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Asheville Friends Meeting

Asheville Friends Meeting continues to provide a worship space for about forty people every First Day where we've been blessed with a good balance of silence and well-discerned vocal ministry. We hold regular meetings for worship for the conduct of business and have been able to adjust to a decreased income with various changes in our financial base. We've maintained our giving levels to both Quaker and local service organizations with the guidance of the Peace and Earth Committee, while we reduced our spending in other parts of the budget for 2008. It will continue to be a challenge for us to support the work we see needing both financial and direct contributions and to be stewards of our community and property. The House and Grounds Committee enthusiastically cared for the property needs, including the removal of a rickety set of outside stairs at the back of the meetinghouse.

Our Pastoral Care Committee and the Needs Fund, under the care of Ministry and Counsel Committee, have reached out to meet the needs of members of our community. One of our stalwart elder members, Alice Brown, died after a brief illness in 2008, leaving a feeling of loss, but also a constant reminder to us of the value of each of our members and of the responsibilities we have to our world and to each other.

To keep our community spiritually well and in touch with each other our Communications Committee has updated the directory of active Friends and maintained, as well as redesigned the meeting website; the Spiritual Enrichment Committee planned a fall series of adult First Day lessons; and the Nominating Committee struggled to find the right people to serve the meeting, in spite of the dual problems of lacking a clerk of nominations and having a smaller community from which to fill vacancies. A core group of Friends meets each Fourth Day in a Friend's home with the goal of praying for peace followed by a shared meal of stone soup. The meeting held a residential retreat in the fall around the theme of "Telling Our Stories."

Two beloved members, Eda and Gerald Smith, had extended health problems which resulted in their transferring membership to Celo Friends Meeting, much closer to their home. We have missed them, but are glad of their improved health that has allowed them to join with other SAYMA Friends. The wider Friends' network is a comfort and a strength to us.

The children of the meeting are the treasure and the promise of a future for our meeting. We are thankful for the families that enrich our meeting with their presence, and when new families come our way we rejoice! One of our Young Friends has ably provided child care so that parents can participate and continue to be nurtured and pass the nurturing on to their

children. The Religious Education Committee regularly provides lessons twice monthly for elementary aged children and guides the meeting's intergenerational activities the other two First Days. We enjoy an annual Secret Friends exchange that gives us a way to playfully cross the generational divide. We also celebrate our younger Friends and those who work with them with a cookout each summer.

Asheville Friends are well and give thanks for the Light and Divine guidance we have received.

Athens Friends Meeting

Since the last State of the Meeting report submitted by the Athens Friends Meeting, we have a new and deeper sense of how the Light Within is leading us to be a light in our community for those who seek for the values and actions of Quakers that may enrich their lives.

The meeting is fortunate to meet in a building it shares with one of the best known ministries to the poor and homeless in the Athens area, Our Daily Bread. This ministry is a ministry of the United Methodist Church but various faith groups and secular organizations participate in the daily feeding ministry. The Athens Friends Meeting has cooperated and worked with two faith groups to serve sack lunches to the homeless on Sunday afternoons. One was Hill Chapel Baptist Church, a predominately African American congregation and the other was the Athens Baha'i Community. At Christmas, we assembled hygiene kits for the guests of Our Daily Bread and those were distributed on 12/25 by Our Daily Bread volunteers. The Meeting participated in the Souper Bowl on Super Bowl Sunday. This was a potluck/fundraiser with Friends bring soup to share with one another and giving contributions to Our Daily Bread Ministries. Also, the meeting assisted a family at Christmas through a Friend associated with an affordable housing organization in Athens. The meeting contributes to a community wide fund administered by the Ark which assists low income folks with medicine and food. An annual celebration of the Ark's ministry is a worship service of hymns which saw several Friends singing in the community choir. The Quaker values of equality and integrity shine through the light of service by Athens Friends Meeting to the poor and homeless in Athens.

The light of peace shines out to the Athens community in various ways that Athens Friends Meeting witnesses to peace in the community. Foremost is by way of several Friends participating in the silent vigil for peace held every Tuesday afternoon from 5:00 PM until 6:00 PM by Women in Black. This vigil is witnessed by a vast number of folks in Athens as it is held at The Arch on the University of Georgia Campus which is on a main thoroughfare in Athens. Several Friends attended the Cost of War Tour sponsored by FCNL which came to the University of Georgia. We have had on going correspondence with inmates confined to death row. We recently have been writing to a man in Mississippi who seeks assistance in fighting the death penalty throughout the country but feels extra effort in his own state is the first step to take. The meeting has a presence at the Human Rights Festival each year in May to answer questions members of the community may have regarding the peace testimony of Quakers. There are Friends who are active in the immigrant community in our area and help us stay updated on the concerns of the immigrant community.

Athens Friends Meeting has had many inreach activities which keep it mindful of the light of community and nurture that Quaker value among us. From time to time we have midweek meeting which many times takes the form of worship sharing. One Friend has recently revived what we call Friendly Lunch, a gathering of Friends for lunch in one of downtown Athens great restaurants once per month. We have two special times of Meeting for Worship during the year on Christmas and Easter. We hosted a meeting of the SAYMA Ministry and Nurture Committee in October, 2008 that ended with the Meeting sharing a potluck with the Committee and all had a grand time. We have Friends who participate in the activities of SAYF and help the Meeting stay mindful of the needs of that group. In March the Meeting participated in a Quaker Quest Workshop on a Saturday conducted by Gita, Barry and Amy (thanks Friends/friends!). The Meeting is in the midst of considering how Quaker Quest would work for Athens Friends Meeting in regard to inreach and possibly outreach. Athens Friends Meeting recommends to all meetings the workshop as it stretches Friends to consider how the Light shines through their meeting. Athens Friends Meeting has had several new attenders in the past few months and we see our average attendance for Meeting for Worship slightly increasing. A special project our Meeting participated in was the Library of Congress/American Folklife Center Inauguration 2009 Sermons and Orations Project. We submitted to the project a video of the Meeting considering and responding to the query during worship sharing during second hour, "What is the significance of the inauguration of President elect Barack Obama?"

Our hope for the coming year is that our Light will shine brightly in the Athens community and that that Light will reach seekers who need a loving and caring community to nurture their seeking and questioning.

Atlanta Friends Meeting

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

The impetus for the formation of the **Refugee Support Group** in April 2008 was an eight-mile walk taken by two Burundi men in late 2007 from their apartment complex to attend our Meeting for Worship. These men, recently relocated from refugee camps in Tanzania, were Quakers who had attended a programmed Friends church in Africa. They and their families, along with another Burundi family, have been attending regularly since their first visit.

The group supported the Burundi families in their transition to America and unprogrammed Friends worship and reached out to the meeting community to find resources – by organizing carpools, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and bi-lingual singing and worship sharing sessions; and by providing material assistance. Building these relationships enriched the spiritual lives of members and attenders, and the Burundi Friends presence brought a new spiritual energy and life to the Meeting. The language, worship, and cultural differences, as well as the special needs of those who have experienced the ravages of war, presented new opportunities for the Meeting to learn and grow.

Though the work of the **Administration** Committee can seem mundane, the improvements of the facilities and in paper-saving information technology were informed by environmentalism; new hiring policies and anti-racism work were based in the testimony of equality; the development of clear, defined administrative processes was rooted in the simplicity testimony; and all of the committee's work stemmed from love of community and the goal of making the Meeting more welcoming and inclusive. The committee was especially gratified that the new employees -- Valerie Barlow, Friend in Residence, and Jonah McDonald, Office Coordinator – also approached their work from these spiritual foundations.

The **Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting** (CURAFM) continued to raise awareness of racism through a Listening Ear for concerns about racism, coordinating forums, and providing articles for the welcome packets, the AFM website, and the newsletter. The **Nurturing Young Friends** Ad Hoc committee met frequently to find ways to nurture our young people and to help them grow into functioning Quaker adults. After implementing a number of changes, they transferred their work to other standing AFM committees.

Care and Counsel Committee focused on the testimony of community. They sought to encourage gatherings of members and attenders outside regular Meeting for Worship, with the goal of increasing and deepening individuals' care of each other. From the Couple Enrichment sessions held in February to the Thanksgiving potluck at the end of the year, they filled the year with Welcome Dinners, Friendly Eights gatherings, a Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast, a Welcome to Babies and Toddlers, and a member's 90th birthday party. They also held memorial services (four); arranged clearness committees (at least six); sent get-well cards, sympathy cards and congratulatory cards; and gave out candles to departing members.

Despite best efforts by the **Finance** Committee and **Treasurer**, among others, the meeting ended 2008 with the largest deficit in its history -- slightly over \$10,000. Contributions, interest income, and rental income were lower than in 2007; the total number of contributors decreased as well. The **Fundraising** Committee focused on creating a website and adding amenities to attract renters, but produced no income. Expenses were under budget in some areas (employee expenses, utilities, and expenses for most committees). But building maintenance expenses exceeded budget because of an active **Meetinghouse** committee that addressed many long standing issues.

The **Educational Scholarship** Committee awarded \$500 scholarships for the 2008-2009 academic year to eight students in the Meeting.

Is our Meeting a place of spiritual power and impact? The **Ministry and Worship** committee reflected on this and other characteristics of vital Meetings at its retreat, especially the impact it makes upon its members, its attenders, the local community, and the wider world. At Meeting for Worship there were familiar concerns over the vocal ministry—is it of a spiritual nature or personal or political? A newly created early morning weekday worship was consistently attended.

Sharing spiritual journeys the first of each month in adult religious education class was uplifting, along with class study of various publications. Forums were held less frequently during the year, although one --- “Quakers and Money: right work, right investing, right contributions and right sharing” --- generated considerable interest and attendees. 2008 saw four new membership requests that were approved, four transfers of memberships to other meetings, and one membership resignation. Three marriages took place during the year under the care of the Meeting.

Advancement Committee: The Gwinnett Community Worship group was unable to find a satisfactory meeting space and was laid down. The committee helped with the formation of a new worship group in Rome, Georgia; and late in the year, they also began working with a new worship group in Carrollton, Georgia.

Social Concerns Committee: Green Friends studied ways to reduce individual electric & other energy consumption. Those who attended the Quaker EarthCare Witness annual meeting learned ways to strengthen people as integral in nature and therefore motivated to greater efforts in Earth care. AFM funds supported Friends’ efforts in a strenuous but successful neighborhood voter registration/gentrification education campaign. Friends prayerfully considered the Universal Health Care concern both in committee & in Monthly Meeting, though not to unity for support of any particular bill.

Nominating Committee worked to find ways to match the gifts and leadings of members of the Meeting with the needs of the community. Recognizing that people’s professions may not be their avocations, they sought to help them identify the latter. They held a committee fair in September to help in this effort, and most major positions were filled by year’s end. In order to reduce the workload on the Newsletter Editor, they recommended the establishment of an editorial board to assist the editor each month.

This indeed is a ‘blessed and beloved community’ that in 2009 will continue to grow in spirit as we reach out to others.

Berea Friends Meeting

Berea Friends cover a wide age spectrum, from three to 95 years. We experience great joy in this age span and in our connections with Friends all along the span. While different ages present different challenges and stretch us beyond our comfort level, we are managing by the grace of God to appreciate the gifts and respond to the needs that arise with each age.

Berea Friends continue to be blessed by the participation and energy of a large group of young people, including both teens (10 – 15 regularly attending) and younger children (five regularly attending). When more than half of those present at the beginning of meeting for worship leave for the youth First Day School program, the change in the room is palpable. The teens attend SAYF retreats regularly and participate in many meeting activities, from the annual Christmas play to trash pickups. In June they treated the meeting to a sit-down dinner and talent show, in appreciation for the support the meeting has provided. Everyone enjoyed the culinary and artistic creativity!

The teachers involved with the teens and younger children have struggled the past year with issues of curriculum, religious education vs. social interaction, and how much control and decision making will be placed in the hands of our teens. As these issues have been threshed, it has been an opportunity for the teachers to contemplate their own spiritual identities and religious differences, as well as thinking through the values that are important to pass on during First Day School.

As part of his Webelos scout faith requirement, Ethan Wilton earned the That of God religious emblem, which is awarded by the Friends Committee on Scouting.

Our ministry and counsel committee set up a committee of care to support member Nancy Lee-Riffe in making the transition from her home to an assisted living facility. Nancy and her children, all of whom live outside Kentucky, welcomed the group’s help with the arrangements. She is now settled and brings us periodic insightful reports from her new venue, which she compares to her much earlier experience as a college freshman.

More recently, member Harry Robie was diagnosed with cancer and has begun treatment. He and his wife Laura are facing this challenge with courage, humor and grace. As of April, they have managed to continue an active lifestyle including traveling.

This year Berea Friends Meeting's annual review of members and attenders took the form of four small group meetings in members' homes for worship, discernment and discussion of the spiritual gifts that we bring to our faith community.

In April 2008, we held a visioning retreat. A strong theme was the importance of the meeting community accepting more environmental responsibility both in our households and at the meetinghouse. The meeting subsequently received a generous gift to apply to greening the meetinghouse and/or making it more useful to the wider community. We are still considering how best to proceed with the meetinghouse. We are gearing up to collect data on our household energy use as a basis for setting goals for reduction. Meanwhile, the meetinghouse care committee has been grappling with a broken furnace, a fallen tree, bridge repairs, a water main leak and numerous smaller challenges – all while helping point us in the direction of longer-term sustainability.

Our peace and social concerns committee, though small, has been more consistently active this year than any time in decades. Each month the committee sets up a letter-writing table with sample messages on a timely topic. From August through April, the letter-writing table generated 200 letters from Berea Friends to decision-makers in Frankfort and Washington. In October, the committee hosted the screening of a documentary on the death penalty at Berea's public library and in November coordinated demonstrations in Frankfort and Berea in opposition to Kentucky's first execution in ten years.

In March, around the anniversary of the beginning of the current Iraq war, Berea Friends joined with two other Berea congregations and Berea College centers to co-sponsor two events with AFSC resources. The first was Speak for Peace, a speaking tour by an Iraqi and a U.S. veteran of the Iraq war. The second was the state-sized version of Eyes Wide Open, an exhibit of boots representing all the Kentuckians who have lost their lives in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts and shoes representing civilian deaths.

We faced a financial challenge in the fall of 2008. In the spring, Friends had approved a budget that included \$5,000 more in contributions than the previous year's budget. In the fall, half way through our fiscal year, we found ourselves so far behind budget that we would have to eliminate contributions to wider Quaker organizations as well as curtail other activities unless more funds came in. Friends rose to the occasion, and this year's budget is back on track. However, it was a wake-up call, and we are reconsidering how we might prepare budgets differently in the future.

We rejoiced in an unusual marriage this year. Beth Myers and Jonathan Schinhofen, who had been married in a civil ceremony 15 years before, asked to be married under the care of the meeting. Following a clearness committee and approval by meeting for business, we gathered for a meeting for worship for marriage, welcoming family and friends of the couple for the worship service. The celebration following included a cake with a family of four dinosaur toys on top, representing the characters of Beth and Jonathan and their two young sons, David and Nevin.

Every fall, Kentucky Quakers hold an All Kentucky Gathering. Lexington, Louisville and Berea Friends Meeting rotate responsibility for planning and program. In 2008, the 25th anniversary of the gathering, it was Berea's turn. We invited Quaker musician and chaplain Ben Tousley from Boston. With "Sing, Share and Rejoice" as the theme for the weekend, Ben led a record number of Kentucky Quakers (49 adults and 25 young people) in singalongs and sessions on healing songs and stories. While he was in Berea, we shared Ben with others through an ecumenical gathering for remembrance and reflection on September 11 and a music and storytelling program for children and adults at the public library.

Birmingham Monthly Meeting (with Royal Worship Group)

This year Birmingham Friends Meeting has welcomed several new members and attenders. We enjoy and appreciate the talent, energy and leadership that these Friends bring to BFM, expanding our interests and deepening the spirituality of our meeting.

The meeting continues to cherish a sense of communion as we hold each other in the Light in our seeking. Listening, sharing and sometimes munching are key to our experience of communion with each other. Adults have been brought

closer together by Clearness Committees for membership, by interacting with the children and youth in First Day School, by a Creative Listening series that allowed us to know each other more deeply, by reciprocal support in times of illness and crisis, by sharing rides to Meeting (what one Friend calls “No Member Left Behind”), by coffee and conversation between worship and second hour, by being asked to present a 2nd hour program on an issue of concern to us and by gathering at monthly Simple Suppers, Women’s Meetings and special events, such as a showing of Bill Moyers’ Faith & Reason video series. A newly added Outreach Committee seeks to welcome visitors and have quality materials on hand to tell them about Friends’ worship and testimonies, and Friends report that a sense of welcome and safety is an important part of the worship experience.

Our young Friends are excited about beginning to participate in Meeting for Business and in planning their own activities. They appreciate the meaningful curriculum that education clerk Connie LaMonte has developed for them, and parents of younger children appreciate First Day School as a safe place where young children feel comfortable.

We also feel deeply connected to wider Quaker organizations through participation in their work and through attendance at SAYMA and FGC gatherings. Several Birmingham Friends will present workshops at the 2009 SAYMA gathering, and we look forward to hosting the SAYMA Rep Meeting in March. Birmingham Friends found the FGC program honoring the 50th anniversary of the address of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to the FGC gathering tremendously moving. Another was pleased to have support to participate in the national AFSC meeting on Eyes Wide Open. A Friend who has been away from Birmingham reported feeling in touch with our meeting by keeping abreast of the concerns of wider Quaker organizations.

The call to live our principles is an important unifying theme in our Meeting. Birmingham Friends individually and corporately express their spirituality through service to a variety of local and statewide social concerns: feeding the homeless at The Table, serving on the board of Greater Birmingham Ministries to meet the needs of Birmingham’s urban poor, furthering interfaith understanding by serving on the Alabama Faith Council, protesting war and seeking peaceful alternatives in concert with Birmingham Peace Project, supporting tax and state constitution reform through Alabama Arise, working to end the death penalty, supporting the lesbian and gay communities by sponsoring a table at the annual PrideFest and presenting a donation of our property tax equivalent to the neighborhood Avondale School PTA.

For many of us, sponsoring six showings of the Alabama Eyes Wide Open exhibit throughout Alabama (2007 through February 2008) was a deeply moving and spiritual experience. One Friend, mindful of the risks of bringing the exhibit to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, was moved by reading the name cards identifying soldiers and reported finding a handwritten note that said, “We miss you,” under a pair of boots at the end of the exhibit. Another Friend spoke of the two showings of the exhibit in Auburn, Alabama, as leaving an “important imprint” on that community.

Our second hour programs have been especially interesting and rewarding this year, and Friends appreciate programs that “engage critical thinking in faith” in a safe atmosphere. Studies of Walt Whitman’s Song of Myself and Parker Palmer’s A Hidden Wholeness, along with a film and lecture on the life of Bayard Rustin, have sparked thoughtful conversations and rewarding sharing. It also enriched the meeting when Friends shared an aspect of their life’s work with us. In some cases, Friends are able to carry our Second Hour discussions to the wider community. For example, a local Progressive Muslim group is taking up Palmer’s book for its next discussion.

We still have much to do, however, to meet our ideals. We are a small meeting and we constantly struggle not to overextend our meeting—or to overburden energetic individuals. Committees need members. There are Friends with special needs that we will need to address in the coming year. We need to continue to be intentional about nurturing our Quaker Youth (and changing as they mature—so quickly!), and we need to help new attenders integrate fully into the community. We would like to have a stronger visiting program with the Royal Worship Group, which is far enough removed from our location to create a transportation challenge. And we need to balance all of these other needs somehow with the need to be silent and at peace—to just be.

2/1/09

Royal Worship Group

Attendees of the Royal (Alabama) Worship group gather regularly at 10 a.m. on Sundays for worship and meditation at the home of Daryl Bergquist and Sara Rose.

We are drawn by the presence of spiritual community and the opportunity for corporate meditation. We are involved in and supportive of each other's lives.

For some, the connection with the Religious Society of Friends is vital. For others, it is convenient when answering the frequent question of "What church do you go to?" and for Friends' historical peace testimony. Others embrace a more individualistic approach or are ambivalent to the affiliation of the worshipping community.

We are all seekers, welcoming the opportunities and challenge of learning from each other's attempts of bringing the spiritual into our daily lives. We read the queries in SAYMA's A Guide to Our Faith and Our Practice in preparation for this report, and intend to experiment with reading a query at the beginning of worship.

Current attendees number 8 adults and 1 baby. An average meeting is with 6 people and 1 dog.

1/25/09

Brevard Friends Meeting

Members: 15 Attendees: 20 Ave. Attd. Meeting for Worship: 20

Brevard Friends Meeting continues to be grateful to be able to meet at College Walk. Our Meeting room is pleasant, comfortable, and adequate for our present numbers. Attendance at Meetings for Worship remains quite steady, with the addition of several new regular attendees. A smaller group attends our bi-weekly Adult Forums. About 1/3 of us live in Brevard, 1/3 outside of Brevard but within Transylvania County, and 1/3 outside the county.

We were saddened by the death of Chet Holmlund in September. Chet had been active in our Meeting for 12 years. He took his turn on several committees, and was most recently our leader at Adult Forum discussions.

We are gladdened by the adoption by Becky and Dan Ellis of Kate, age 13, from China who joins Andrew, 11, who was adopted from China by the Ellises two years ago. They are our only children/youth attendees. They prefer to stay for the full Meeting for Worship.

We have a monthly potluck dinner on the first First Day following Meeting for Worship. We have had four Friendly Eights sessions.

We continue to support, mostly with money, our local Sharing House, Center for Dialogue, and Bread of Life, a soup kitchen. One of our members is a volunteer at Bread of Life, and two are active in the local peace group.

A concern was raised regarding the "quality of our Meeting for Worship" because a few of our attendees find it helpful to read briefly as a means of centering. After several efforts to openly discuss this matter were unsuccessful, we decided to have a "Worship Sharing" on this topic following Meeting for Worship. There were about 20 who participated. Several shared their reasons for reading, and everyone shared their own truth.

Our Clerk, Wendell Holland, decided to step down as Clerk at the end of December, instead of next June. Bob French agreed to be "interim-Clerk" until then, at which time Richard Zelman will become our Clerk.

Our Adult Forum concluded its study of The Inward Journey, from the Christian Tradition, edited by Lorraine Kisly. We will next do our own version of "Quakerism 101" using The Quakers, A very Short Introduction, by Pink Dandelion.

Celo Friends Meeting

This was the year we moved into our new meeting house. Making this move was the culmination of a process and project that has both challenged and stimulated our Meeting over many years. What began in 1996 as a concern for a decent dwelling for a caretaker with a bathroom suitable for public use has now yielded not just these but a wonderful room for fellowship and a beautiful worship space as well. It was important to pay careful attention to Friends' process in making each decision in the planning and construction in order to maintain the spiritual health of our Meeting.

We started worshipping in our new space in June when the children carried embers from the fire in our old building and kindled a fire on the new hearth. In September we held a called Meeting for the dedication of the new building. Friends and neighbors from near and far who helped with construction, and contributed to our effort were invited, and over 100 attended. A wonderfully gathered Meeting occurred which recognized the contribution of all who had worked on the building. We also acknowledged our attachment to our old goat barn where we have met for many years. The gathering became a celebration of our Meeting as a spiritual home in addition to celebrating our new physical home. Since that time we have appreciated having the bigger and more comfortable space for our children's Christmas program and for a memorial service for our neighbor Bobby Wells. As Friends we recognize that our faith and practice don't depend on things of the material world such as new meeting houses. In this case the process of building as much as the building itself has strengthened our Meeting community.

Our weekly Meeting for Worship is the anchor of our spiritual life. Ministry and Care has worked on a Guide to Meeting for Worship to be printed and put in benches for new attenders as well as to serve as a refresher for regular attenders and members. Ministry and Care also continues to take responsibility for providing a query to be read at Meeting for Worship once a month. This has proven to stimulate our worship community. We have considered the question of vocal ministry and how to strengthen and deepen the vocal ministry in our Meeting. Our current practice is to reserve a few minutes after silent Worship for "additional messages". This is often a very full time. We are considering whether we can or should encourage more of these messages to be delivered in the body of the Meeting. An attender raised the question of why the same people tend to speak every First Day. In an effort to address this we held a worship sharing session on the topic of vocal ministry. It was held immediately after regular Meeting for Worship in order to encourage participation of new attenders.

We have held a number of adult education forums in an effort to deepen our spiritual sharing, sometimes inviting outside resource people. With attention to Earth Care one of our members offered a workshop on Our Carbon Footprint giving fruitful thought to how we live and die. A number of Friends hold an ongoing Sunday morning Bible study using JoAnne and Larry Spears pamphlet Friendly Bible Study.

We continue to have an active First Day School program with a large group of children ranging in age from 2-13 years old. Younger children learn to play cooperatively during stories, craft projects, and nature walks. The older children's First Day School topics included Quaker leaders around the world and social and economic issues with activities including games and clay projects. We participated in the Empty Bowl Project to raise money for hunger relief locally and in the world. We practiced compassion and creativity by organizing a food drive for local Reconciliation House and a fundraising event for Heifer International and UNICEF. A few of the youth attended an event by Asheville Student Peace Alliance as well as SAYF for the first time. A youth directory was created this year, and we had some events for social fellowship time. We had a Christmas program dedicated to a Quaker project for the street children of Kenya which united 15 children with the support of volunteers to produce an enthusiastic program with dances, songs, and a play.

Charleston Friends Meeting

How has the truth fared in thy meeting this year?

Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Seek to live in affection as true Friends in your Meetings, in your families, in all your dealings with others, and in your relationship with the outward society. The power of God is not used to compel us to Truth; therefore, let us renounce for ourselves the power of any man over any other man and, compelling no man, seek to lead others to Truth through love. Let us teach by being ourselves teachable.

Keep to the simplicity of Truth. Seek for its manifestations in prayer, in reading matter, in the arts, and in all experiences of daily life (Advices, in Faith and Practice, Philadelphia YM 1972).

Charleston Friends have been called to consider Truth and each Friend's vision of Truth through its worship and ministry this past year. We are acutely aware that individuals have partial and incomplete glimpses of Truth, that we see "through a glass darkly." This has been exemplified in Meeting's struggle to be caring and supportive to an attender, who has suffered legal intervention in his family life, while not outrunning our ability to understand the truth of his situation.

We weren't as successful as we would have wished in the effort. Our members gained Clearness about how Quaker principles apply to a difficult, real world experience. We learned about the necessity of using discretion when invoking Meeting's presence and authority, while still providing at least some measure of caring and non-judgmental support. We pray for healing for our Friend and his family and we pray for sufficient Light that we can minister tenderly.

As a small meeting, we are sometimes few in number, but Meeting for Worship rarely passes in complete silence. Vocal ministry increases in depth and breadth of participation, perhaps encouraged by the reading of queries each month, the setting aside of the last few minutes for sharing joys and concerns, and the periodic worship sharing we have undertaken. Other corporate activities that aided our spiritual development and strengthened worship included continued discussions of Bringing Religious Education Home, a new book group which has met over potluck meals, and ongoing twice monthly Bible study.

Occasionally we are blessed with outside speakers and presenters. This year, they included: Coston Davis from the West Virginia National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; a discussion of sustainable farming led by a young adult Friend who is attempting to practice it; and a presentation about providing health care services to needy rural Haitians.

In managing our business, Charleston has had some rather intense and often long Meetings for Business. On reflection, this appears due to the ambitious agenda of items covered, rather than to lack of organization. With the exception of Peace and Social Justice, we operate as a committee of the whole, which expedites decision making at the expense of occasionally protracted discussion as Friends seek to understand the concern and decide how to address it. This year we have committed ourselves to increased social ministry, greater participation in wider Quaker affairs. We moved towards supporting one of our youth as a released Friend. We rejoice in the skill of our clerks in gently guiding us through the business at hand and sensitively recording the results.

In cooperation with the Floyd, Virginia Monthly Meeting, Charleston Friends celebrated the wedding of Alison Wise and Ian Slyboom after the manner of Friends in June. Alison is the daughter of two Meeting members; we rejoice in their new family, new home, and in God's gift of healing to Ian after a serious auto accident.

Meeting has continued its efforts to broaden outreach to seekers in the community. We have begun offering Friends Journal to local libraries, and have joined other like minded West Virginia area meetings to sponsor programs on public radio. We've considered a Quaker Quest series, but have not felt able to meet the commitments of time and energy required.

We continue in our social ministry, which involves preparing meals at a local women's shelter and men's shelter. In support of a community response to a serious incident of racial hatred, Meeting sent a work party to help paint the interior of "The House That Love Built." The American Friends Service Committee has sponsored and organized much of the effort. Through the Peace and Social Justice Committee, we offer support and guidance to the Service Committee's work in West Virginia. Two members serve on regional and/or national AFSC boards and committees. We also contribute both financial and intellectual support to the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

This past year we decided that we are so appreciative of the social mission of the organization from which we rent meeting space—the Religious Council for Community Renewal—that we decided to make an additional contribution beyond the rent to advance its work. We also appreciate the work of several other community voluntary organizations, and discovered a new opportunity to be supportive in spite of our small numbers and busy schedules. After a process of

discernment with one young adult Friend, we released him to work for a community advocacy and educational organization on our behalf. This realized a dream Charleston Friends have had for years.

In 2008, Charleston doubled its attendance at SAYMA. There, one Friend gave a well-received blues workshop. In another form of inter-visitation, Charleston Friends Meeting is organizing this year's West Virginia Friends Gathering September 12-13. We have had fall gatherings for many years for worship, fellowship, and discussion. The location and program of the gathering will be on our web site.

1 March 2009

Chattanooga Friends Meeting

In stark contrast to 2007, 2008 did not bring a large influx of new attenders to our Meeting. We enjoyed steady attendance by most of the previous year's newcomers. Several of them also became constant participants in elements of the life of the Meeting in addition to meetings for worship. One of our stalwart active-member couples moved away toward the end of the year; a former member returned to town and the Meeting, and a family with two young children began attending regularly. We consulted with a Quaker green architect on recommendations for expanding our Meetinghouse to have larger spaces for worship and First Day School. Jere Licciardello came under a leading to work against torture. He attended the conference titled "A National Summit on Torture: Religious Faith, Torture, and Our National Soul" in Ninth Month, 2008. In a Second Hour session Jere brought to the Meeting information he learned there and his own newly-begun vital testimony against torture. We added to our membership roll one who had been a very regular attender and active in the work of Meeting for a few years. Five of our youth "graduated" into SAYMA's "Southern Appalachian Young Friends" program. They have continued very active and enjoying it a lot.

In the fall our First Day School started the practice of using curriculums for the younger children's class to be followed by the four or five teachers who rotate teaching one First Day each month. The first curriculum completed in Twelfth Month was "Friends Make Choices." It explored how Quakers make decisions and included learning about Friends' testimonies. In one of Meeting's Second Hours we discussed principles for how teachers will teach FDS classes around the use of a curriculum and concluded as follows: "We agreed that we need to respect each other and different teaching and learning styles, use age-appropriate material lessons with relevancy to each child's life and be prepared but flexible as the Spirit leads us. We also agreed that, whatever curriculum we use, the goal in teaching our children will be to stimulate and nurture their spiritual growth."

Our Meetings for Worship held every First Day continue to be the sustaining and inspiring central element in the life of Chattanooga Friends Meeting.

Columbia Friends Meeting

Columbia Friends Meeting was energized by the engagement of Friends by searching for a new meeting space, in issues of peace, the environment, and other social concerns, in supporting each other and in searching for a deeper appreciation of the inner Light.

The number and age span of our young Friends increased so we made plans to provide activities and enrichment for them, including paid child care by older young Friends during 2nd hour discussion. Two young Friends graduated from high school and we celebrated with a party and the gift of religious books. The young Friends continue to prepare lunch for the homeless through Food not Bombs on the 4th first day each month.

One of our college age young adult Friend's attended the annual FCNL meeting in November and has agreed to be FCNL rep for SAYMA.

A graduate student at the University of South Carolina and one of our members have worked together to start a Quaker student group at the university called Quaker Journey Campus Fellowship. It has been approved by the university and will start meeting in the spring semester.

We continue to explore options for a Meeting House. We decided to move to a different rented space and continue to look for a good permanent home.

Ministry and Nurture Committee suggested that Peace and Social Concerns be a committee of the whole and as such one 2nd hour discussion each month concentrates on these issues. The meeting co-sponsored the Sabeel Conference on peace in the Middle East. Individual members planned and provided hospitality for this conference. The meeting continues to support the local food bank with food, money and volunteer activities as well a monthly visitation to the federal prison in Edgefield. The meeting endorsed the SAYMA Minute on torture. We sent money to FUM to support activities in Kenya after the post election unrest. We did that to show support where we had common ground. We supported a young friend and her family where there was discrimination in her high school regarding gay and lesbian students.

There were opportunities for friends to support meeting families who were going through life events such as the birth of a baby, aging parents with health issues, illness and surgeries. Besides food and visits, flowers and prayers, quilts were made for two elderly members and a new baby.

Some members connected with the Bush River Quaker Descendents reunion group which has cleaned up the historic Quaker cemetery in Newberry, South Carolina. They attended the reunion, helped with state wide publicity and held a meeting for worship with the group (most of whom are no longer Quakers).

Meeting for worship is quiet and would benefit from more spirit led vocal ministry. One of our members has been actively involved in Quaker Quest and has brought to us the issue of voicing our beliefs and being willing to express them. Our spirit has been strengthened by the involvement of members and attenders in wider Quaker activities such as the Quaker Earthcare Witness conference, FCNL, Quaker House, FWCC and AFSC.

Cookeville Friends Meeting

Spirit is alive and well in Cookeville. We continue to enjoy our small spiritual family and community.

Our counter-recruitment efforts with Veterans for Peace continue at three local high schools. In an attempt to expose more young people to Quaker values and give them more information on alternatives to military service, we began a Facebook group called Friends of Peace. We also have two friends who participate in Second Life virtual Quaker meetings.

The weekly peace vigils on the courthouse square continued until the beginning of the Obama administration. It was felt that we should take a break for the first one hundred days of the new administration to wait and see what happens in Washington and hold the new president and his administration in the Light.

We were blessed to have Peterson Toscano visit for a second time. He shared his play "Transfigurations" with our meeting and did his final public performance of his play "The Reeducation of George W. Bush" for the wider Cookeville community.

Our meeting is also co-sponsoring the film "For the Bible Tells Me So" with other area churches. This "remarkable documentary boldly takes on a loaded topic – Christianity and homosexuality – and examines it both intellectually and emotionally."

Both of the above events have brought us into closer contact with the Tennessee Tech chapter of the Lambda Group.

Our annual retreat in September featured an introduction to the Alternatives to Violence program led by Thais Carr, and Caroline and Gary Kiev, of the Nashville meeting.

We enjoyed our visit from SAYMA's Ministry and Nurture committee in January, 2009, and are grateful for their outreach efforts.

We continue to have second hour discussions on various topics including the Quaker testimonies. We also had a visit from a representative of Mothers Acting Up and hosted a discussion with members of a local Wiccan group. Upcoming second hour discussions include the gospel of Thomas and a visit from Chuck Hein of Citizens Against Torture.

We continue to meet in the basement of the Wesley Foundation United Methodist Campus Ministry building, where we recently set up recycling containers for the Center's and our use.

We feel the lack of younger people and families with small children in our Meeting.

We are a small group but we feel vital at our core.

Crossville Friends Meeting

Our Meeting continues with a small, dedicated core of members. During the latter part of 2008, we focused our attention on outreach. We developed a website (www.crossvillefriends.org) to help expand awareness of our Meeting. During the last 2 months of 2008, we had some 100 visitors to our new web site. We have placed several notices in the local newspapers inviting spiritual seekers to visit our Meeting and are contributing a monthly column about our Meeting to the religion section of the Crossville newspaper. We also had a longer article on the Quaker peace testimony appear in the local paper. We have scheduled an open house to further expand awareness of Quakerism in our community. We are hoping all of these efforts will attract new people to our Meeting. At the very least, we are fostering more understanding of Quakerism in the community.

In May, Gladys Draudt retired as clerk after 15 years of service. Our Meeting expressed its deep appreciation to Gladys for her dedicated work. Joe Parko began serving as clerk in June. Our Meeting suffered the loss of one of our founding members, Bill Evans, in December. Bill was a guiding light for our Meeting and continued to support us after he and his wife, Lu, moved to Pennsylvania where he was a member of State College Meeting. We held a memorial service for Bill in April.

Members of the Meeting continue to be involved in various ministries in our community, ranging from environmental and energy education to peace work focusing on Iraq, Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We continue to have a discussion hour after Meeting for Worship in which Friends share their thoughts from readings in Friends Journal and other Quaker books. We have also started to hold a potluck dinner after Meeting for Business each month. Our Meeting may be small but it is filled with the Spirit. We look to the Light for guidance on how to extend the Quaker message to our community.

Greenville Monthly Meeting

Greenville Monthly Meeting continued as a stable community throughout 2009. Our membership remained stable. We usually had 12-14 people most Sundays for worship. We started a once-monthly midweek meeting preceded by a potluck that meets in homes on a rotating basis. There have been 5-10 in attendance at these shorter meetings. During the year we had a presentation by the chaplain of Perry Correctional Institution concerning his efforts to build a chapel for the incarcerated men. Several members attended a lecture by Paul Farmer about his work with Partners for Health in Haiti. A number of individuals helped with a project based on the Furman campus to collect and distribute blankets to the homeless. We hosted the once-yearly Palmetto Gathering of the five meetings in South Carolina at a local state park on a cold and stormy weekend in late winter. Our most exciting development during 2009 was the initiation of a monthly first-day school. This occurs on the first Sunday of the month, the same Sunday as our potluck lunch. We usually have 5-6 children. The parents are rotating responsibility for the lesson. It has been delightful to have the children come in at the close of meeting to tell all of us about their lesson for the day.

Huntsville Area Friends Meeting

The Huntsville Area Friends Meeting (HAFM) has provided spiritual community in the manner of Friends over the past year to approximately 10 -15 persons who have been regular attenders/members, plus several other persons who have worshiped with us intermittently. This report includes historical information from June 2007-2008 in addition to the significant events of the current year. During this time, a change to our meeting location occurred, and we have had two significant and hopeful activities. We have also experienced a decline in attendance and participation, struggled in our new meeting space, and the sense of the meeting is not clear about our next steps.

After two years of meeting at the India House, formerly a University of Alabama in Huntsville facility which was acquired by a private party, we were notified that the space we had been renting each week would not be available beginning July 2007. HAFM was referred to the newly opened Jordan Crossing Multicultural Center as a possible location to consider through a HAFM member's connection with the Interfaith Mission Service and the Huntsville Pastoral Care Association. Jordan Crossing Multicultural Center is an outreach of the United Methodist Church.

With its core values of Active Discipleship, Intentional Diversity and Radical Hospitality, the Multicultural Center seemed like a good prospect. Our excitement was dampened when the rental agreement we were asked to sign included a covenant attesting that we were a Christian congregation and asking that we affirm a list of doctrinal statements. *After a series of deep and open communications between an ad hoc HAFM committee and the center's administration, the as-written covenant agreement was abandoned, for all partner congregations. We were invited to help recraft a new covenant-type statement.*¹

HAFM met in a number of rooms in the building with varying degrees of comfort, all with very poor acoustics before finding a small space that we could use exclusively. Although we are happy to have a "room of our own," our meeting time coincides with several other congregations whose music and vocal worship is electronically amplified. Friends use the 'white noise' of a large fan to help lessen the audible impact of the other congregation's service. While some member/attenders are able to integrate the significant sounds into worship, others are very distracted and challenged by the uncontrollable noise. The issue has recently been raised to seek another meeting location, and HAFM will continue to seek clarity and unity on this issue. HAFM is also trying to refocus on the quality of our meetings for worship, second hour sessions and other activities and events that will nourish the spiritual life of our member/attenders.

A spiritual nurture group was formed in late 2007 based on the structure described in the Pendle Hill pamphlet "Group Spiritual Nurture: The Wisdom of Spiritual Listening" by Daphne Clement; and Parker Palmer's: *A Hidden Wholeness; the Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. Approximately 10 Friends made the year-long commitment to the development of the spiritual nurture group, and the communication and sharing continued to deepen with each gathering. The group fulfilled its commitment.

In August 2008, HAFM began on-going monthly studies using Marsha Holliday's *Exploring Quakerism: A Study Guide*. The 15 chapters in Holliday's text are being supplemented by other Friends' publications and the "meetings for learning" enriched by the participants' experiences.

HAFM Friends met at lovely Lake Guntersville State Park for a spiritual retreat on Saturday, January 10, 2009. The theme of the retreat was *Building an Inclusive and Diverse Community*. Activities included worship, worship sharing, focused individual time, preparation of a shared meal, songs and stories from the DVD "Light of Change," featuring the music of Bernice Reagon Johnson, Holly Near, and Quaker artist Carrie Newcomer, and the DVD featuring the work of the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, TN. Other activities included hiking, eagle-watching and time and opportunity for Friends to deepen their relationships with each other.

Other highlights from our Meeting activities include:

- Participating in SAYMA and wider Friends' gatherings, *e.g.*, Yearly Meeting, representatives' meetings, meetings of the Ministry and Nurture Committee, and the recent FGC Consultation on Ministry and Nurture.
- Participation in the opening public worship service of the Multicultural Center, an interfaith event comprised of the congregations that meet at the Multicultural Center
- Outreach by the M&N committee to send cards/phone to members who are ill, experiencing difficult times, or who have been unable to attend meeting on a regular basis.
- Expanding our on-going financial support of local charitable organizations to include (1) First Stop, an Interfaith Mission Service program benefiting homeless persons; (2) the Community Free Clinic, a volunteer-staffed chronic and acute care clinic for patients who have no health insurance of any kind; and (3) Crisis Services of North Alabama,

¹ A major concern was the policy of Jordan Crossing to allow only Christian congregations to actually worship in the center. Although HAFM (Quakers) are certainly not NON-Christian, we do not label ourselves as purely Christian either. In practice, our Meeting census and participation has traditionally included members/attenders who also identify themselves as Buddhist, Wiccan, Jewish, and various Protestantisms. For the Center's administration to say "You're Christian *enough*" gave us pause for concern on the one hand...and on the other, led us to feel that our association could be a positive influence in so many ways---stretching the boundaries of thought; breaking down the strict *labels* that are too often used; providing an *alternative* (broader?) way of viewing Christian-based spirituality; offering the example of the Friends' methods of problem solving and community building, as well as the Friends' concerns for social justice, tolerance, and inclusiveness via our participation in the long-term vision of the Center.

a multi-service agency for individuals and families in crisis comprised of seven major programs, including comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence both in- and out-of-shelter, HelpLine/HelpNet, providing information and referrals to social services, government agencies and volunteer opportunities.

- Working with the broader community's Interfaith Poverty and Policy Group
- Continuing to learn more about individual and group practices that emphasize healthy Earth-care

Individual activities that reflect Quaker testimonies or provide outreach include:

- Singing in a local chorus (Huntsville Feminist Chorus), which lifts up themes of "thinking globally and acting locally," related to environmental, human rights, and other peace/social justice concerns
- Participating in a 9-month flagship leadership program for Huntsville/Madison County and bringing a Quaker perspective and visibility to discussions, activities and networking with religious leaders and community leaders in north Alabama.
- Participating in local peace demonstrations
- Working to provide safe and healthy environments for victims of domestic violence, and working with others to eradicate violence in our society.
- Knitting prayer shawls for survivors of domestic violence (*See addendum below.)
- Opening a couple's home to a young high school exchange student from Russia for an academic year's experience in the United States, and bringing her to Quaker events on a number of occasions
- Rescuing, rehabilitating, and releasing, adopting and finding loving homes for several four-footed species who were in need of assistance
- Convening a multicultural interfaith prayer and discussion group

*More on the Prayer Shawl Project

The following is a statement by the Friend who originated the Prayer Shawl Project, and an example of the note and blessing that is lovingly sent with each shawl.

Why do I make the shawls? Well, it's been on my heart for a good while.

There are times in my life that I think of as "Vayomer Adonai"--which means "and God said." (Statistically, this one phrase makes up a substantial part of the Hebrew Bible and is really good if one is trying to learn Hebrew).

So, Vayomer Adonai et Karen, "Make prayer shawls." I have been feeling kind of, well, I guess, despondent and that there is so much awfulness in the world and I wasn't really doing much about it. So, I prayed, and this is what came.

Hopefully, by helping one woman who has been the victim of violence, I can contribute to the peacefulness of the world. It's not a grand thing. But it is what I was given.

The following note was included with the last prayer shawl gifted to a woman leaving a domestic violence shelter for her new life.

Hi there,

First of all, thank you for letting me make this prayer shawl.

Praying in this way is a great help to me.

Here are some of the things that I prayed for as I made this shawl:

**that you would be safe and free from all kinds of harm*

**that your children, if you have them, would be safe and supported*

**that you be able to make wise decisions*

**that you have a community that will support you in the days and times ahead*

**that you will think of the waves of the ocean and feel calm*

**that all the colors in the world will look bright again*

**that you will have joy beyond anything that you thought possible*

**that you will find meaningful work that gives you pleasure and fulfills your life's purpose*

**that your only dreams will be happy ones*

**that your new home will be blessed*

**that God will bless you, keep you, and hold you in the palm of his hand*

I made the shawl in a shell pattern because the light orange color reminded me of the inside of a sea shell.

Memphis Monthly Meeting

On November 23, 2008, we gathered at the meetinghouse we had rented since 1995 to move into a building of our own. Not knowing what to expect that day, we were amazed that nearly everyone in the meeting and a surprisingly large number of vehicles turned out. It seemed to be an outward sign of the unity we had achieved from nearly a year of fundraising, searching for a building, and navigating legal hurdles. The commitment of our community was quite moving, especially to many of our long-time members, who watched new, younger leaders emerge with ideas, energy, skills, and labor.

The new meetinghouse itself met almost all of our criteria, including high visibility, more space, a price within our budget, flexibility of usage, minimum required renovations, and handicap accessibility. For the record, we purchased it for \$138,500, paying cash from about \$90,000 in donations and \$57,000 in loans from two Friends (using extra money for renovations). Gifts of furniture, a piano, kitchen supplies, and a refrigerator, and more, and all sorts of work have been overwhelming and humbling.

It takes a lot of energy to take on new responsibilities of building ownership, continue to give good attention to the spiritual and pastoral care of our members, and devote ourselves to peace and community concerns. Changing from the simple life of renting to the more complicated life of owning led some among us to worry about burn-out, finances, and relationships. We continue to pray for understanding and energy, and we are grateful that we were able to be spiritually present to major life changes for three of our families:

- Fausto Delfin was born in May, then hospitalized for a week (he's doing fine now), surrounded by family and the meeting's care.
- Boris Kort-Packard and Meghan Carr were married under our care in May.
- Ruth Boaz, one of our founding members, asked for the meeting's help during the last stage of her life. She died in November after being cared for by a number of our members, followed by a service to celebrate her life.

We also struggled with events leading to the transfer from our meeting of one of our long-time members, which were rife with misunderstandings and hurt. We were left with many questions. How do we keep from shutting the door on conflict? How do we talk about feelings as a group? How do we listen to the different things that people are observing and feeling all in the same place? Can we learn to provide safety for what is truly on our hearts and to say sincerely, 'Tell me more'?

It took us months to find unity with this report, for in our dialogs we found individual experiences of the year to be vastly different. Some felt sorrow and ambivalence in the conflicts we suffered; others were so elated with the meetinghouse purchase, its meaning, and the influx of visitors that every other problem paled in comparison to their joy; still others were new enough to the meeting that they missed the struggles and took the meetinghouse purchase and move happily in stride.

This has been an extraordinary year for our community. We hope that our love for one another has strengthened, and we build our life together on that foundation.

Meeting Events/Milestones in 2008-9:

- In the Spring of 2008, our landlords of 14 years announced their intention to sell the building we were housed in. By the summer we had decided to purchase another meetinghouse, withdrawn our savings from the stock market, were looking for the right place, and raising funds for a purchase.
- Fausto Delfin was born in May to William Dolphin and Teresa Delfin.
- Boris Kort-Packard and Meghan Carr were married under our care in May.
- Ruth Boaz, one of our founding members, died in November.
- Meetings for Learning have included First Day Evening workshops led by Pat Jessup and Kristi Estes. At one meeting for learning in September we celebrated our influx of young adults with a singalong featuring ten musical instruments and let-it-rip singing.

- Our youngest children have continued to jell as a group, have been very excited with the new meetinghouse, and engage in interesting candle-centered worship sharing. In January we had a wonderful “spotlight on the children.”
- In September we also enjoyed a final celebration of our presence in the Cooper-Young neighborhood at the fall festival there. At our booth we sold pottery made by our children, donating the proceeds to the House of Mews for cat rescues.
- In November we purchased and moved into a building at 3387 Walnut Grove Road for \$138,000.
- In December we had a joyful Christmas concert and caroling at our new meetinghouse.
- In February Stacey Dixon and Andrew and Harper Crockett lobbied for LGBT concerns in Nashville.
- Kristi Estes transferred her membership to Oxford Friends Meeting in March.
- In March Ron McDonald resumed what used to be an annual hike and campout for our teenagers and took Andrew and Harper on a long hike in the mud of Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park.
- Terese Buscher was accepted into membership in April 2009.

May 10, 2009

Nashville Friends Meeting

First day Worship has an average of 45 adults and children. Nashville Meeting's practice of conducting it's monthly Meeting for Worship with attention to business starting at 10:00 am on Third First day continues to be well attended by the adult Friends and active attenders. Newcomers to Friends worship seem uncomfortable with and sometimes leave when committee proposed minutes are presented. Our format is: begin worship at 10:00; read the Query for the month at 10:40; time for worship sharing on the Query; then (with adequate time for worship) three or four action items are presented by committee clerks. These may become Minutes from this Meeting. After the close of Worship, committee announcements and reminders of First day Greeter and the Meeting House Cleaners sign up sheets are circulated during the personal introduction time. The Children's Worship and First Day School class attendance falls significantly on Monthly Meeting days.

Our Ministry and Counsel Committee has performed many tasks for nurturing the Spirit of the community as indicated below:

1. Significant time from community members has gone into Clearness and Support committees for members and attenders this year. The most major of these, the Support committee for Paul Schrag during his final months, was a big expression of community Spirit to Paul, Nan and Dot Dobbins.
2. The Nominating Committee function is performed in a friendly and timely manner. All members and active attenders are involved in this discernment.
3. The Fall retreat at Bethany Hills Center was a great opportunity for the Meeting participants to reach out to one another in a relaxed and beautiful Fall environment. Evening entertainment was provided by our member Bill Wolfe and his friends playing Irish music.
4. Our Regional Gathering (03/14/09) was led by Maryann Hamilton on “Nurture Your Spirit Creatively.” It was attended by 14 Nashville Friends, 2 Cookeville Friends and a Chattanooga Friend.

Our Finance Committee with the help of the Treasurer has worked hard this year to produced a timely budget for 2009. This year we have a plan to distribute Quaker-Giving from the end of year balance.

Maintaining a Peace and Social Concerns committee has been a struggle for the Meeting this year. It has evolved into a committee of the whole meeting. The appointed committee for the year functioned for only one month. Despite these problems however, the Monthly Meeting has been supportive of individually-led concerns as follows,

1. This summer, the Meeting constructed in the Meeting House basement an office for a 'Jobs with Justice' project. One attender managed the projects for two staff members and several summer interns. Jobs with Justice organizes the community to advocate against the injustice for the lowest paid members of Nashville's labor force. Examples are car wash employees and airport taxi drivers. The taxi drivers issue: Nashville taxi companies own the cab operating permits. Nashville Friends were involved in actions and letter writing to support the organized taxi drivers' efforts to decrease the very excessive permit fees charged by the taxi companies.
2. The Meeting's concern for peaceful resolution of Middle Eastern armed conflicts was expressed by the Monthly Meeting to our Congressman and Senators.

3. Members of the Meeting are active in protesting to the Governor about the continuing killing of TN death row prisoners.
4. Attender Chris Moore and his band, "Kindling Stone" gave a benefit concert for the Buddhist Temple and Nashville Friends Meeting.

High school Young Friends have thrived with regular van trips to SAYF retreats. Adult F/friends helped in many ways for the Third month SAYF retreat at Nashville, Ten SAYFers participated in the Yearly Meeting SAYF Program. Our Children's Program for middle school and primary age Friends is growing again. Their latest project was a fund raiser for the Girls Schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan inspired by the book Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson.

Quaker Cottage is functioning now with two students and a resident. The grounds of the Cottage are used for outdoor play space and gardening projects by children and teachers of our First Day School.

The Alternative to Violence Project [AVP], is an ongoing outreach activity of several members of our Meeting. Our leaders participated in the national meeting, have had training sessions in the Nashville community this year and a presentation for the Cookeville Monthly Meeting retreat. . One member facilitated AVP for Fort Campbell military personnel.

Adult second hour planning and leadership has provided us with offerings about Quaker history, social testimonies and nurturing our spiritual community. Once a month different Friends lead us through chapters of Your Money or your Life by Vicki Robin & Joe Dominguez. This series has provided helpful sharing about our financial lives. One Friend has provided leadership for a second year of Spiritual Foundation Groups called 'Growing In The Light.' Ten Friends had one weekend retreat, two all day retreats and monthly meetings of the large group and monthly meetings of small groups of five Friends each.

Nashville census calculation for 2008 are:

Members: 31 (20 Active)	Attenders: 90	Attenders Under 18 :46
Babies born:		one
New members:	none	
Transferred members Out:		one, Penelope Wright
Memorial of a member:	none	
Death of an attender:		one, Paul Schrag

Oxford Friends Meeting

This has been a second 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, responding to requests for help, and participating in the Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business at which the Starkville Preparatory Meeting was certified as a monthly meeting.

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 continue to expect return and growth as grief for our losses subsides and more Quakers move into Oxford. Occasional attenders have assured us that this will happen.

Leadership. The meeting has continued to have only two offices, clerk and treasurer. The current co-clerks are Cora Jordan and Pam Coe. Pam Coe is treasurer with Cora Jordan as co-signer on the bank account. Because attendance has been so low this year, the work that would normally be carried out by committees has easily been assumed by Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.

Decline in numbers. We have continued to lose members and attenders (six adults and five children) but feel fortunate that these losses have been the gain of other monthly meetings, as participants in our fellowship have moved out of town. Grief over the deaths and shock at so many deaths in 2007 continue to inhibit some from attending.

Children's meeting has ceased to function, since only two children have attended over the year and they chose to remain with the silent meeting for worship. On the one occasion when we met with children from the Starkville meeting, Cora Jordan led children's meeting.

Starkville preparatory meeting. We have continued to act as caring meeting for the Starkville, MS preparatory meeting, and Pam Coe has attended and encouraged their meetings for study and soul searching as they worked toward becoming a monthly meeting. Nan Johnson also attended a meeting during which they decided to send an application for monthly meeting status to Oxford Friends Meeting and assigned responsibilities for drafting the letter. A group from the Starkville meeting attended the Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business at which Oxford Quaker Meeting took under advisement the Starkville meeting's request to become a monthly meeting. On December 14, 2008 we certified Starkville as Starkville Friends Meeting, a monthly meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. We were grateful for such a joyous occasion during a year that had generally been so difficult.

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.

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.

January 16, 2009

Swannanoa Valley Friends Meeting

In the past year our Meeting has continued to grow in numbers and in spirit. Our Meetings for Worship are well attended, and we worship in meaningful silence from which arises inspired vocal ministry. Singing before Meeting, led by a gifted Friend on one First Day each month, rises to our minds as one of our Meeting's blessings. Each First Day we devote considerable time to sharing reflections that did not rise to the level of ministry during Meeting for Worship. Friends agree that there is a clear causal connection between this post-meeting sharing and the quality of our worship.

At Meetings for Business, a large number of our members and attenders take thoughtful and active interest in the welfare of the Meeting. Adult Education forums following most Meetings for Worship have deepened our fellowship by providing opportunities to learn about Quakerism and social justice issues and to share our spiritual journeys.

A wonderful feature of this past year has been the growth of our First Day School program. Nine children are now regular in their attendance, and three adults take turns teaching. The curriculum features art, stories from the Bible and Native American traditions, and Friends' testimonies and history. Members of the Meeting volunteer as friendly adult presences to assist with the program each First Day. After Meeting for Worship, the children come to the center of our circle and share with the entire Meeting their art, their discoveries in nature, and what they have learned. The children's level of comfort with all adults in the Meeting is a delight to us all.

Much time and attention has been lovingly given this year to members and attenders who have had health setbacks or need special care. We are often on the phone with each other arranging transportation or visitation for someone in our Meeting who is sick or infirm. Our system of email communication has been invaluable for organizing help for those in need, and we try to reach out in many ways. However, we recognize a need for more coordination and participation in this area. We are conscious that we are a small meeting, with few hands to do all that is needed.

Ministry and Counsel has sought to make Queries more central to the Meeting by suggesting that we regularly devote after-Meeting forums to their consideration. The committee's continued support of Spiritual Friendship Circles means that most members and attenders meet monthly in small groups, deepening our awareness and appreciation of one another and our individual spiritual lives. Ministry and Counsel has recognized and helped to meet the needs of many Friends this year and has continued to guide the spiritual life of the Meeting in discreet and loving ways. Its members have devoted much time and deep concern to issues of confidentiality and the ways we deal with interpersonal conflicts.

An instance of discord in our Meeting this year has led us to want to explore again how to resolve conflicts when they arise, including the proper role of confidentiality. We acknowledge the need to deepen our understanding of Quaker process as it applies to resolving conflicts that affect the Meeting. We may want to consider focused meetings for worship for suffering, wherein we would hold the problem before the Light, opening ourselves to the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In the summer, several skilled Friends accomplished the replacement of our front porch and the removal of obstacles to safety in the approach to the meetinghouse. Over the past summer and fall, a new landscaping initiative has taken shape. Being called to appropriate stewardship of the land, the Building and Grounds Committee, along with all interested Friends, drew up a master plan that includes a memorial garden on the riverbank, berry bushes, vegetables, flowers, a shade garden and celebration area, and, most agreeably, little grass to mow! Our intent in this labor has been to make our land more productive and reduce our energy consumption. The committee's convener has devoted countless hours to replacing our lawn with curving paths and beds and preparing the soil for planting. As spring approaches, the whole Meeting has been invited to participate by bringing seeds and plants to transform the yard into a garden, and we are all looking forward to watching it grow. Step by step we are making ourselves at home on our lovely property nestled in a bend of the Swannanoa River at the junction of Flat Creek.

The Library Committee has had a productive year buying books about timely Quaker subjects while cataloguing many new and donated books and getting them on the shelves. The Committee is discussing ways to encourage the Meeting to use the library by giving tours and talks about new and older books.

While our Peace and Social Concerns committee has been inactive for most of this year, it has recently re-organized. Individuals continue to represent our Meeting on local and national endeavors in the area of peace and justice. Having six members with past experience in the Middle East, our Meeting has paid special attention in study and action regarding the continuing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The devastation resulting from Israel's invasion of Gaza has weighed us down with grief. We will continue to hold in the light all parties to this and other conflicts that trouble our world while we seek additional ways to bear witness to that power that takes away the occasion of all wars.

Our Social Committee has recommended twice-monthly potlucks after worship and after business meeting to allow for more extended, relaxed fellowship within our community. This past Christmas Day we held a special Meeting for Worship in the late afternoon, followed by a festive potluck dinner. It was well attended and much appreciated. We plan to make it a tradition. Along with our Meetings for Worship, our Spiritual Friendship Circles, and our work together on committees and special projects, our intention to devote more time to gathering socially has given us another way to grow in love toward one another, and our sense of community is strong.

April 5, 2009

West Knoxville Friends Meeting

We started consideration of this year's State of the Meeting Report by reading last year's report and acknowledging that much of the last year's description of our meeting still applies. We are many of the same people engaged in the same struggles and joys and we still ebb and flow in the same ways as we come together in our meeting community. We struggle with maintaining the sense of community since we are scattered geographically. Getting together during the week whether for committee meetings, programs or visiting often proves difficult. The best many of us can do is to come to meeting for worship most Sundays; distances and the pull of other parts of our lives can make even that much difficult. Nevertheless we continue to gather in Friendly 8 groups, for potlucks and after-meeting snacks (yes, we like to eat!) and second hours to share our lives and our spiritual concerns.

Last year we had a workshop to learn about Quaker Quest. This year we have begun the "inreach" phase of the Quaker Quest process. We have had several sessions in which we have shared our ideas and feelings about a number of Quaker concepts. The depth of sharing has been powerful and makes us want to continue these explorations whether or not we continue to the "outreach" phase of Quaker Quest.

Considering the possibility of reaching out to people new to Quakerism has made us realize our limitations in introducing our practices and beliefs to new people. As one Friend phrased it, osmosis works better with plants than with people.

We have had many new people visit us but it continues to be a struggle for us to bring them fully into the life of our meeting. At least we have begun to talk more about which things are essential to our faith and which things are just cultural conformities. These cultural similarities that some of us share may make it easy for some of us to feel comfortable together but may make it hard for newcomers to feel like they might belong.

Other than agreeing that we have no creed, we have found it surprisingly difficult to get to the core of our beliefs and our truths. It is hard to share our Truth and gauge how it has fared with us this year when instead it feels often as though we have many truths and rarely take the time to share them with each other much less with those who are newcomers among us. We imagined greeting both Jesus and George Fox at our meetinghouse door . We are not sure what would happen but we are confident that they would at least be welcomed even if we might consider asking George Fox not to speak quite so long during his next meeting for worship!

Although we clearly have not yet learned everything there is to know about being a Quaker meeting, we cherish what we have learned. A number of us had personal challenges in the past year that were made lighter by sharing with the meeting community. We realize that we also laugh together - even in meeting for business - and that laughter is a sign of our joy in being together. We are taking good care of our meetinghouse (the building itself) which needed a number of repairs this year. With careful deliberateness, we concluded our relationship with a foreign student that we had been assisting. Most importantly, we gather together every First Day morning in meeting for worship where we find in that place beyond words the core of our life together.