

**Atlanta Friends Meeting**  
**2023 STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT [FINAL]**

Faithfully submitted by Jennifer Dickie

*The larger your beloved community, the more you can accomplish in the world.*

**— Thich Nhat Hanh**

In a world that feels increasingly fraught with conflict and violence, it can be challenging to live into the promise of the beloved community, the matrix of love that grows our inward Spirit to support our outward actions. As Friends our commitment to this path is expressed in attention to the inward spiritual life of our meeting and the ways we enact the outward expression of Spirit in the world. This year, we are grateful for the deep and abiding ways members and attenders have leaned into the life of the Meeting and we hold in our tender care the challenges as we strive to live fully into the beloved community.

Atlanta Friends Meeting [AFM] has enjoyed growth and a sense of prosperity in 2023. We saw continued high attendance on First Day mornings and growing numbers of young adult Friends, teens who participate in the Southern Appalachian Young Friends [SAYF] program and young Friends in our First Day school classes. We welcomed 3 new babies into our community as well as 2 new members by application and 2 by transfer. We celebrated one marriage. We said goodbye to one member through transfer. We celebrated the lives of two long time members, Lynn Leuzler and Free Polazzo with memorial services held in our Meetinghouse.

The spiritual health of our meeting continues to grow, evidenced in the depth of ministry and Spirit in meeting for worship, growing attendance in meetings for worship, increased participation in spiritual nurture groups, sustained mid-week worship opportunities, and the increasing numbers of families attending Meeting. We have added a second elementary class to serve the growing number of children on First Days. We have maintained a welcome table for the many new attenders and welcomed more than 105 people who volunteered outside of committees and appointments in 2023. The Nominating committee reflects on a productive year filling needed positions stating, “[AFM is] fortunate to have a large and involved body of people in Meeting, many of them new, to look at as we fill these positions.”

AFM committees and groups overwhelmingly noted the importance of building and sustaining relationships this year, something that was deeply missed in the pandemic years. Nominating reflects that the Spirit led process of working together to fill roles in the Meeting has enriched their committee through its collaborative process. Care and Counsel notes that the committee is supportive of each other and Green Friends feels the spiritual health of the group is good and

can reliably expect people with a deep commitment to stewardship at every meeting. Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer [LGBTQ] Concerns celebrates establishing a consistent place for queer and allied members and attenders to create community through regular informal gatherings during potluck. Groups that meet together like the Group Reading books by and about People of Color, the monthly Sewing Circle, and our young Friends built relationships through shared experiences in 2023. The Committee on Undoing Racism in AFM [CURAFM] was heartened by the enthusiasm within the Meeting to learn about restorative justice practices and to participate in growing a community of people trained in the practice. AFM continues to shepherd Macon Friends Worship Group which by the end of 2023 had decided to reinstate monthly in-person meetings. The act of meeting together to do the work of Friends held us in relationship with each other to build and strengthen the loving matrix of the beloved community.

The health of the physical space is not insignificant to our ability to meet and flourish. AFM's framework is supported by many people and committees. This year the administration committee worked seamlessly to upkeep the Meetinghouse. The work of Green Friends in 2022 provided us with solar panels creating sustainable energy that saved us up to \$3000 in 2023. Our library committee along with many volunteers converted our catalog from a paper to digital making our holdings more accessible to a wider community of people. Our web manager and volunteers began the work of building our new website, and a small committed group of Friends managed the technology required for our hybrid meetings for worship, forums, and other events so that we might be enriched by those who join us online. The Ferguson Cabin Stewards maintained our property on Burton Lake for the continued enjoyment of Friends, hosting groups from AFM and Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association [SAYMA] in 2023. This attention to infrastructure ensured healthy, vibrant, and welcoming spaces for members, attenders, renters, and visitors to experience hospitality and dwell in the Spirit.

On this firm footing, the Atlanta Friends Meeting expanded our reach inward through a multitude of opportunities for listening, learning and teaching. Care and Counsel made conscientious and vigorous efforts in outreach to homebound, sick and grieving members and attenders. Quakers for Racial Equality [QRE] continued their long practice of providing weekly virtual resources for the Meeting to access many opportunities for learning and enriching ourselves in our quest to become a multicultural and anti-racist meeting. They also continued the practice of a *Listening Ear* once a month for concerns regarding racism. Ministry and Worship, Social Concerns, CURAFM, Green Friends and the ad hoc committee on Reparations and Right Relations hosted

forms for Friends that explored our shared history, celebrated Quaker ancestors, deepened our understanding of our Quaker practices, and our understanding and commitment to reparations for and right relations with indigenous Peoples and African Americans. Additional forums presented information about local, national, and international conflicts and concerns. Several forums included or were presented by Atlanta Friends reminding us of the depth of experience and knowledge among us. In 2023 Casa Altera welcomed the 500th asylum seeking guest into the Meetinghouse.

Building the beloved community extended beyond our Meeting with the Friends Committee on National Legislation [FCNL] Atlanta Advocacy Team lobbying members of Congress for increased funding for international peacebuilding programs and continuing to build and deepen relationships with congressional staff. They led a How to Lobby workshop for the *East Metro for Social Justice* group. AFM's Friends for LGBTQ Concerns helped to coordinate our participation in Atlanta's Pride Parade. Members of our community participated in multi-faith coalitions calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, the coalition of activists to Stop Cop City, the Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights, and SAYMA's Racial Conflict Transformation Program. Social Concerns Committee used its budget to support many organizations working for justice, peace, and the rights of Indigenous People and other People of Color.

Our commitment to building the beloved community through our connections with each other and Spirit, and through outreach is rewarding and in building this community we also faced struggles.

While we have been enthusiastic about the growth within our meeting we have recognized that with growth can come challenges. We saw some new Friends who sought membership in 2022 attend less in 2023. Ministry and Worship ponders ways we might continue to invest in and welcome new members beyond the act of minuting their membership. We are heartened by the number of young adult Friends in our midst and with the changing demographic we are called to be open to new perspectives and responsive to questions that may challenge our assumptions about Quaker faith and practice.

Deepening our spiritual work is also perennially challenged by a need for more volunteers, energy, and time. Religious Education was delighted by the increased number of children in the program drawn by more families who attend Meeting and was frustrated at the difficulty in providing consistent and safe programming because of too few teachers and volunteers with the First Day School program. Care and Counsel felt called to care for more aging Friends and

realized that this required a larger pool of volunteers to support adequately. QRE felt the continued call to help us progress toward an anti-racist multicultural spiritual community and noted the challenge of working with a small group of volunteers to energize white Friends to break out of patterns of white supremacy culture.

Some new initiatives by Friends struggled to get off the ground. Small group gatherings envisioned by Care and Counsel have not moved forward due to scheduling conflicts. The new Young Friends Support Committee was challenged to meet regularly for the same reason. They also recognized their initial plan to host young Friends events at the Meeting house regularly needed revision to accommodate the wide range of ages and the geographic disbursement of Quaker families.

In an effort to update the AFM Handbook, Nominating requested all committees review their descriptions. Many committees were challenged by envisioning their current work while remaining true to the original call of the committee. The Nominating committee halted the update work while they sought more clarity for their role and the request to committees.

Outward challenges included the continued gridlock in congress - rendering the work of the FCNL advocacy teams less effective. The growing disparity in our country, left the Social Concerns committee feeling stretched with so many needs. The Ferguson Cabin Stewards Committee is grappling, on our behalf, with a neighbor who continues to transgress on our property.

In each of these struggles Friends continue to be reflective and even through the challenges of our growth and changes we are called to build the beloved community. As we reflect on 2023 we recognize the many blessings of our community and we strive to recognize the places we fall short. As Friends, we are called to give our time through worship and service and listen to each other within and beyond our differences to allow Spirit to work.

*Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.*

— bell hooks