STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT –

New Garden Friends Meeting

for North Carolina Fellowship of Friends

2022 - 2023

In 2022-23 New Garden Meeting continues to be served by our interim pastor, Ashley Wilcox, with part-time pastoral visitation by Deborah Suess, and Karin Heller as Religious Education Coordinator.

We are still seeking a permanent pastoral minister, and are currently in the process of discerning what our Meeting will ask a new pastor to be tasked to do. A Transition Team is working hard to put forth our requests of a new pastoral minister before posting the position.

Our principle leading is to be inclusive of as many as safely possible medically. We, like others around us, have felt compelled to take this into account. COVID and other infections are most challenging to an older population, and our congregation includes many in that demographic. There have been concerns about social and psychological effects of COVID also. Gradually, during the 2022-23 time period, we have been returning to pre-COVID activities. For about two years the congregation’s decisions were guided by a committee composed of doctors, the Clerk of the Meeting and the Clerk of the Meeting on Ministry & Counsel. Although this committee in Fall 2023 is no longer active, it could be reconvened if necessary. As of this writing we have resumed most pre-COVID activities and list “Masking is optional” in our publications.

Our meetings for worship continue to be held in-person, on Zoom and on Facebook Live. We are currently in the process of upgrading and streamlining our online capabilities. There has been some discomfort in the congregation regarding placing more cameras in the meeting room, but the commitment to be inclusive has driven the need for this enhancement. Accommodations will be made for those who wish not to be filmed.

Our attendance overall varies from 70-100 among all platforms, and Meeting membership, attendance and financial support have not significantly changed in the last year. We are blessed with a number of dedicated people who work with the technical issues to make this all happen, and continue to look for more individuals who could share that burden.

We are continuing to use Google Drive to share and store our documents, such as for our Monthly Meeting , allowing us to search Meeting documents by date, subject and author. This allows us to archive Meeting records.

We have 9 people on staff: three full-time and six part-time. We have transitioned from our organist of many years, Michael Greene, to a new accompanist, Andy Mock.

Both members and attenders serve on numerous committees to support the responsibilities of the Meeting.

Our Religious Education Committee and Coordinator, Karin Heller, continues to work hard to offer opportunities to all ages. There are weekly offerings for adults, which are provided in person and on Zoom. Our children and youth groups are small, and there have been several multigenerational, “all-age” programs. Karin started a part-time play group in September, which we hope will be a way for families to become familiar and comfortable with Quakerism, and perhaps join the New Garden fellowship.

Outreach has continued.

* After our previous pastoral minister left, leaving the next-door parsonage unused, a committee discussed options for its use, and made the recommendation to our Monthly Meeting to use it to house recently arrived refugees temporarily until they find appropriate other housing in Greensboro. Once approved, a large group of volunteers from the Meeting cleaned and then stocked the home with household goods and furniture either donated or purchased with Meeting funds. Now when one family moves on, another moves in. New Garden is in partnership with Church World Service, who selects the families and supports them as they assimilate. Repair and maintenance, as well as the payment of utilities, are responsibilities of the Meeting. The 6th family moved on in mid-September.
* The Meeting hosted a dinner to raise funds for those affected by the earthquake in Turkey. The Fellowship Hall was full of New Gardeners and other local Friends, as well as a number of people from the Muslim community. It was a great opportunity for a diverse group to share a meal.
* A dedicated committee at New Garden continues to provide meals at the local Urban Ministry building for those who are hungry and often unhoused.
* We continue to benefit from the generosity of Friends who made possible our solar panels, which support much of our electrical power and support the health of the Earth.

In all our work we are attempting to keep in mind our charge to work to be an antiracist community. Each committee meeting begins with reviewing that charge. We have installed on a public street beside the Meeting an “Antiracist Little Free Library” stocked with books and literature focused on anti-racism. After our “Black Lives Matter” sign on the lawn was found missing, then found, and then challenged by a Greensboro resident, the Meeting decided to re-install it, and from time to time rotate it with another anti-racist sign.

We have experienced the working of the Light in our Meeting through the steadfastness of Friends and attenders, who contributed greatly to our congregation through all the difficulties of COVID, and a pastoral minister leaving. In July we learned that Ashley Wilcox was recently diagnosed with ALS, but thankfully, she is committed to serving our congregation until we find a settled pastor.

Respectfully submitted,

Kate Seel on behalf of the Meeting on Ministry & Counsel