

Berea Friends Meeting 3/19/2023 approved
State of the Meeting Report 2022
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The single lane wooden bridge, the only access to Berea Friends meetinghouse, was in need of repair. Some rotten wood on a single beam made for a bumpy crossing. Continued deterioration could affect adjacent beams. Makeshift relief came from covering the surface with a metal plate until finding someone to work on the bridge and waiting for a sturdy replacement. After waiting for some months to get a telephone pole and getting it milled to the correct shape a knowledgeable, skilled person with appropriate tools managed to single-handedly install the beam without hurting himself or losing it into the creek.

Likewise Berea Friends Meeting is a sturdy bridge in need of repairs. The aftermath of the pandemic habits added to the spotty attendance, word weapons of accusations, gossip, and blame, illnesses, knowledge lost with members leaving, have all challenged us. Resilient as we are, some of our bridge builders initiate activities or rather re-introduce pre-pandemic activities that help build stronger relationships, friendships to create an atmosphere of trust rather than suspicion, fear and criticism. Soup suppers, projects to clean, to de-litter a highway, to feed people who participate in Room in the Inn (a program that accommodates the unhoused), to provide cookies and Christmas cards to those detained in the jail, to have worship sharing on queries in a Spiritual Journey group, to sing, to eat at potlucks, to discuss topics of interest, and to do committee work are all a part of a rebuilding framework.

Although the meeting may seem to be fragmented, members and attenders find ways to connect with each other, with Spirit and/or activities. So the low attendance at worship often just 6 to 8 people, which often lacks vocal ministry, is just one aspect of the Meeting community. People are also individually seeking through retreats, Zoom meetings with other groups and in workshops. Several have authored books or are in the process of doing so. A query was raised as to whether these individual activities deepen our worship and community or somehow scatter, diminish and detract from the life of the local meeting.

As happens with young people, they continue to grow older and age out of certain programs and get involved independently elsewhere. Some service projects and SAYF (Southern Appalachian Young Friends) retreats continue to attract teen participation, but that does not regularly bring them to Meeting or to help them find Meeting for Worship valuable. It is quite a challenge to invite new families to join our Meeting when there are not already young people attending. The facilitators of the young people's programs are often discouraged that the program plans they have are met with no shows. A very challenging cycle indeed!

In keeping with our testimony on sustainability, Berea Friends are exploring solar energy panels installed rooftop. Member/attenders of Meeting continue to encourage people to learn and try to understand about the insidious impact of racism in most aspects of our lives and to work for equity. Zoom is a very important connection to Meeting and we are challenged to think about using this connection as a way to reduce the carbon footprint of auto use.

Friends question our use of the testimonies. Are they a goal, a Spiritual leading or an inventory as a way to measure our actions? Does the peace testimony contribute to silence on important issues due to fear of creating conflict? Should continuing revelation be our most important testimony, which is not even considered part of S.P.I.C.E.S.?

In a culture which seems to criticize everything, do we expect wonder, joy and awe? To rephrase a George Fox journal entry: Are we patterns and examples, who walk cheerfully on the earth looking for Spirit/God/Inspiration in each other? Adding to that thought, if we don't find that of God in others, do we look again and again...?