

Spiritual State of SAYMA Report 2022-2023

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

New International, Psalm 133:1

*Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for
thereby some have entertained angels.*

New International, Hebrews 13:1-2

SAYMA Ministry and Nurture Committee found the Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association was still in recovery mode this past year as we all continued to live in a pandemic with its isolation, extra precautions, daily fear and uncertainty. While still grieving the loss of one monthly meeting, we have now added the loss of a second one. We are learning to hear each other when we receive minutes from monthly meetings, and to listen better so that we can maintain connections. Discovering how to relate to those who decided to leave the yearly meeting is not easy, as we yearn for reconciliation, but must deal with recognizing and being accountable for harms done, following this with building back relationships, person to person.

The pandemic and technology have changed how we worship and do our committee work, permitting more opportunities to accomplish tasks, but also posing challenges to doing the work necessary for nurturing community. It's become our practice now to incorporate worship sharing during our representative meetings, helping us to *re-member* ourselves in the midst of tasks. Various meetings came together not only in committee work but also in affinity groups and worship opportunities throughout SAYMA. We worked in small groups to reshape and share our understanding of systemic racism and racial justice work. This has begun revealing past and present white-centered behavior, guiding us to trust the Light Within as we seek to change that imbalance and embrace racial equity.

We have found that having Co-Clerks of SAYMA enables complementary use of strengths and limitations, sharing the work that weighed too heavily on one person in the past. Our current team complements each other beautifully. They have implemented a regular Clerks Advisory Committee meeting before each

Representative and Yearly Meeting, which has greatly facilitated communication within SAYMA.

We are learning our history as Friends did not differ from the general colonial attitudes and deeds as much as we had believed. We are re-routing our direction, setting new destinations and goals. Here we are: learning, apologizing, recognizing harms, seeking healing with justice and caring. Here we are: building trust where it was lacking. Wilmer A. Cooper's words speak to us of the journey ahead for Friends in SAYMA.

“Quakerism is a way of life.” This saying, common among Friends, is intended to make it clear that Quakerism is not just a set of beliefs or a statement of faith; it is a practical, ethical, and functional religious approach to life. That is to say, it is a religious faith to be lived out and not just professed and talked about. This is not to suggest that Friends do not regard faith commitment as primary and prerequisite to action. Indeed, our first responsibility is to seek the truth in terms of God's will. But after we have discerned it, we are obliged to carry out the will of God by “doing the truth.” The inward journey of faith can never be separated from the outward journey of practice, and Friends believe the two are integral and indispensable to each other.

Cooper, Wilmer A. *A Living Faith: An Historical Study of Quaker Beliefs*. 2nd ed., Friends United Press, 2000.