

Members and attenders of Columbia Friends Meeting have considered the SAYMA queries in order to discern how our group fared over the past year. We agreed that there have been significant challenges which include the withdrawal of some long time attenders. This has had a huge impact. Folks stepping back have revealed that often, the meeting's response to conflict has been a driving factor in their decision. We are now talking about past and current conflicts and using Quaker processes to halt old and ongoing hurt.. One person plans to return and we hope that others will too.

The lingering effects of covid have created problems and opportunities. On zoom and social media we can reach Friends who are unable or prefer not to worship and fellowship in person. Overall, this has helped Columbia Friends maintain and establish valued relationships, but there have been bumps regarding the best use of technology for all concerned. Recently we have begun exploring how to improve our zoom process so that both in person and on line folks can experience a more satisfactory worship.

Some additional challenges have involved funding the budget, repairs to an old building (our meetinghouse), upkeep of the greenspace and covid policies. Also there are few people able to volunteer for positions of responsibilities including First Day school teachers. We are few and largely older but very committed to addressing these areas of concern and are acutely cognizant that we must do better.

On the positive side, Columbia Friends have made a conscious decision to focus on spiritual growth. One member with a deep knowledge of this topic led some Saturday discussion groups. Our second hour First Day programs have included personal spiritual growth journeys and worship sharing. When planning future offerings, we hope to keep this emphasis. Our web site and outreach have made a difference in the lives of others. Pot lucks have been restarted. We are reaching out to those among us who are ill or need emotional support and our committees and representatives are active in peace work, first day school, wider Quaker communities and planning the use of our greenspace. In addition we provided assistance to a young international PhD candidate at UofSC who was involved with Quakers in his home country as a high school student, during college and while earning a masters degree. This latest project has been a source of profound satisfaction for many of us.

In summary, our small Quaker community feels fragmented and threatened. In response, we are actively seeking ideas for strengthening our sense of unity. To this end, we are trying to identify the group's common needs and goals.. Our meetinghouse and grounds are wonderful and should be used more intensely. How can we realistically and safely offer these resources for the benefit of others? Columbia Friends realize that our small group's future is not guaranteed and that the time to dig deep is now.