

Cincinnati Friends Meeting
State of Society Report for 2014

For the State of the Society Report Wilmington Yearly Meeting asks these three questions: *Where do you see the love of Jesus in your meeting? How does your meeting express the love of Christ to your community and to the world? When challenged by difficulties how do you show your love to one another?*

Ministry and Counsel received six requests for Clearness Committees, one for marriage under the care of the Meeting, three for membership, and three to test a personal leading. In June the Meeting celebrated the marriage of Jennifer Hatch and Dean Gardner under the care of the Meeting. As a result of two clearness committees the Meeting welcomed two new members into membership, and one committee has carried over into the new year.

Adult discussion continues to enrich those who attend a variety of programs. Between 4 to 8 regularly attend a Sunday morning discussion of 'Centering Down' readings provided by the Minister. Participants report that the worship sharing format of this discussion enriches one's own spiritual understanding and aids in knowing more deeply the spiritual lives of others. When a monthly discussion of Brent Bill's *Quaker Compass* ended, another group formed to read and discuss 'spiritual classics' such as *Practice of the Presence of God* and the *Gospel of Thomas*. Donne Hayden led a six week program using the *Quaker Bible Study* method developed by Joanne & Larry Spears, began a new series of Quaker 101, weekly leads a Wednesday midday prayer group, and led a discussion group on mysticism. To this latter group Stephen Potthof made a presentation of his research on Quaker dreams.

As one way of *express [ing] the love of Christ to your community and to the world* Cincinnati Friends Meeting continues its support of our two ministries—Permaganic in downtown Cincinnati and Artsy Fartsy in Milford. In 2014 land developers threatened both projects so that the future of each is in some doubt. We continue to donate food and needed supplies to the Free Store Foodbank, to Bethany House, and to Tender Mercies.

When challenged by difficulties how do you show your love to one another?

Several incidents in 2014 tested our faith and our use of Quaker order and further enabled us to show our love for one another.

Jesus advises us to speak directly to one another in times of conflict, albeit sometimes with the help of others in the Meeting (Matthew 18:15-17). In 2014 Ministry and Counsel helped negotiate two conflicts between members of our Meeting. In one case M & C helped conflicting members face one another and listen to each other. In another case a member of M & C spoke individually with individuals experiencing conflict. It is not clear yet whether these conflicts will transform themselves into stronger relationships; nevertheless, we are growing in how we respond to conflict.

With some apprehension and some faith Ministry and Counsel invited all members and attenders to one of three open sessions to answer the question, "What do you think about same gender marriage?" Each individual attending—a total of nineteen-- had an uninterrupted time to answer the question. Ministry and Counsel wrote a summary of these discussions which was accepted by Monthly Meeting as an accurate summary of what members and attenders said. We discovered some unity among us on this subject, but were not ready to record a Minute. Just as importantly, we discovered that when we listen

to one another, we can discuss emotional and controversial subjects without pushing each other away. We were reminded experientially what many know intellectually that “Love is patient and kind; it is not rude or quick-tempered” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5) and that “There is no fear in love” (1 John 4:18).

Vocal Ministry during Meeting for Worship continues to enrich many. In addition to Donne Hayden’s remarks this ministry included messages by congregants in Donne’s absence, guest speakers, a presentation by the young friends First Day school of their understanding of the Quaker testimony of simplicity, and spontaneous Spirit-led messages. On two consecutive Sundays, however, Ministry and Counsel felt that spoken messages from the silence were inappropriate for Meeting for Worship in length, frequency or content. To help the Meeting renew its understanding of Quaker Worship, Ministry and Counsel prepared a short statement which it had printed in the Bulletin, read at Monthly Meeting and sent out on appropriate e-lists.

We completed our experiment with Quaker Quest by conducting six public sessions in September and October featuring speakers on Worship Straight Up, Accept and Nurture, and Action with Local Impact. Each session included hospitality as well, a question and answer period, and a time of Worship in the manner of Friends. Hoping to attract millennials to our Meeting, we had focused our printed publicity on the University of Cincinnati campus; we used Facebook and Twitter as well, and some individuals invited personal friends. We were deeply disappointed that only 5 individuals attended any of our six sessions, none of whom were millennials. We were convinced that we had been led by the Spirit to undertake this outreach, so what had happened? After prayerful reflection the Quaker Quest Core Committee reported to Monthly Meeting that the year-long preparation time had enriched our Meeting by helping us know each other more fully through working together and by hearing each other’s stories in the public sessions. Our weakness had been publicity, but we could not say whether the problem was the audience we addressed, the content of our printed advertising, the media we used, or something else. The Core Committee recommended and Monthly Meeting agreed not to continue the Quaker Quest process into the spring as we had initially planned.

Discussion in Ministry and Counsel and among the Trustees led to a decision not to close the Meeting House due to bad weather. The weather is not the same everywhere, and enough individuals have keys to open the building so that even if everyone cannot safely travel, some can meet for unprogrammed worship. In 2014 we made several improvements to our property, e.g., removing honeysuckle and painting.

In 2014 Ministry and Counsel and the Meeting initiated the process to record Donne Hayden as a Minister.

Sabrina Darnowsky’s book *Friends Past and Present: The Bicentennial History of Cincinnati Friends Meeting (1815-2015)* has been published and work continues toward CFM’s Bicentennial celebration and the production of our documentary video.

Approved by Cincinnati Friends Meeting
February 28, 2014