have an active presence in the TN prisons (Ideas discussed included Alternatives to Violence Program and Meeting for Worship.); Mary McKinney led sharing about the spiritual formation group experience we have had this year; and Penelope Wright came back to visit and shared her experience of traveling among the wider Friends' communities. Both retreats add a lot to our meeting experience of community.

In keeping with our testimony on Peace, twenty Friends participated in eight visits to the offices of Senators Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker and Representative Jim Cooper as part of the 'Peaceable Assembly Project'. The visits included up to fifty Middle Tennesseans who were part of the nationwide 'Occupation Project' in the spring of 2007 to end the war in Iraq.

'Quaker Cottage' is a small home near our meeting house that has been donated for Meeting use and is administered through meeting volunteers. This home is fully functioning now, with a resident who lives there seven days a week and an available guest facility for up to two people. It's been a pleasure to have Penelope Wright's husband Peter as our guest this year for two weeks each month during half time work for Vanderbilt University (through all the renovations!) Friends who wish to use the guest room while visiting Nashville can call Dick and Maaret Houghton at 615-463-9512.

To those who contributed to the Hibbard Thatcher and Nelson Fuson memorial funds, we are grateful to have been able to use those funds to beautify the Meeting grounds and also replace plantings that died in last year's drought.

On the Fifth Month, Eleventh Day, we had the joy of a witnessing a wedding, between Christina VanRegenmorter and Jessica Humphrey at Montgomery Bell State Park under the care of the Meeting. Friends and family gathered in group camp one (where we have held many retreats) to celebrate for the weekend. Meeting with Attention to Marriage was held on First Day at 10:00 a.m. We rejoice in their happiness together!

Nashville census calculation for 2007:

Members: 59 (28 active)

Attenders: 34 (14 under age 18)

Transferred members out: 1 to Cookeville MM and 1 to New Hampshire

Marriages under the Care of Nashville Friends Meeting-1

No new babies, new members, memorials, or deaths of members or attenders.

## **Oxford Friends Meeting**

This has been a year of adversity for the Oxford Friends Meeting. We have been very grateful for the support of our caring meeting, Memphis Friends Meeting. They have expressed their concern in many ways, attending meeting with us, hosting members of the Oxford meeting from time to time, and responding to requests for help.

We are grateful to those members and attenders who have continued to support the meeting. We intend to continue to meet regardless of the numbers of participants and fully expect return and growth as grief for our losses subsides. Attenders have assured us that this will happen. We have had a large turnout occasionally, particularly for Meeting for Business. We are particularly hopeful of re-establishing an active meeting for children.

Leadership. At the beginning of 2007 the clerk requested leave of absence, and the Ministry and Nurture Committee assumed the role of clerk. Over the summer months Nan Johnson agreed to act as interim clerk. The meeting then decided, in view of the small number of active members and attenders, to eliminate all standing committees and to have only two offices, clerk and treasurer. The current co-clerks are Cora Jordan and Pam Coe. Nan Johnson is treasurer.

Decline in numbers. Sadly the meeting has experienced a dramatic decline in numbers due to death and illness. Since January 2007 two members, Winthrop Jordan and Michael Herrington, and one regular attender, Marilyn Zarzeski, have died. Chronic and acute illnesses have kept attendance low. Grief over the deaths and shock at so many deaths in a small meeting have inhibited some from attending.

We met for almost six months at the Exchange Club, a local charitable organization that opened its facility to us free of charge. Since we have traditionally met at the home of one of the members who died, the move was necessary. Attendance was particularly low while we were meeting at the Exchange Club. Since late summer we have resumed meeting at our traditional meeting place, and occasional attenders have resumed attending occasionally.

Children's meeting has suffered during this period, both because of a paucity of volunteer leaders and because no children attended on many Sundays.

Starkville preparatory meeting. We have continued to act as caring meeting for the Starkville, MS preparatory meeting, although illness has kept us from attending as often as we wanted to. We are proud that their meeting is growing and moving forward toward becoming a monthly meeting.

Participation in the community. We remain active in Interfaith Compassion Ministry (ICM), with four volunteers, one of them a member of the ICM board. A number of members and attenders support ICM financially through the meeting.

We have continued to support AMOS financially and with representation on the board. As AMOS moves toward creation of low cost housing for Oxford, some members of the meeting have expressed an interest in volunteering.

Individuals in the meeting have continued to maintain a ministry for a death row inmate at the Mississippi state penitentiary. The meeting as a whole stands firm in opposition to the death penalty.

Submitted by Pam Coe and Cora Jordan, co-clerks

## **Swannanoa Valley Friends Meeting**

In our fourth year of gathering in the building at 137 Center Avenue in Black Mountain, right in the cradle of a bend in the Swannanoa River, we feel securely at home and settled in our beautiful Meetinghouse, which we have owned now for just over a year.

Meeting for Worship is, as it has consistently been during our 10 years of existence as a Meeting, the hour that

draws us down deep into ourselves and at the same time binds us together as a community. Our periods of silence are profound, and vibrant vocal ministry appears nearly every week as a gift to each of us, even as it reveals us to each other in ever deepening ways. We are thriving and growing in numbers as new attenders are drawn to our loving and embracing community.

This year we celebrated the birth of Charlie Kennedy, the newest addition to our community; we continue to welcome the presence of students from Warren Wilson College who bring their creative energy, and we are blessed by longtime Friends who are now in their 90s. Our Meeting truly enjoys the presence of participating members and attenders from 6 months to 95 years.

Sharing the building with members Mel and Beth Keiser's Common Light program has been a blessing to the Meeting, for many of our members and attenders are active in the Common Light programs as well. We are grateful that our building has multiple uses. In addition to the Common Light programming, we also have a mutually supportive relationship with the Montessori School across the street, and we look forward to outreach and cooperation with other faith communities.

Ministry and Counsel actively nurtures the spiritual life of our Meeting through Care Circles as well as through individual visits as needed. During this past year special attention has been directed to those Members and regular attenders under the care of our Meeting who are unable to attend Meeting for Worship, either because of the confines of advancing age or because they live some distance away. Members of our Meeting have been visiting with these Friends on a regular basis in order to share with them in person and to bring them in some small measure the joy and comfort we find in Meeting.

In October we lost our long-time friend and member Chris Ahrens. A very full memorial service was held under our care at Highland Farms, where we heard many heartfelt messages and testimonies to the far-reaching impact of Chris' life. Then at Christmas time, we mourned the sudden loss of our beloved attender Lewis Bissell. Working with Lewis's family with regard to the memorial service was both a challenge for us and an opportunity for ministry. A memorial service, held under our care at the Jubilee Community Church in Asheville, brought together people across a wide range of religious belief and practice, yet we found that differences melted away in the presence of our deeply shared love for Lewis.

In this year we have become increasingly aware of opportunities to witness to the civil and religious rights of same-gendered couples, offering our perspective on equality within the Yearly Meeting, in our local community, and in the wider Quaker world. We are more and more aware of the many ways that men and women in long-term, same-gender relationships are a blessing to our Meeting and we are eager to share our positive experience and our deeply held convictions with other Meetings.

In the past few months our Peace and Social Concerns Committee has been revived and is now meeting regularly. Individuals in the Meeting carry ongoing concern for issues of poverty, prison reform, the death penalty, Middle East peace, ecology, and area recycling, and we are taking on new concerns regarding the presidential elections, work with interfaith dialogue and action groups, and immigration issues. Two of our members have recently been accepted for graduate study in areas of peace and justice. We are also trying to act collectively as a meeting on some of these issues, rather than just supporting the individual leadings of our members. We look forward to future conversations in our community about our emerging leadings with regard to further social witness.

The adult education forums have been a weekly venue in which we share information, ask questions, and engage in dialogue on particular topics of interest. Through these meetings we have enhanced our knowledge of Quaker history and practice, strengthened our awareness of social and community concerns, and deepened our relationships in the Meeting.

Just this spring our First Day School attendance has nearly tripled in size. Three teachers take turns teaching the class, with ages ranging from 3 to 9 years, and Meeting members and attenders take turns providing valuable assistance as teacher aides. Bible stories and Native American animal tales form the substance of the curriculum, and the children share their experiences in delightful ways in the sharing period after Meeting for Worship.

We are grateful for the many blessings we share as a community. While we celebrate our gifts, we also strive to embrace new areas of growth and awareness. We are seekers and finders, claiming what we have come to know experientially while remaining open to continuing revelation.

### **West Knoxville Friends Meeting**

In many ways, we are functioning as a mature, well-grounded meeting. We seem to be doing well at carrying out the basic functions of a monthly meeting in that we have a welcoming, nourishing meeting for worship every Sunday, a functioning, though small, first day school, and committees that are doing well at carrying out their basic duties. We have also had an inquirer's group that has been especially important for some of our newer Friends. This occurs at a time when we realize that the founders of our meeting are either no longer with us or are no longer as active as they once were. We acknowledge the strong foundation our founders have given us while others of us are finding ways to step into more leadership roles and be more active. One Friend noted that a similar cycle takes place in the SAYF group on a much more frequent basis - seniors graduate and there is concern about who will take their place but the next year younger members step up and the work continues magnificently. We are not, however, overly self-congratulatory about our present state since we are sometimes concerned about the depth of our worship, the adequacy of our religious education at all levels and the timeliness and completeness of our committee work.

Nevertheless, our basic soundness has allowed us to expand our horizons somewhat. We have been able to consider the possibilities of Quaker Quest and recently had a day long workshop with Jane Berger and Gita Larsen to learn more about Quaker Quest. We had good attendance and the workshop gave us a good background that will enable us to decide if we are able to go forward with Quaker Quest at this time. Our Peace and Social Concerns committee, working with other interested folks in the community, recently sponsored a workshop on Alternatives to Military Recruitment with Bill Galvin of the Center for Conscience and War. After a hiatus of several years, last fall we had a meeting retreat and the women's worship-sharing group has started meeting again.

Our care of each other has also blossomed. The role of clearness committees has increased with more Friends seeing such committees as a helpful procedure and an entire committee as a whole has gone through the clearness committee process. We seem to have been better this year at not only seeing where there are needs but also responding to those needs. This response had been seen as the meeting helped the Burial Grounds committee with its large work load, in the work of Ministry and Nurture in starting to develop a safety plan and in the whole network of the meeting as individual needs because of illness and other situations have been met. We have also had an oversight committee for the important work of one of our members in assisting a foreign student to come to this country. While the oversight committee got started late and has needed some time to understand what it needed to do, we have learned a lot about how such a group can be helpful and we will be better able in the future to respond as needed in other situations.

As sometimes happens in smaller groups such as ours, the age ranges in our meeting have changed in recent years. While we had for awhile a large thriving high school group, those individuals have moved on and are scattered in various colleges and other situations. We have now only a few, though certainly treasured, high school students. We now have an exuberant group of preschool-aged girls who bring joy (and some rowdiness) into our meeting for worship. We value seeing them learn to share and learn to make use of the silence. We are

pleased that some young adults are part of the meeting because that has historically been an absent part of our age structure.

One Friend spoke for many of us when she acknowledged that although she comes to meeting to be fed, she also has a responsibility to come prepared to feed the life of the Meeting. She realizes that the depth of her preparation before meeting affects her ability to feed others and she resolved to become a better source of nourishment for others. Others of us can join her in that resolution.

All of these parts of meeting speak to how the Spirit is moving among us. Even though on many Sundays we have limited spoken ministry, we feel the Spirit moving in many ways. We are thankful for the meeting community and the spiritual connectedness we find here.