

Asheville Friends Meeting

2019 State of the Meeting Report

As we reflect back on 2019, we find we have made some progress toward becoming the meeting we hope to be. Our Meeting members and attenders are active and committed to bringing about change in our world, both locally and globally. We find ourselves inspired by the work of individual Friends in Meeting and are grateful for their passionate commitment to bringing about justice and honesty in all of our dealings. We are humbled by the work that still needs to be done and hope that we can become more efficient with our efforts and figure out how to provide support to each other.

The rift in our community is beginning to heal, but we have some deep listening to do to fully come together. We are slowly developing the resiliency to sit with our challenges and work together. We want change to happen quickly, but as Friends we know that we often need to sit with an idea and let Spirit do its work. We are learning to be more gentle with each other and honor the experience and perspective that each of us brings. What a blessing to spend time together and learn from each other!

In 2019 our Racial Justice Committee gained several new members and continued to provide ways for the Meeting to reflect on our practices and communication surrounding racial injustice. We continued our book discussion using *Becoming an Anti-Racist Church: Journeying toward Wholeness* by Joseph Barndt. It is clear that we have a lot of work to do as a meeting and we will work to bring more people into the discussion. Our challenge as a meeting is to bring these concepts into practice in a tangible and explicit way. To further our reflection, the Racial Justice Committee distributed copies of *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo. Asheville Friends are open to continuing this important discussion.

Our meeting for worship has been deep and we find Spirit speaks to us in many ways. Many meetings have been silent, yet others held deep, heartfelt, and illuminating vocal ministry. Sharing our “joys and concerns” during our final moments of worship continues to be rich as Friends open up and share from the

heart. It demonstrates a level of trust and brings out the love of the community in response. We also find that Spirit is alive in the mundane moments of meeting life--when we wash dishes, do committee work, come together for work days, and join in the social time after meeting for worship. We are grateful for those who keep showing up to do the important work of the Meeting. Unfortunately, we have several committees without clerks at this time and that tells us that we need to focus on building up our committees. Our meeting attendance is up, so with some attention we can bring these new members and attenders into our committees.

We have had many discussions about our finances and our desire to maintain a significant level of outreach in our budget. However our commitment to outreach must be balanced with the necessary upkeep of our aging meetinghouse, if we are going to responsibly shepherd our Meeting for future generations. We unfortunately had to trim our outreach by 10% in 2019 due to budgetary constraints. Our treasurer agreed to help keep us on track by including all of our Meeting reserve funds in future reports, so we can have more clarity and be proactive with our meetinghouse needs.

One important task that was begun in 2019 is the development of a long-range plan. The revitalized Long-Range Planning & Visioning Committee began its work in 2019 by facilitating a series of worship sharings designed to explore 1) what our purpose is as a meeting and what we hope to accomplish; 2) how we can nurture our community and become welcoming to all. The final worship sharing focused on how we want to be active in the community. These worship sharings will inform the committee's work as it develops its long-range plan for the meeting.

The Meeting also began discussing the need for some shared understanding about how we communicate and interact in our meeting. Many people have been hurt by well-meaning, but insensitive communication in Meeting for Worship, Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, and other more casual interactions at Meeting. Our goal is to come up with a shared understanding for community living, so that we can create a space where difficult issues can be explored in a safe, compassionate environment.

Our Peace and Earth Committee's passion informed and guided our Meeting to lean into living our Testimonies in several important ways. With humility and respect, we acknowledged Indigenous Elders who have shepherded this land throughout the generations. We understand that there have been indigenous people on this land for thousands of years and thus many different indigenous nations may have lived in this area. The most recent nation is the Cherokee and we announced publicly that we are on Cherokee land. We're partnering with Cherokee Natives to build right relationships, engage in dialogue, and educate ourselves and others about our history including the Indian Boarding Schools. We financially supported the Speaker Series of the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program at UNCA to bring Dr. Rangi Matamua, a New Zealand Maori astronomy professor to lecture on campus.

In addition, our Meeting felt it was important to raise awareness of our country's use of torture following 9/11. We submitted a letter to local papers encouraging people to see the movie, *The Report*, which brings to light the torture and subsequent cover-up.

We are increasingly concerned about the deteriorating situation in Gaza where human rights abuse continues. We work to inform ourselves so we can influence our country's relationship with Gaza and be mindful how our purchasing decisions can affect life in Occupied Palestine.

There is so much that needs to be done and we are seeking ways to support each other in this important work.

Activism is not limited to our adult members and attenders, but is alive with our children in the Meeting. Our Meeting has a vibrant junior business meeting that helps our children understand clerking and how to conduct business in the manner of Friends. Their focus is on improving meeting life and impacting our community. They have an ongoing concern for people experiencing homelessness and those facing food insecurity. In 2019, the First Day School focused on the "expanded" testimonies: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, Education, and Ecology. At our Youth Celebration in May, we gave each family the book, *Sitting Like a Frog* so families could incorporate mindfulness exercises

into their family life at home. Youth group inductees received Bibles imprinted with their names. The number of children is growing, and our First Day School's opening circle is often standing-room-only as we gather the children before breaking into our three age groups. We are thrilled to have a youth group again and look forward to its presence in Meeting.

We welcomed two new members in 2019 and are grateful for their involvement in our meeting. Our hearts were saddened by the deaths of Jim Hipkins and Ellen Oldham and we miss them. We are reminded of the lasting impact Friends make when they are with us.

As we wrap up our reflection on 2019, we find ourselves longing for better connection. We realize our work in racial justice would be far more effective if we joined forces with other groups doing similar work in the area. We are also eager to connect again with other Friends' meetings in the region and also with other faith communities. First and foremost, we want to connect with each other in Meeting and are looking for ways to build community and get to know each other on a deeper level.