

State of the Monthly Meetings report to SAYMA 2023

Once again the Monthly Meetings in our yearly meeting have had many challenges and much growth over the past year. Ministry and Nurture urges all of you to read the individual reports if you can as they are full of the life of the Spirit that we all try to live.

Most Meetings are still dealing with the remnants of changes and struggles that the pandemic brought to us all. A few of us are still using Zoom for gathering, but most of us are managing with a hybrid of in person and online Meetings for Worship. Adjustments are being made, but Zoom seems to be here to stay, as a means to connect older, distant, or disabled Friends, and as a way to live more lightly on the earth. Some Meetings have lost attenders permanently because of the changes that the pandemic brought, especially families with children, and that absence is mourned. Some also had people withdraw because of how conflict was being addressed in the Meeting.

We were deeply saddened by the loss of Charleston Friends Monthly Meeting as they withdrew from our fellowship in January of this year, although we are blessed with a few individuals who are continuing to associate with us. We wish them well, along with Swannanoa Valley Monthly Meeting, and hold out hope that in time we will all find our way back to each other.

Quite a few Meetings are finding it a challenge to fill positions of responsibility and some have come up with creative responses, trusting in Spirit to guide the process. As our communities age there are real concerns about sustaining the life of the Meetings. A few of us have gratefully received visitors and new regular attenders or Members over the past year. Some Meetings are also finding young Friends more involved in the life of the Meeting, and benefiting from Young Adult Friends assuming leadership roles.

Our Meetings and worship groups have found various ways of strengthening their communities both inwardly and outwardly. Many Meetings emphasized the work of dismantling white supremacy, and a large number of individuals from our Monthly Meetings joined the SAYMA small group racial justice transformation work. Friends engaged in social justice work in many areas of need with active participation in wider Quaker organizations such as Friends Committee on National Legislation, work with refugees and immigrants, deep concern for the ongoing environmental catastrophe, and much more. Some Meetings deepened their community life with book discussion groups, Quakerism 101 classes, worship sharing, improving communication, revitalizing how we organize ourselves, and discerning together way forward with needed repairs of Meeting Houses or structural changes. In reading these outward and inward ministries we find a strong sense of Light and hope amid what can seem a very dark world. Merely being present to each other in many different ways, we are indeed actively engaged in facing challenges with grace, supporting and lifting each other up, deepening spiritually, and breathing new life into our testimonies.