

State of the Meeting
New Garden Friends Meeting
For 2021-2022

“How can we walk with a smile into the dark? We must learn to put our trust in God and the leadings of the Spirit. How many of us are truly led by the Spirit in our daily lives? I have turned to God when I have had a difficult decision to make or when I have sought strength to endure the pain in dark times. But I am only slowly learning to dwell in the place where leadings come from. That is a place of love and joy and peace, even in the midst of pain. The more I dwell in this place, the easier it is to smile, because I am no longer afraid.”--- Gordon Matthews, Britain Faith and Practice, 29.01, 1987

This quotation from Britain Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice is relevant to the challenges of New Garden Friends Meeting in 2021-2022. Walking cheerfully into the unknown is always the charge for Quakers, and this year has proved no exception for our community. It has been characterized by transition and change.

As our world has entered a new phase of the COVID pandemic, we have wrestled with questions of how to balance concern for the physical health of our members and attenders with a concern for emotional health and spiritual vibrancy. Our COVID advisory group, composed of many of the meeting’s doctors, has continued to provide us with excellent advice as to the physical risks we continue to face. We recognize that the pandemic is not “over,” though vaccines and previous infections are decreasing the risks of severe disease and death for most. It is still dangerous and can be deadly, especially for children, people who are unvaccinated, and those over 65.

In spite of this, with a concern for emotional and spiritual needs, and not only physical ones, many of our number are encouraging us to relax some of our most stringent protocols, especially when the risk of transmission of the virus in our area is low. Naturally, many are weary and long for a time when we are free to sing together in worship and to eat together communally. We have met together in threshing sessions about proposed changes. In response, we have transitioned from meeting online only, to meeting together outside only, to meeting indoors distanced and masked, and even to making masks optional when risk of transmission of the virus is low. Online options have extended our geographical reach, and hybrid meetings will continue to enrich our corporate life. Nevertheless, we also hope that days are on the horizon when Friends may also meet in person without restrictions.

The COVID pandemic has not been the only challenge our meeting has faced during the past year. We have been in major transition with our staff as well. In May 2022, our beloved pastoral minister resigned her position for medical reasons, after a period of intermittent leave, which had begun the summer before. During that time, we also hired a new office manager. Fortunately, our Religious Education director has continued to provide leadership through weekly online

messages and continued programming for all ages. We are thankful that our music director, organist, childcare coordinator, and the staff member who cleans our building have continued to serve. Our good Friend, Deborah Suess, has assisted with pastoral care during this time, and a successful search for an interim pastoral minister has just been completed. Soon, we will embark on a search for our next permanent pastoral minister as well.

New Garden committees have stepped up to meet the challenges of these changing times. The Meeting on Ministry and Counsel, led by clerk Karen Garraputa, covered the pastoral needs emergency phone and scheduled speakers for meeting for worship. Many of our own members stepped up to offer messages in meeting for worship. In this, as in many other ways, we are thankful to have so many who are willing to share in the ministry of our meeting.

Our initiative to become an antiracist community has advanced, as each committee continued to ask at the beginning of meetings if each decision we are making supports our goal to transform ourselves into a community which is actively antiracist. A couple of our most recent steps towards this goal have included building and installing an Antiracist Little Free Library in front of the meetinghouse and initial plans for a New Garden history room, which will accurately reflect the meeting's complicated involvement in assisting the antislavery and civil rights movements.

Despite the challenges faced this year, we enjoyed a number of highlights and carried on in many important ways. Members of our meeting participated in the celebration of the 350th year of Quakers in NC. That was the topic for the children's summer program, and a number of Friends joined in the Quaker pilgrimage to sites where George Fox visited. Our RE director led weekly online go-lives through which members could maintain a sense of belonging, even when we were not meeting in person. Many found the Adult Forum sessions of First Day school meaningful, while others met in the Spiritual Disciplines class where they found significant support for their personal and spiritual lives. Our meeting provided financial support as well as household goods and clothing for Afghan refugees coming to Greensboro, and a team continued to prepare and serve meals through Greensboro Urban Ministry.

As always, as our community moves forward, we seek to remain faithful to Quaker testimonies, to continue to connect with other Quakers, and to provide a Quaker witness in our relationships with one another and in the wider world.