

Cincinnati Friends Meeting

2024 State of Society Report

March, 2024

**2023-24 Theme:** *“Becoming the Quakers the World Needs”* (borrowed from FWCC)

**Scripture: Romans 8:18 (NIV):** *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*

**2023-24 Queries:**

1. How does your meeting identify what the world needs?
2. How are you practicing being what the world needs?

*“True godliness does not turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavors to mend it.” ~ William Penn*

In the past, Quakers – like the Amish – tended to separate themselves from “the world.” The metaphor of a “hedge” was commonly used. These queries importantly acknowledge a profound shift in our thinking. In order to survive and, more than that, to *thrive* in the future, we must identify and practice becoming what the world needs. Cincinnati Friends Meeting (CFM) has pursued four major routes for identifying what the world needs and doing what we can to meet those needs.

### **We identify what the world needs by being in the world.**

Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee (P&SC) works to become aware of the needs of several social support organizations in the city of Cincinnati that provide support to those who suffer from the world’s problems of hunger and homelessness, and to do what we can to meet those needs. In 2023 through the P&SC Committee, members and attenders of CFM provided a Bethany House Home Kit containing household items families would need as they establish their new homes and transition from homelessness. Personal and household items were also collected and delivered to the residents of Tender Mercies, an organization that provides security, dignity, and community to homeless adults suffering with mental illness. And monetary donations were provided to support local food banks and a non-profit, Christian based organization that supplies food during times when schools are not in session to students and families who suffer from food insecurities.

When the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) endeavored to update their policy statement on reproductive health, the P&SC Committee actively engaged CFM members and

attenders in discernment sessions to gain the sense of our Meeting regarding these issues. The document P&SC wrote from those discussions melded disparate voices into one vibrant, cohesive statement that spoke to our beliefs as a community. Along with input from other Friends Meetings, CFM's inclusive participation and subsequent submission of responses influenced the development of FCNL's November 2023 Annual Meeting updated stance on reproductive health and abortion, emphasizing individual discernment, legal rights, and support for equitable access to service.

CFM is in touch with the needs of the world through our active participation in EquaSion, a non-partisan interfaith organization committed to fostering understanding, respect, compassion, inclusion and engagement among faith communities and all people in Cincinnati. CFM hosts a booth each summer at EquaSion's *Festival of Faiths*, Cincinnati's largest interfaith celebration which brings together adherents to 34 faith traditions and 13 world religions to share food, entertainment and experiences. CFM has also committed to EquaSion's initiative *A Mighty Stream*, which aims to advance the cause of racial justice through education, dialogue, community-building and advocacy for policies and legislation to remediate systemic inequities. Led by Spiritual Nurturer for Growth and Outreach Cathy Barney, CFM has assembled a core group that has begun examining their own racial biases and learning about racial inequities in our city and country, with the goal of bringing their learning to the entire CFM community. CFM Minister Jim Newby has been very active in EquaSion for 7 years, serving on both the *Festival of Faiths* Planning Committee and on the Advisory Board for *A Mighty Stream*.

Born of a developing friendship that reaches across lines of color between CFM Minister Jim Newby and Pastor John Ivey of Beulah Missionary Baptist Church, our two communities have become friends as well. Spiritual Nurturer for Growth and Outreach Cathy Barney organized a June picnic for members of both communities which featured food, fun, crafts, conversation, and even some gospel singing under the trees on our beautiful property. At Christmastime, our two communities met again, this time at Beulah's church, to share Christmas traditions and continue building relationships. At the next meeting of our two communities, planned for May 25 of 2024, we will share our prayer traditions, with both Jim Newby and John Ivey speaking about the nature of prayer in their own traditions.

One of the ways that CFM practices being what the world needs is by witnessing via our online and printed newsletter, *The Traveling Friend*. Through its articles, we hope to encourage spiritual growth, promote stewardship of the earth, build a beloved community, and share both the historical and contemporary perspectives of Friends. We also engage the world through social media, with a presence on Facebook and X (Twitter).

Cincinnati Friends learns the needs of our local world through its participation in the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati (MARCC), an organized coalition of faith organizations that seek

to collaborate around social concerns in Cincinnati. Serving as our representative to MARCC, Nan Hatch reports each month on the activities and priorities of the organization.

**We identify what the world needs by discovering the needs of our own members and attenders.**

For the children of CFM, the world brings a new set of concerns that ironically parallel the world their parents are living in. Exposure to social media and technology can bring with it over-stimulation, distraction and the weight of one's self-esteem. There also seems to be an increase in group and individual bullying among youth. Though individualism is encouraged, conformity is lauded.

First Day School attempts to meet the needs of our children by providing a space for them to be heard, to be seen and to grow spiritually. The Quaker testimonies (SPICES) are the backdrop for each lesson. We take time for centering in a moment of quiet after doing a brief check in with each child. A talking stick is an essential tool that allows space for the eager voices to learn to listen as well as to share. Lessons ebb and flow between Quaker history and biblical story sharing, and then back to how these lessons intersect with the children's current world and their own stories. There are moments of awe shared by both teacher and child, and children are reminded of God's love working in their lives, even if they don't understand. The keys of paying attention, listening, respecting and welcoming others provide tools children can use when facing the needs of the world.

Spiritual Nurturer for Growth and Outreach Cathy Barney has discovered the spiritual needs of adult members and attenders by staying in contact with leaders of CFM's spiritual nurture and book study groups, and encouraging those leaders when needed. In the fall of 2023, Cathy created and facilitated a retreat that invited several guest speakers to share with participants ways they can discover their own spiritual gifts. In a brainstorming session during that retreat, Cathy identified needs that have resulted in the creation of three new spiritual nurture groups for 2024 that include such topics as aging, inter-generational connection and expressing Spirit through poetry. Cathy brought her expertise and experience to Wilmington Yearly Meeting, conducting a mini-retreat on spiritual nurture groups and creating a pamphlet which captured her 20 years of experience in encouraging spiritual growth.

Cathy has also worked to organize an April, 2024, trip to England for 15 Quakers who will visit various locations of historical importance as they learn about the early roots of Quakerism. Following a leading in 2022 to visit these sites, Cathy made important connections with United Kingdom Quakers who will be facilitating CFM's visit and helping to interpret the significance of the sites important to Quakers.

In 2023, the We Care ad hoc committee continued to pursue its mission to be intentional in maintaining connections and providing support and comfort to members and attenders of our CFM

community. Begun during a year of pandemic, the committee expanded its work this year to arrange transportation for members and attenders who needed help getting to worship services or committee meetings, and to coordinate meals for families experiencing health challenges or the loss of a loved one. The committee provided support and companionship to two members who experienced hospitalization and a transition from home to assisted living arrangements this year. As committee members have refined their mission, they have realized that the best way to serve the CFM community is to facilitate care among members and attenders, rather than providing all of that care themselves. Doing so avoids burnout among committee members and builds relationships within our community, allowing Spirit to lead individuals to serve one another. The committee has also grown in its understanding of listening, offering only the care people desire, and offering it in ways that better honor the individuality and dignity of recipients.

Our Nominating Committee seeks to help identify and address the world's needs by placing appropriate individuals in positions where they can provide guidance and leadership on people's spiritual and corporeal concerns.

### **We Identify what the world needs by responding to visitors and newcomers**

The "world" is finding Cincinnati Friends Meeting; there is a spiritual fire burning here that warms our souls and appeals to others. It is this generation's responsibility to keep those fires burning and it is the Trustees' particular responsibility to keep the meeting physically and financially viable both for the present, and for the very long term.

When "the world" comes to the meeting, in the form of first-time visitors, are they finding what they need? Are they finding a welcoming place, a cared-for environment, a spiritually nurturing space? CFM's Trustees routinely place "how would this look to a visitor?" at the top of their considerations. When the subject of placing chairs in our back yard was first proposed, Trustees considered what would look most welcoming to visitors, including those with mobility challenges. In another example, Trustees are actively involved in an overhaul of our septic system. "The world" needs watersheds that are clear and clean. Our current system, designed in the 1950s, is falling short of that goal, so our testimonies require us to procure a system that not only meets current EPA requirements, but is designed to last as long into the future as we can project.

"The world" redefined itself during the Covid years. Meeting for Worship now permanently includes members and attenders who cannot attend in person, either for reasons of health or distance. The installation of two large flatscreens, three cameras, and a mixing table moves the world into worship in ways that could not have been imagined in the past.

When newcomers arrive at our door, they are welcomed by a Greeter who offers a “welcome package” of information about CFM, gives them an overview of what to expect and where to find restrooms, and directs them to the children’s area if needed.

Our Hospitality Committee has provided many opportunities for folks to sit down and break bread together. In the past year we have seen a marked increase in the number of people attending hospitality events, allowing people to connect and find spiritual nurture through community. Hospitality provides an opportunity for guests and new attenders to connect with long-time members and for children to mingle with the whole community. The members of the Hospitality committee are gratified to see these connections being made and excited to continue serving in this way.

### **We identify what the world needs by redefining “world” to include the planet and all creation**

The Native Plant ad hoc committee convened in January and May of 2023 to strategize maintenance and next steps for their pocket prairie project, tree identification, and invasive species control. In August, the group collaborated with staff from Indian Hill’s Stanley Rowe Arboretum to verify tree identification data, and to discuss woodland care and a future property Master Plan. With input from forestry experts, representatives of approximately 30 tree species that are accessible to the public were identified on the property. Throughout 2023, efforts were made to control invasive species - Lesser Celandine and Garlic Mustard in the spring, and invasive Bush Honeysuckle and Privet in the fall. The pocket prairie was tended to, with additional native plant and wildflower seeds sown for future growth. Overall, the committee demonstrated a commitment to ecological restoration and community engagement of Cincinnati Friends. In the coming months, CFM will be considering the creation of a permanent committee that would embrace a larger responsibility for our stewardship of the earth testimony. This committee would include the work of the native plant group, and could also consider energy use, recycling, composting, and other issues of environmental concern.

This year the P&SC Committee provided monetary support to Faith Communities Go Green (FCGG) and Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW), organizations that support world-wide environmental concerns. A member and voluntary representative from the Committee attends annual meetings, receives newsletters, and provides information on how to educate and inspire faith and civic communities on how to change lifestyles for the betterment of the environment.

And, finally, the stewardship of our financial resources by our Trustees is conducted with a mind toward environmental responsibility. The overwhelming majority of our resources are invested with Friends Fiduciary, ensuring that our testimony of stewardship of the earth is honored, along with our other testimonies of peace, integrity, and equality. Careful management of our resources by Trustees will ensure that Cincinnati Friends Meeting will be in the world for as far as we can see into the future.