

State of Celo Friends Meeting in 2022

Approved on March 19, 2023

Community was a theme for our meeting in 2022. This past year, our meeting has been filled with technological and in-person connections, rebirth, loss, suffering and growth. Challenges with technology and conflicts over Covid protocols, a worship with animals, the tentative and then wholehearted return to worshipping in person, the rebirth of our First Day School program, a new Ukraine Crisis/Refugee ad hoc committee, worship sharing groups, a birth, two tragic deaths, and the return of singing all brought us together in Spirit.

At the beginning of the year, we invited Friends to worship inside the meetinghouse, and several did while we continued a well-attended Meeting for Worship via Zoom. We tried using a device called the OWL that enabled Friends at home on Zoom to see and hear Friends in the meetinghouse. In a fairly short time it became evident that the OWL was, for many, detrimental to the quality of worship, and so we accepted that we would continue to have two separate Meetings for Worship. When the weather was nice, we worshiped outside, and more adult Friends felt comfortable attending in person.

As Covid restrictions eased and people felt more confident about attending in-person worship, we experienced a rebirth in our meeting. In the fall we sang outside without masks and then sang inside with masks once the weather turned cold. Individuals chose whether to wear masks during Worship. Marilyn Cade and Mari Ohta, determined to re-start First Day School, garnered the support of parents and volunteers so that our benches have been filled once again with children at the start of every meeting. The youngest children enjoy playing together, while the school-aged children have lessons with Quaker themes. FDS performed Christmas Carols from around the world and in different languages, including American Sign Language. We are tremendously grateful for the children's return.

Our dedicated Catherine Reid, who had lovingly seen the meeting through the worst of the pandemic, ended her term at the end of April. Her co-clerk, Joanna Flynn continued as the solo clerk for the rest of the year with the help of the entire community. She began to send an email "Saturday Update" each week, which provided information about Sunday's Meeting for Worship, upcoming events, and shared resources.

As we anticipated the challenge of bringing our families with children back to the Meeting for Worship, and in the spirit of fun, we held a "Meeting for Worship with Attention to Animals" event in April. We had a joyful worship experience with a horse, goats, a guinea pig, rabbits, and many cats and dogs. Adding to our joy as we slowly began to reassemble, Magnolia Rouse was born in June; she literally brought new life to our meeting.

Throughout the year, many of us were involved in worship sharing groups sponsored by the Adult Religious Education committee. At the end of the year, we focused on nurturing our spiritual roots and strengthening unity in our meeting. Some worship/sharing groups re-formed and contemplated queries drawn from Peter Blood's online curriculum "Deepening Meeting Life." In October our focus was on "Our Meeting as a Beloved Community," and in November we focused on "Deepening Our Shared Worship."

Celo Friends Meeting continued to support and learn through SAYMA. We supported our own Bob McGahey, who ended his term in June. He served as the clerk of SAYMA during tumultuous times. Seven of our members and attenders are participating in the Racial Transformation worship-sharing affinity groups sponsored by SAYMA, which began in Fall 2022. Geeta McGahey serves as one of the facilitators.

Acting on our testimonies of community, stewardship and peace, an ad hoc Refugee Committee began in April, 2022 as a response to the humanitarian crisis created by the Russian invasion of the Ukraine and the resulting war. That committee raised money for the European-Middle East section of the Friends World Conference for Consultation and the Friends Peace Teams. Through direct contributions to Catholic Charities of Asheville and the purchase of a bicycle and tricycle, committee members supported a newly arrived Ukrainian family. In July the committee sponsored a talk on refugees by Stephen Zunes, PhD., professor of International Studies at the University of San Francisco. Locally the committee offered help to a newly arrived Ukrainian family and provided news updates on psychosocial support teams in Lviv, Ukraine sponsored by Friends Peace Teams.

Our Nominating committee went above and beyond the call of duty by arranging for all the positions to be filled according to our two-year cycle. We met in the Spirit using the Strawberry Creek method to raise up Friends who can bring their gifts into the meeting. Celo Friends continue to be grateful for this way of finding folks to serve.

Thanks to the work of several Friends, the poet Jacinta White, author of *Resurrecting the Bones* (Press 53, 2019), made a sojourn to our cemetery in September while she was in town presenting at the Carolina Mountains Literary Festival. She led a group to the part of our cemetery that we believe holds graves of enslaved people, and she composed a poem to commemorate their lives.

Beloved sons in two families died during this year. The deaths of Zane Thomas, 31, and Julius Polgar, 15 were, and are, a deeply felt wound to the meeting and to the broader community. Our Meeting gave support to family and friends, attended memorial services, and Julius' home burial. Community engagement in end-of-life matters continued the rich legacy of meeting member Ernest Morgan who wrote *Dealing Creatively with Death*, which continues to be a formative guidebook more than 60 years later. Our annual Day of the Dead was an intergenerational gathering to lovingly care for our cemetery and to honor those who are no longer living.

During 2022, community deepened in the ways we worshiped, sang and gathered together. Covid policies continue to be challenging, and we have yet to find a perfect balance that satisfies everyone. But listening together in the Spirit, we discerned together the best way forward during the fall and early winter allowing our community to grow in the Divine.