

**State of the Meeting Report**  
**Asheville Friends Meeting**  
Approved Third Month 9, 2008

Asheville Friends find a number of factors indicating the overall good health of our spiritual community, despite the challenges of diminished numbers. Attendance was about thirty-five Friends on the average First Day last year, compared to about 45 a couple of years ago, but we feel that the quality of worship each First Day is as consistently deep as ever. In the past year we have had two beloved Friends pass away, but we have added seven new members or transfers from other meetings.

A year and a half ago we changed our First Day schedule to pair religious education with adult spiritual enrichment at 9:30, followed by all-ages worship at 10:30. We use the library for family worship, affectionately called “wiggles” worship. A speaker and radio arrangement allows those worshipping in the library to hear vocal ministry. Our Library Committee welcomed the children who worship with their families in that space by moving adult materials up, which gave adult materials better exposure; and by providing space for items appropriate for small hands on lower shelves. Two standing committees, Peace & Earth and Religious Education, have led social action and all-meeting activities during the first hour on fourth and second First Days, respectively, each month. On the remaining First Days we have explored Quakerism and meditation practices. An occasional fifth First Day has given us the opportunity to sing together.

The children’s program has also become smaller. We are unsure of the reasons for this decline, whether it is due to the schedule change or natural attrition. The committee has attempted to bring Young Friends of middle and high school age together for events, but hasn’t yet been successful in that endeavor. Those who attend or teach First Day School with the guidance of the Religious Education Committee continue to have great ideas and share plenty of love and care.

Community building has been a concern the whole meeting has worked on this past year with some success. In addition to our monthly Sandwich Sunday, on many First Days a group of Friends eat lunch together at a local health food café, sharing stories and passionate conversation. We recently had our fourth annual Secret Pals month, with older and younger Friends paired to secretly give their pals handmade items, favorite recipes and stories, or origami, for example. Our Communications Committee revived the newsletter after a three year hiatus, providing a colorful format, distributed largely by email, but with several hard copies made available at the meetinghouse for those who do not receive electronic documents and as outreach to visitors. The Communications Committee also set up a computer in our meetinghouse office to help Friends to send and store meeting information. We have not had a meeting retreat longer than a day in two years. An Ad Hoc Retreat Committee is planning a residential retreat in the fall, to provide an opportunity for additional quality time together. Thus, community has grown among us in Asheville Friends Meeting.

Our Ministry and Counsel Committee meets monthly to take the spiritual pulse of the meeting. It has initiated the formation of a handbook for the meeting for practical use, and has taken on the topic of membership and its meaning among Friends. The feeling

persists, however, among those on the committee, that it never quite covers all the important items on the agenda, often preempted by time-sensitive items. We found that our Pastoral Care Committee, a sub-committee of Ministry and Counsel, had become less active, and effort was put into reorganizing our care of Friends in need. Committee members took on the responsibility of checking on specific Friends who are ill, isolated or in need in some way.

Peace and Earth Committee is encouraged by the success of their monthly Spiritual Enrichment sessions and the fact that our budget has allowed the committee to contribute financially to both Quaker organizations and local, like-minded agencies. A mid-week meeting for worship for peace followed by stone soup has a core membership for whom the evenings have been deeply rewarding.

We have had fruitful meetings for business, as well, as we worked on a minute of welcome to all those who come to us, regardless of their sexual orientation. As an extension of that, we have worked on a marriage procedure guide which reflects the practice of treating equally all couples who come to us for support. Our Finance Committee has struggled with major shifts in membership and software challenges. The new meeting computer may help us to improve our record keeping and reporting capabilities.

We struggle with our smaller numbers to have as many members on committees as we would like. Several committees have demonstrated that even with fewer members, fewer meetings, and fewer reports to business; much can be accomplished by a small group primarily by means of electronic communication, holding face-to-face meetings for discernment only as often as needed. Despite the tension of seeing many things to be done and not always being able to clerk our own concerns, Asheville Friends enjoy each other's company and benefit from working in community. We have faith that if we follow the Spirit's leading and take right action, that we will be able to sustain our meeting's health, even with fewer people. We continue to feel power and love from the Light each time we settle into worship. That power and love has been carried over into our daily lives. For that, we are very thankful.