

The past year has been full of challenges for Friends in Bloomington-Normal. The most difficult as a group was when our meeting experienced the stress and grief of seeking clearness on how to deal with the worrisome behavior of one attender. The life and energy of the meeting was slowly waning without the group having a clear picture of an emerging pattern within isolated incidents. Failing to discuss concerns and lack of unity on how to deal with them detracted from participation in the meeting. In summer 2018, we came to the necessary decision to ask that attender to stop coming to worship. Other challenges included the need for several Friends to prioritize caring for aging and ailing family members. Some Friends among us have had trying times with deaths of loved ones, coping with personal troubles and difficulties in political action.

The ongoing habit of voicing Joys and Concerns at the conclusion of each meeting for worship has been a valued experience for connecting socially on a different level from the spiritual connection in silent worship. We treasure Friends' cooking and baking talents at potlucks and when they take up the rotating job of weekly "Quaker Baker." Our weekly meeting for worship has benefitted from returning attendees and members and from consistency in location as we settle into the space we are using at Building 7 at Normandy Village in Normal.

Over the past year, one of the meeting's ongoing concerns is the health of First Day School. There is not a regular weekly First Day School, since many weeks there are no children at meeting. We eagerly invite Friends with children and new attenders of all ages. We continue to offer children's activities when possible, but the disjointed nature of having programming on an irregular basis is not especially attractive to families.

Adults interested in further readings and discussions about Friends' ways of living continued with monthly meetings for continued education. Readings used in the past year are from approved sections of ILYM Faith and Practice and from Mothers of Feminism by Margaret Hope Bacon.

Throughout the year, the meetings for worship have been blessed with thought-provoking vocal ministry. The experiences and prayers shared by anchor members of the meeting have enriched our First Days. We have been very joyful to have occasional attendance by some longtime Friends who live in B-N but do not worship often with us. If you, the reader of this missive, think this might be a reference to yourself, please know that you are always welcome, and your contributions to the life of listening for the Spirit (in silence or otherwise) are valued.

Intergenerational activities and fellowship were fostered through the second-annual End of Summer Fellowship of Friends Picnic, a holiday potluck with Christmas carols, and monthly Women's Meeting for Eating. The End of Summer picnic brought a joyful and large number of locals and visitors from other meetings. Two B-N Friends are now in a rock band together after making music at our holiday gathering. The Women's Meeting for Eating celebrated with Friends who retired from work during the past year, and the gathering has been enriched with frequent visits from Champaign-Urbana Friends.

We continue to ask for and receive support and love from our fellow Friends here in Bloomington-Normal and beyond. We are especially grateful for visits and helpful counsel from Field Secretary Judy Wolicki. We felt that her support was a steady presence with us this past year. B-N Friends participating in activities with Blue River Quarterly Meeting and ILYM committees and Annual Sessions keep us connected with the wider community of Friends in our area, and we have also appreciated when the wider world of Friends comes to us through visits from Judy, Friends from Clear Creek Friends and Urbana-Champaign Friends Meetings, and Ministry and Advancement Committee member Chris Jocius.

2019 Clear Creek State of Society
Approved 3-17-2019

It has been a fairly quiet year at Clear Creek Monthly Meeting. We meet for worship each week, weather permitting, and enjoy our fellowship times before and after meeting. This winter it seemed the weather conspired against us on weekends and we had to cancel worship and business meeting several times. These gaps in our worship time made the Sundays we were together all the more precious to us.

The return of warm weather in the spring signals our move from Clear Creek House to the Meetinghouse for worship. While we are grateful for CCH and the warmth it provides us all winter, we are also glad when we can once again worship in the Meetinghouse. The spirits of the elders gone before seem to join us for meeting there.

We once again had a retreat led by Field Secretary Judy Wolicki. The retreat took place at Clear Creek House September 8 and 9, 2018, the topic being "Living in Dark Times," based on the Pendle Hill Pamphlet by Rex Ambler. A small but enthusiastic group enjoyed sharing ideas and concerns about living out our Quaker testimonies in this difficult time. That same weekend we also held a memorial service for Wendy Dennis and "Papa" Wes Dennis who were then buried in the Friends cemetery.

In 2017, a long-time member of the meeting donated a small house in Hennepin to Clear Creek. We had hoped to interest a Quaker in purchasing the property and joining our meeting, but that did not happen. We sold the house to a Putnam County resident in September and are discussing how best to use the proceeds to do good in the community. As has been our practice for the past several years, we continue donating to two needy Putnam County families around the holidays.

In October, we hosted Continuing Committee at the Yearly Meetinghouse as well as a Middle School retreat. We always enjoy having the wider Quaker community visit us, and like to see the campus in use.

Friends Bob and Carol Bartles celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary with a party in Burlington, Iowa, on November 3. Several of us attended the event and enjoyed meeting Bob and Carol's family and their Burlington friends, listening to music provided by family and friends, and partaking of the delicious meal catered by Zach and Kelly Schobernd. We took advantage of the trip to visit the two worship groups under our care. In the morning we worshipped with Burlington Friends, and in the afternoon drove on to Macomb to worship with them before returning home that evening.

In December, we lost our dear Friend Betty Wolf. Betty had been living at the Mendota Lutheran Home for more than 4 years. During that time, our Friendly Circle group met monthly in a room at the home to worship with her and hold discussions. Although she had not been physically present at Clear Creek for some time, we feel diminished by her loss.

We are once again looking forward to spring and the return to the meetinghouse. We encourage Friends to visit us at any time and share in our worship.

Springfield Worship Group

Summoned by spiritual yearnings, Springfield Friends Worship Group continues its journey with trust in one another, and in the leading of the Holy Spirit to discern those pathways of compassionate service to our fellow creatures, drawn by His hand through the trials and troubles of this life.

We continue to meet weekly in search of the spiritual and intellectual sustenance we receive from our community of seekers. Our group remains small but dedicated, with attendance ranging from six to twelve adults. We have enjoyed several visitors this year, and continue to welcome those who choose to spend time with us.

Our current status as a Worship Group defines us most accurately. We elected to have a meeting clerk, and most recently a recording clerk. Meeting for Business is held once a month. As a group, we have discussed and considered the option of becoming a Preparatory Meeting, We are a Quaker Worship Group and under the care of Urbana-Champaign holding our worship group weekly.

As individuals, our religious experiences are varied, which adds to the richness of our discussions. Several members are involved in efforts to bring about change in our community. Pamela is involved with Habitat for Humanity. Dennis plays music at local nursing homes, and the Peoples' Church, which serves our homeless population. Eve is providing dance therapy for seniors with Parkinson's disease, and serving on committees for Racial Conversations. Nancy, Dennis and Vinnie are also involved with the Racial Conversations groups. Terry our recording clerk, keeps us updated on local events, benefits, and seminars geared toward seniors. Cynthia our clerk, works as a hospital chaplain in Springfield, and assists our group with updates to our Health Care Advanced Directives. We discuss and share the emotional process

of sharing our wishes, concerns, fears, and hopes about our final stages of life.

Updates and progress on other shorter-term events and individual activities or concerns are shared as needed in joys and concerns weekly and during Meeting for Business.

Our Worship Group community is stable and sound. Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting continues our care. Several members attend U-C meeting when they are able, and we receive e-mail updates from that meeting.

We have enjoyed selecting challenging queries, which we share during the months with five Sundays. This becomes a quarterly occurrence, and allows us time to prepare thoughtful responses.

Once a month, our group prepares and serves a meal at Helping Hands, a local homeless shelter. First Christian Church has joined us in this effort, and their offer to provide some of the food is appreciated. We enjoy this service project, and look forward to the fellowship and expressions of gratitude from the residents each month.

Our group receives sustenance from each other, from our query-sharing to our ongoing discussions about the current state of the world. We support each other as fellow worshipers, but also as friends and family.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Baklanov
March 2019

Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting State of Society Report, 2019

The quality of our Meeting for Worship has been strong, enriched by ministry from many different friends and by rich gathered silence. Often the queries, crafted by the Ministry and Care Committee to speak to our Meeting's concerns, have elicited multiple responses during worship and resonated beyond it. Friends welcomed two Saturday morning silent retreats that included a shared meal. Attendance at worship continues to grow, increased by younger visitors who have kept coming back. Our newly re-designed website and new Facebook page have allowed curious searchers to find us easily.

Youth Religious Education is thriving. The younger children (3-12) continue to have a single (paid) teacher this year; the resulting continuity has created strong bonds and new confidence among the children who report proudly and enthusiastically to Meeting each week on what they have read, discussed, and created. Teens and tweens have helped to shape their own program on topics ranging from the Bible to Quaker processes; recently they attended a Programmed Meeting. Several friends and families are active in Blue River Quarterly and ILYM activities, connecting our meeting to the wider Quaker community. One teen, recently welcomed into adult status, joins us at meeting for worship and business meeting (along with other teens); he is helping to co-organize teen/tween activities this semester.

We have worked as a community to accomplish some important projects this summer. Our building received a new coat of paint and much needed carpentry was completed. We organized four moving memorial services. Some friends researched a "Venerable Friends" presentation that used bios and photos to help us appreciate the dedicated Friends who founded and sustained our meeting and whose work for peace and social justice still inspires us. This fall, a large group from the meeting marched under a UCFM banner in the CU Pride Parade. A rainbow-decorated red truck followed the marchers, sporting tie-dye-clad children in the back shouting "Happy Pride Day" and mobility-challenged elders within. Throughout the year we shared ideas in discussion sessions: a Quaker Q&A, a penetrating exploration of Quaker decision-making, and another on the value of silence to us.

In contrast, our summer Hackberry tree crisis was challenging and divisive. An arborist found that the beautiful 140 year-old legacy tree had a heartwood fungus that threatened its stability and survival. The Building and Grounds Committee, fearing for the safety of our building and of all those who use the grounds, especially children, proposed the tree's removal to Business Meeting. Without discussion or objection, the proposal was approved and noted in the March Minutes, and we contracted for the tree's removal. In June, as removal grew near, some Friends claimed that the decision was not transparent and proposed re-opening the issue. Some urged we should respect the tree as a she, a living being, host to birds, animals, and insects, and integral to our community. Others reiterated safety concerns, noting that the roots, crown, and trunk were already diseased. We then learned that decisions made and minuted cannot be undone without forging a new sense of the meeting. After weeks of painful disagreement at two business meetings, during ad hoc tree committee meetings, and even in worship, we agreed to re-affirm the original decision. In the tree's absence, we agreed to honor its legacy with a photo album and by using its wood to carve children's chairs, for habitat on our grounds, and in a circle of logs and stools around the stump that forms a meditation and play space.

As a result of the controversy, we have a deeper understanding of and appreciation for Quaker decision-making. We have learned how to listen respectfully and hear each other out. We are working to minute and communicate decisions more clearly. Attendance at business meeting has

grown. We are working to integrate more attenders into our committee structure, so they can share more fully in the work of sustaining the meeting. We recognize the need for more programming to introduce Quaker beliefs and practices. We have discovered this year that we have the resilience to turn our challenges into opportunities for further growth.