

## State of Nashville Monthly Meeting, 2023

As Quakers in the liberal tradition, we lack many of the ties that bind other religious congregations together. We have few specific creeds to unite under; we have no clergy serving as leaders to unite behind; and, perhaps above all, our belief in continuing, personal revelation means that no one of us can claim spiritual authority over another. In some ways, the lack of these conventional tools create challenges. However, Nashville Friends Meeting has found that a richer, deeper sense of shared religious community can be attained by working and discerning together, human to human, in our shared commitment to following the leadings of the Spirit. The last year has seen both tests of that commitment and joyous occasions for it to flourish. Although a simple recitation of events cannot capture the full spiritual dimensions of our time together, below is a non-exhaustive account of notable events from 2023.

### ❖ Membership and Attendance

- We welcomed two new members.
- Several long-time members of the Meeting moved away or announced that they intended to do so in the coming months.
- We also honored the life of member Dick Houghton whose memorial meeting was delayed due to the COVID pandemic.
- While we are sad to see these weighty Friends go, Spirit still moves strongly within our community, and we have welcomed many newcomers. Weekly worship was well attended throughout 2023.

### ❖ Life of the Meeting

- In March, we held a newcomer/oldcomer event at the Meetinghouse. It was a great success with strong attendance and positive feedback by those who participated.
- Many members and attenders, as well as some from the wider Quaker world, participated in spiritual deepening groups that not only contributed to the spiritual depth of our Meeting, but also to the relationships among participants.
- We held an Exploring Quakerism course that served as an introduction to Quakerism for newcomers and an opportunity to reconnect with foundational dimensions of our faith and practice for more seasoned Friends.
- Members of the Prayer Committee diligently prayed for those for whom we hold concerns. This has been an underlying support to our community.
- The Children's Education Committee began having NFM members describe their spiritual journey and answer questions with the children. The engagement of children in the life of the Meeting has progressed. The number of children in attendance has grown from 3 to 8 young Friends. Young Friends now attend the first fifteen minutes of Meeting for Worship before attending first day school. Many parents are involved in our Zoom planning meetings and have volunteered to help teach the children once a month. With consistent parental support, young Friends, ages 12-18, have been able to regularly attend SAYF (Southern Appalachian Young Friends) gatherings, more than in recent years. We find joy and gratitude in these opportunities for our youth to engage in the wider Quaker

world. Additionally, we began planning for a JYM (Junior Yearly Meeting) retreat to be held in Nashville in 2024.

- We continued our discernment in how to balance protecting the health of those attending Meeting in person in light of the increasingly manageable, but still present, public health emergency that COVID presented. As part of that discernment, we ended our mask requirement and reintroduced the shaking of hands to signal the rise of worship. Hybrid worship - offering in-person and Zoom attendance options - continued to be our practice throughout the year.

#### ❖ Witness

- We channeled our Quaker belief into actions in the wider world.
- We responded to FCNL's (Friends Committee on National Legislation) request for discernment on reproductive health rights.
- In response to the Covenant shooting, we wrote a letter to the Governor and General Assembly seeking gun safety reforms in our state.
- The Meeting approved signing on to an FCNL letter to Congress to protect non-Pentagon spending for Three Peacebuilding Funds around the world.
- Members of the FCNL Nashville Advocacy Team held meetings with our Senators and the three Congressman now representing what had been a single district for Davidson County to seek increases in spending for peace building and reductions in military spending. They also lobbied for passage of the Truth and Healing bill which would establish a commission to investigate and document harms committed by government-supported boarding schools against indigenous people.
- In November, joining many other Quaker Meetings and organizations, we united as a Meeting in publicly calling for an immediate peaceful resolution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine.
- We continued in our careful discernment of the allocation of the Meeting's giving to Quaker organizations and also to those in our own community doing important work that aligns to the world we seek as Friends. The Peace and Justice Committee reminded us to consider what it means to give and be in community with the organizations that we support.
- The Meeting's Alternatives to Violence Project team trained seven facilitators among the women at Debra K Johnson Rehabilitation Center and five facilitators among youth engaged with Gideon's Army.
- Members of the Meeting engaged with other groups to support the resettlement of an Afghan family seeking refuge in our community.
- There was no participation in SAYMA Friends of Color because there was no gathering of SAYMA Friends of Color.

#### ❖ Meeting Administration

- Our Archivist completed the monumental task of scanning the entirety of our Meeting's business minutes and other important documents dating back to its origins in the 1950s. The Meeting minuted our appreciation for this work.
- The Meeting also minuted thanks to two long-term members as they completed their service on Ministry and Counsel.

- We invited members and attenders to complete the Friends General Conference (FGC) Institutional Assessment and Implementation Committee's demographic survey. Because many did not complete the survey, it is an imperfect snapshot of the Meeting. It did, however, indicate that we are still, in many ways, much less diverse than the city, nation, and world around us. We have continued to strive to remain aware of the effects of that limitation. The results are shared as follows:
- Results of Friends General Conference (FGC) Institutional Assessment and Implementation Committee Demographic Survey Conducted Among Members and Attenders of Nashville Monthly Meeting in 2023:

Total Respondents: 23

Racial/Ethnic Identity\*

White 23 (100%)

Indigenous/First Nations/Native: 1 (4%)

Jewish descent: 1 (4%)

Age

18-35: 6 (26%)

36-65: 5 (22%)

66+: 12 (52%)

Gender Identity

Woman: 17 (74%)

Man: 4 (17%)

Nonbinary/Genderqueer: 2 (9%)

Do you consider yourself to be trans?

Yes: 2 (9%)

No: 20 (87%)

Missing data: 1 (4%)

Relationship to Meeting

Member: 11 (48%)

Regular attender: 9 (39%)

Occasional attender: 2 (9%)

Visitor: 1 (4%)

All other responses: 0 (0%)

\*Percents total to greater than 100 due to individuals holding more than one racial/ethnic identity.

- We created an Instagram account that offers queries and updates about the Meeting.
- Although the life of the Meeting was active, our donations were well below our budgeted expectation. The factors for that shortfall are likely many, including a high cost of living and the presence of many younger Friends with comparatively limited resources. We have been able somewhat to offset the reduced donations through our income from groups who use the Meetinghouse. However, the ongoing fiscal health of the Meeting is an issue of genuine concern, particularly given the fact that we continue to be embroiled, against our will, in litigation about a property line dispute involving the long-ago-sold property on which we used to meet.
- Squirrels take occasional residence in the Meetinghouse; 2023 was no exception.