

Over the last year, Macon Quakers, known formally as Macon Worship Group under the care of Atlanta Friends Meeting, has experienced a number of changes that we feel indicate growth in a positive, satisfying direction, and we appreciate the opportunity to have a voice in the wider Quaker community that is SAYMA and to share our many recent developments.

Early last year, the group began meeting outdoors in person every 4-6 weeks in Macon locations such as The Labyrinth at Mulberry Methodist Church, The Peace Fountain at Tattnall Square Park, and The Art Garden at Wesleyan College. These meetings complemented our ongoing Zoom gatherings held weekly on Wednesday evenings and provided additional context for strengthening community. While the simplicity and enjoyment of nature enhanced our experience, we began to desire a less transient approach.

Eventually, we secured a monthly indoor meeting location within Centenary United Methodist Church at 1290 College Street in downtown Macon, adjacent to the Mercer University campus and Tattnall Square Park. We meet in the large, well-lit, yellow “round room” off the sanctuary and have been very comfortable there since our first meeting in December 2023. We spend roughly 30 minutes in silent worship, followed by sharing of joys and concerns and, lastly, enjoying refreshments and fellowship. Attendance has ranged from 8-17 at these meetings.

Centenary has generously waived rental fees for us; however, we have agreed to earmark \$30 of our collections each month as a gift to the church. We continue to utilize our financial account through Atlanta Friends Meeting and anticipate receiving periodic balance updates, hopefully through the establishment of an attendance rotation at Atlanta’s Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business sessions. Our only expense at this time is our website, which we have agreed is in critical need of updating. We appreciate the use of attenders’ personal Zoom account at this time for our regular online meetings.

Outreach efforts are ongoing. Last fall, we offered to the community an “Introduction to Quakerism” session with Bill Holland and Mary Ann Downey in which approximately 10 people attended. We also maintain a Facebook presence and send *The Macon Quakerly*, a weekly email newsletter received by 62 addresses. Our newsletter features a very thoughtful and personal original reflection written typically by Bill Holland, although in more recent months, other Macon attenders have provided contributions. We share these reflections on Facebook and with our Atlanta Friends as well and have often received word that they are appreciated by readers, sometimes even outside our expected sphere of influence.

Interesting to note, while the number of our regular attenders at either our Zoom or in-person meetings exceeds our pre-pandemic numbers, the composition of attenders is now entirely different, except for Macon Clerk Kellie Divis and Bill Holland and Mary Ann Downey from Atlanta. There is no current attender who attended prior to 2021, and only one new current attender has a Quaker background. As such, in many ways the group has completely started afresh, and there is a great need for ongoing support from Atlanta. We encourage our Atlanta f/Friends to visit Macon to share seasoned experiences, insights, and encouragement.

We would also like to note that Macon has had representation at SAYMA and has consistently sent two youth to participate in the SAYF retreats via Atlanta Friends Meetings throughout the

year. We appreciate the opportunity for this inclusion and wish to continue seeking ways to build our youth community.

At our February meeting, we held a worship sharing opportunity in which the group considered the three SAYMA queries intended to facilitate state of the meeting preparation. Contributions included the descriptors “authentic,” “naturally-developing,” “grounding,” “consistent,” and “sustaining.” There were also expressions of interest in eventually increasing the frequency of in-person worship opportunities both at Centenary and outdoor locations, and our clerk Kellie Divis revealed her leading for the group to consider transitioning to a new clerk soon, as she has held the responsibility since spring of 2018. Along with our need to strengthen involvement with Atlanta and further emphasize outreach (e.g., website updating), these statements will inform the direction of our future efforts. We feel gratitude for the connection we have to each other and look forward to journeying on together.

We close with two statements directly provided by regular attenders of the worship group:

“Both the weekly Zoom meetings and the monthly in-person meetings have given me opportunities for community that I have been missing for several years. Finding a regular place and time to meet face-to-face has been such a blessing and a joy, and those monthly meetings are something that I look forward to as they approach. The in-person meetings give us a chance to get to know one another in a deeper way, to feel the connection with each other, and know that whether we are silent or sharing, we accept and love each other. When we say that we hold each other in the Light in our sorrows and our joys, we are also being Light for one another. Weekly reflections shared by Friends give us perspectives and insights that grow our faith. I believe knowing we can bring our joys and sorrows and lay them before our Friends in Meeting, knowing that we will not be judged or critiqued as we share, and bending low to listen to someone’s heartache in Meeting has made it possible for us to feel connected in ways that overcome the chaos and turbulence in the world around us and within us. I am not a Quaker (yet), but attending Quaker meetings has answered a need within me that has long been unanswered.”

“When I first decided to come to a Quaker meeting, I did not expect it to become such an important part of my life. As someone who is interested in many faith traditions, with many unconventional and eclectic beliefs, I did not see myself becoming regularly involved in an organized religion. But when I arrived at the meeting for worship, I found the practice to be immediately resonant. I loved the meditative aspect of the silence, and always appreciate the thoughtful insights and vulnerable sharing from the community. The more I learned about the Quaker faith, the more I found that appealed to me. I was struck by the simple yet radical egalitarian message that each person has the Inner Light. There is no higher authority to dictate interpretations but rather each person is seen to have something to offer through their own special contribution and insights. I think this naturally encourages us to listen to one another more, rather than instructing on the ‘correct way.’ This is confirmed by my experience in the meetings, where it is not so important what you believe, but how we show up for one another. As someone who feels constantly misunderstood and an outsider, being able to have that sense of community is something I am eternally grateful for.”