

State of the Meeting Report 2023
Submitted March 2024 by Beth Parrish, Clerk

Berea Friends Meeting rose to the occasion of making those attending SAYMA (Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association) annual sessions at Berea College feel welcome. Through tours, presentations, transportation, hikes, musicians and much more, we shared some of what makes Berea a special place.

Our numbers in Meeting for Worship have been small, numbering from 4 to 10. Our committee work and official responsibilities have been hampered as a result. However, we have continued and helped each other out as we are able. Computer and programming challenges have affected our treasurer's reports, which leaves us feeling unsettled. We are questioning our expectations of doing things as we have done them for decades and thinking about how to reimagine our Meeting.

We have had few young people involved in Meeting activities over the last year. Some graduated and went on to college and some to Boarding School. SAYF (Southern Appalachian Young Friends) has provided a kind of glue that keeps a few teens engaged with Quakerism. Our support of these teens going to SAYF makes some the adults thrilled with that participation and others wondering what is needed to draw these young folks into the life of our Meeting.

Our biannual, spring Visioning Retreat resulted in a look at where we are and some approaches to building together a more congenial, joyful body even through our disagreements. We increased efforts to foster positive relationships through soup suppers and other informal interactions.

In spite of low numbers, we continued with usual projects. We took our turn at leading All Kentucky Gathering in October, which is an annual gathering/retreat of Kentucky Friends from the three Monthly Meetings in our Commonwealth. Its purpose is primarily for intergenerational community building. Our theme was "What have we done? What shall we do?" and featured information about abolishing slavery by eliminating the exception clause from our state and federal Constitutions.

Our members were leading and participating in the small group and modules about racism for SAYMA.

We carried concern about the Berea unhoused through donations to and volunteering with RITI (Room in the Inn) which provides shelter and food during the winter months.

Early in December our annual jail cookie project was well supported by Friends and community members. We provided a small plate of about a dozen cookies to each of more than 300 people detained in our county Detention Center along with two cards with postage for them to send. This working together and giving touches us.

What is the State of the Meeting depends on the state of our membership and attenders. Our low numbers became lower at the latter part of the year because of illness and because of disagreements, unresolved conflicts and the tension created due to the way we communicated that shut others up or made them want to avoid interaction, or to walk away. We are not of one mind about our concern for equality/equity/racial justice. A number of those disappointed with Meeting do not feel heard. Listening is a quiet proposition, but without response by word or action people find it deafening, intimidating, unsafe, and look at others with distrust because their views, words, ideology, ethics are not affirmed. We struggle to Listen to the voice of the Divine in everyone.

What have we done? What is there to do? Where is our Center, our Light? What is our Common Denominator?