

Cincinnati Friends Meeting 2019 State of Society

True Godliness does not turn men and women out of the world but excites their endeavors to mend it.

Through the leadings and guidance of our Committees and the commitment of individuals to further our spiritual and communal responsibilities to be part of the world and not apart from it, we have challenged ourselves to continue the legacy of faithful Quakers who have come before us. We have accepted challenges that have taken us out of our ‘comfort zone,’ that have required us to reach back into our history to call on the strength, courage and depth of faith of those who came before us – to do what is required of us in our time and place as they did what they did in their time and place.

We have moved into the midst of the world with questions, apprehension, where there have been moments of fear and times of hurt, yet open and joyful in following the leading that compels our community to do what we can to walk with on a continuing journey to mend the world.

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God?

So often in worship we hear these words from the Bible and so many others that reflect on our responsibility to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. We are blessed with a pastor, Jim Newby, who brings us messages that not only remind us to follow this pleading within worship and our faith community, but who encourages and supports us as we follow the pleading beyond our Meetinghouse door.

Ours is a community of active faith and no scripture better describes who we were in 2019, as it continues to direct us to do even more in 2020. *What does the Lord require of us but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God?*

In keeping with our commitment as part of the Sanctuary movement, the flame of one single candle flickered on a table next to a photo of one little girl and her father as our Peace and Social Concerns Committee led us in a community-wide candlelight vigil for social justice in October in support of children and families caught up in the immigration crisis, to remember little Valeria and her father Oscar who died in the waters of the Rio Grande. During our interfaith service, we listened to the story told by Rabbi Miriam Terlinchamp that continues to inspire us to not be silent, to be active, to always, always ‘knock on the door’ as long as there is injustice around us.

Three young women led us in sharing Valeria’s story, Anne Frank’s story and the stories of those who have suffered throughout history and continue to suffer, including this one message from one of the young women. – “If we do nothing more, we will stand here united to curse the darkness that ripped the life out of Valeria and Oscar. We will light our flames from Valeria’s flame and as we do, it will deepen our commitment to building a world where no young girl ever again will be torn from the arms of her parents to die in a concentration camp. No little girl will wade in the water and lose her life to hate, intolerance and injustice.”

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In addition to the words of these young women growing in their Quaker faith, there was music from Alex Myers, a Quaker Scholar from Wilmington College, who played his flute as his grandmother, Jennie Harner, she a Quaker, played the piano, reaching into our very spirits with **Wade in the Water**. There was Joe Henry leading us as our candles were lit, as we sang together, “**Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary.**” There was a new hymn, one every Quaker should hear, written by William Williams II and performed for the first time by William and his son William III, a hymn written to remember Valeria’s life.

There was the social justice offering, generous gifts given from the hearts of those in attendance, with that offering then given to support the Ubry-Terrell family as they adopt children from a Mexican orphanage, a fitting memorial to one little girl and a guidepost for us as Quakers to do justice and love mercy. We came together in unity as our candles filled the darkness and as some of us wrestled with our questions about safety - did we need to take precautions during the vigil based on some comments we received following our event posting on Facebook and the state of the world in general. We stood in our Quaker faith even as we struggled with our very real human apprehensions.

There were so many ways our Peace and Social Concerns Committee unified us in justice and service, under the leadership of Elizabeth Newby. We joined in community with Meetings throughout WYM, with Barb Napier leading us, filling our Mason jars to overflowing and donating to yard sales so that together across our Yearly Meeting we could be part of the reconstruction of the old Quaker school in Puerto Padre, Cuba into a community center. What a joy sharing this experience with other Quakers!

We continued our support for Bethany House, a shelter for abused women and children, continued to take meals to share with residents at Tender Mercies, continued ongoing donations for the Free Store, and raised more than \$1,100 in gift cards to supply food, water and other supplies for immigrants passing through Cincinnati and more.

In addition to the leadings of our Peace and Social Concerns Committee, we as a faith community stepped further out of our sheltered place into the midst of the world. A Social Justice Minute that we had prepared and approved as a Meeting was taken to Yearly Meeting where all were in unity and the Minute was approved by Yearly Meeting.

We were active participants in the 2nd Annual Festival of Faiths, an interfaith community-wide event bringing together people of all faiths to share with each other and learn from each other. We had a table at the event at the Cintas Center in Cincinnati. Jim Newby presented the opening prayer. He also serves as a member of the Steering Committee for the event. As with our candlelight vigil for Valeria, we faced some of the same apprehension about personal and event safety. With an estimated 3,000+ in attendance in a large open space, we could not help but be aware of how vulnerable we were to the violence that permeates so much of our society today. We also opened our doors to host a Festival of Faiths open house at our Meeting House, welcoming guests from many faith traditions to experience Quaker worship for themselves.

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We opened our doors and our hearts to listen and learn from those who gave of their time to come to our Meeting to share with us. We welcomed Earlham College Professor of History and author Tom Hamm, who led us through the difficult times of earlier Quakers who faced schisms and splits, reminding us that we are not unique as we continue to struggle with our own schism that has led to painful disaffiliations.

We learned more about FUM from Emily Provance as she shared some of her experiences in missions, bringing them to life for us so that we now have a fuller depth of understanding of what these mission are as we support them with our annual donations, including Ramallah Friends School. Her presentation was one of the reasons that we were inspired to increase our giving to some of our wider Quaker outreach, including American Friends Service Committee and Friends Committee on National Legislation, affirming that our donations are an important way we support social justice and equality.

We shared openly about inclusion when we welcomed Wilmington College faculty member Sue Lucas to share her story of acceptance at the family and community level for LGBTQ+ people. Paul Buckley joined us as part of his traveling ministry to share thoughts from his new book.

We provide a welcoming space for those within our community to share their concerns and ministries as well. We continue to support the *Artsy Fartsy* youth ministry of Cathy Barney and the Permaganic Garden gardening ministry for youth of Luke and Angela Ebner. What an honor for us to host Cathy and her *Artsy Fartsy* kids for a special outing at our Meeting House, where they were each presented with their own hooded sweatshirt with their logo, paid for by funds from our Peace and Social Concerns Committee.

Meeting attender Bill Williams II led us following worship to learn more about our Quaker faith in action as it relates to the history of Ireland and the great famine. We learned for the first time about the lifesaving role of the Society of Friends Relief Committee that was based in Dublin.

Member Heidi Bright took us on her spiritual journey on her sacred pilgrimage to France, leading us in discovering the mystical connection between Mary and her son Jesus with the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

With the leadership of Joe Henry and Suzanne Johnson we hosted Ohio's first Alternatives to Violence Basic training three-day workshop. Although no longer a Quaker program, Alternatives to Violence was founded based on the Quaker belief in an inborn power and seeking of peace in everyone. Ray Geers, Bob Green and Nan Hatch from our Meeting completed the training, alongside community participants.

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Deepening spiritual ties with each other was the focal point when some members came together for a retreat in Cape Hatteras, dubbing themselves the Hatteras Eight. During their time together they focused on the theme of transformation.

Assuring that the legacy of Quakers who came before us lives on, like our own Meeting's Levi and Catherine Coffin, is a continuing passion for our four First Day School teachers, Jeff Arnold, Linda Daigle, Nan Hatch and Carole Barnhart. Having four teachers assures that our Young Friends have access to multiple viewpoints, since each teacher teaches from their own perspective.

Teachers take a 'current topic' approach to First Day School, looking for ways to tie Bible studies and Quaker testimonies (SPICES) into the topic, which can be spiritual, environmental, social and more. Topics have included immigration, the environment, sharing and materialism.

We begin sharing our Quaker way of worship and our Quaker heritage at an early age for our youngest children, led by teacher Patia Williams and Child Care Assistant Megan Myers.

We shared scripture and how it relates to our growing in faith during our weekly Adult Spiritual Sharing Group that meets before the beginning of worship. We planned and took part in a number of Spiritual Nurture groups. Our Prayer Shawl group made shawls that were given as a measure of comfort to patients in Hospice of Southwest Ohio.

Our Trustees provided loving care to our grounds and Meeting House, committed to their roles as caretakers of the legacy of those who made it possible for us to worship together as a blessed community on what we know is truly sacred ground.

We were blessed with funding that allowed us to increase donations to some of our community outreach commitments, including Quaker organizations. We, as a community of faith, committed to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with God, now pay a portion of our Meeting Outreach budget – the money we set aside for ministries and missions – before we pay for monthly operating costs.

We continue to be surrounded by the memories and legacy of faith of Allen Riley and Jim Newby's sister Darlene.

As we have been more and more stepping out in the world to do our part in mending it, we have encountered real fears that something might happen to us for taking a public stance. We have had deep doubts between us that we can accomplish something bigger than we think can, of trying something new or different. We have faced concerns that we might offend. We know that what we have done and continue to do and what we believe can and will cause friction, hurt, even disaffiliation. As the fear threatens to overtake us, as doubts make us pause in our actions, as our concerns to be good quiet Quakers and not offend slows our actions, as we walk with anger and

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hurt and become separated from each other, it is in these times when we bow our heads and wait for that still small voice to come to us that we find the faith and the courage to walk the next step. Be ye not concerned by the journey, but the next step in the journey. Levi and Catherine would expect no less of us. It is then we hear and follow the words, "*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God?*"