

Cincinnati Friends Meeting

2025 State of Society Report

April, 2025

2024-25 Theme: We recognize the well-being of the Earth as a fundamental spiritual concern.

Scripture: God created...and it was very good. Genesis 1:1-31

2024-25 Queries:

1. How is your meeting being led regarding the spiritual concern of Stewardship and care for the earth?
2. How do we honor the beauty and balance of God's creation, guarding against all abuse?
3. How do we live in thankful awareness of God's creation?

"The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age."

- John Woolman

In so many ways, large ones and small, Wilmington Yearly Meeting's theme has been the center of activity at Cincinnati Friends Meeting this year. We are so fortunate to own a property that is one-half forested, and our growing sense of stewardship in recent years has led us to be more intentional about caring for that woodlot and for the life with which we share it. That sensibility has spread into nearly every corner of life in our community this year.

Septic system

Probably the most impactful project we have undertaken this year has been the replacement of a septic system that dates from the building of our meetinghouse in 1963. The outdated system was found to have been releasing *E. coli* bacteria into the stream that borders our property, and it was clear that it needed to be modernized. After much research and investigation by our Trustees, we installed a new mound-style septic system in September, honoring God's creation by treating and filtering all of our waste and converting it to clean water which is then circulated to the earth beneath.

Stewardship of the Earth Committee

A second major commitment to our environment this year was realized in the formalization of a new Stewardship of the Earth Committee, which was launched in August. The committee arose from a recent initiative, overseen by Trustees, to make our property more environmentally friendly by planting a small plot of Ohio native prairie plants, providing food and habitat for native pollinating insects and the animals and plants that are supported by them. The work of this “Native Plant ad hoc committee” expanded into caring for our woodlot by aggressive removal of invasive plants, notably honeysuckle and European privet. As we began to see exciting results from our work, and ideas about other ways to care for our environment proliferated, it was a natural next step to create a new Committee that could oversee these efforts, as well as begin to address other issues of environmental concern.

As the newly-formed Stewardship of the Earth Committee began to consider its role in our community, an early realization was the sheer magnitude of the task, which can feel overwhelming. The Committee has begun by educating themselves about which efforts are most likely to make a significant difference, and to begin there. First steps have been taken at fellowship meals to introduce or consider composting, recycling, using reusable tableware rather than paper and plastic, and encouraging plant-rich diets. A next step is to educate the community, so that members and attenders see the need for this work and see practical ways they can participate, both at the meetinghouse and at home. The idea is to “lower the bar” for people, so they can easily see ways to be involved.

Peace and Social Concerns

Spirit is showing us that God’s creation encompasses all people, and its elements are so very interconnected. We are seeing how racism, inequality, poverty, violence, illness, death, and more are interwoven with stewardship of the earth. As we open ourselves to learning about how we have contributed to all these problems, we are moving into an ever-deeper awareness of God’s creation. This year, our Peace and Social Concerns (P&SC) Committee prioritized community and individual or family needs, peace efforts and immigration concerns. The P&SC Committee also “lowers the bar” for participation by gaining knowledge about the needs of our greater community and making those needs known to members and attenders.

In 2024, through its budget, as well as through directed donations from individuals, P&SC has provided Bethany House with two complete home kits for families transitioning from homelessness to independent living, as well as holiday gift cards for residents. Monetary donations were also provided to four local food banks, the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati (MARCC), Tender Mercies, the Wilmington College food assistance program and Community Shares of Greater Cincinnati. The Committee also responded to expressed needs by making monetary or gift card donations to ten families within our community. In support of peace efforts and immigration concerns, donations were also provided to Ignite Peace, Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Native Hope, American Friends Service Committee, and the Haitian Community in Springfield, Ohio.

We Care Committee

As our community grows in number, the responsibility to care for one another has also grown and has propelled us to approach care in a more intentional and coordinated way. In recent years, an ad hoc committee we've called "We Care" has been identifying needs and creating pathways for members and attenders to address those needs efficiently. This year, the We Care ad hoc committee was formalized to become the We Care Committee. Officially launched with new leadership in September, the We Care Committee oversees, coordinates and encourages Cincinnati Friends to care for one another. Since its September launch, the committee has coordinated assistance with meals for several families, sent cards expressing love and support to people experiencing difficult times, and organized or offered transportation for two members. A representative of the committee attended our December 21 Longest Night service, to offer support where needed. The committee recently requested the purchase a wheelchair to have on hand at the meetinghouse with the aim of encouraging attendance by those with ambulatory difficulties.

First Day School

An equally important part of God's creation is our youngest members and attenders. Cincinnati Friends First Day School is a vibrant, growing spiritual community where children are supported in their personal journeys toward understanding and living out the core tenets of Quakerism. The flexibility in teaching style, the emphasis on personal experience, and the spirit of inclusion all contribute to a meaningful learning experience for the children. By focusing on stewardship, peace, and the teachings of Jesus, First Day School helps young people deepen their faith, connect with their peers, and grow in their commitment to living out Quaker values.

Busy family schedules, siblings and a broad age range are challenging. However, the children are aware of each other's uniqueness, and are encouraged to value and listen to one another, welcoming the newcomers and embracing new teachers with openness and curiosity.

This year, we added assistant Anita Zupin, who plays an important role in maintaining a calm, respectful classroom environment. A new, ad hoc education committee recently gathered to support these efforts, as well as adult education and spiritual nurture. The First Day School Coordinator and Spiritual Nurturer developed a teaching guide to encourage more members and attenders to help with teaching, as we embrace our children as a valued part of the community and steward this precious resource.

Spiritual Nurture

Care for our community surpasses physical needs to address the spiritual lives of our members and attenders. Our Nurturer for Spiritual Growth and Outreach, Cathy Barney, has had a busy year, completing the process to become a Recorded Minister in the presence of many supportive Cincinnati Meeting Friends at annual sessions in Maryville, Tennessee. Spiritual-nurture groups flourished this year, culminating in a full end-of-year retreat. Additionally, Cathy organized a youth camp with our

sister church Beulah Missionary Baptist Church at our beautiful Quaker Knoll Camp, engaged in anti-racism work in our meeting and helped revamp our First Day School program.

A highlight of Cathy's year was to organize and lead a trip to 1652 Country in the United Kingdom, tracing George Fox's journey near his 400th birthday. The fifteen pilgrims making the trek became their own spiritual-nurture group, meeting months ahead of their departure. Sharing our rich history amidst the natural beauty of Lancashire and the Lake District in England with our hosts/guides Wendy Hampton and Ben Pink Dandelion created a new bond, cemented in daily worship. Wendy is Programme Coordinator for Supporting Quaker Communities at Woodbrooke Quaker Centre, and Ben directs post-graduate Quaker studies at Birmingham University, and leads research at Woodbrooke. With a richer understanding of founding Quakers, we deepened our faith and community, and we are drawing inspiration from those early Quakers as we consider our response to the new political landscape in the United States.

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee did some heavy lifting this year, tasked with filling two new Committees and nominating a new Music Coordinator, who will oversee a quarterly series of concerts after worship. The goal of the committee has been to ensure that a broad range of voices and talents are represented in leadership roles, and that our leadership structure continues to evolve with the needs of the Meeting. The committee engaged in a thoughtful discernment process, using the results of an all-member and attender survey of gifts to guide decisions about placements. A strong emphasis was placed on inclusivity and balance throughout the year. Special attention was given to ensuring that newer members of the meeting are engaged in leadership opportunities, while also maintaining a sense of continuity by retaining experienced members. Care was taken to keep lines of communication open, ensuring that the process remained transparent and collaborative, with feedback and insights gathered from all members of the committee.

Work of the Minister

Minister Jim Newby's messages continue to challenge and encourage our community. His participation in Wilmington Yearly Meeting supports Quakerism locally, and this year he represented Quakers to the greater world by delivering an Opening Prayer at the Festival of Faiths, serving as emcee for both Ohio Open Doors and Sacred Connections gatherings at our meetinghouse, delivering the opening prayer at a meeting of MARCC, through his work with the Cincinnati interfaith collaborative EquaSion, and by speaking with religion students at local high schools. Partly because of Jim Newby's leadership and outreach, our Meeting continues to grow in numbers and in spiritual depth. In 2024 we added five new members, added a sixth by transfer from another Meeting, and transferred the membership of one member to another Meeting.

Other Projects

This year the Trustees engaged in several short-term projects that enhanced the environment in which

we work and worship. They spearheaded the design and installation of a conversation circle in the lawn behind our meetinghouse. Constructed in February of paving stones in warm earth tones, the circle honors God's creation in its simplicity and beauty, and offers a comfortable space for connections to be made and strengthened. Each chair in the circle was donated to the Meeting with a plaque that remembers or honors a loved one, encouraging thankful awareness each time we sit down. During warmer months, many of our nurture groups have enjoyed meeting in the conversation circle.

Another project undertaken by the Trustees this year was to replace our old acoustic piano with a new electric piano. The old piano did not thrive in the fluctuating temperatures of our meeting room, and required constant tuning. The new piano stays in tune, and connects with our existing sound system, producing a more beautiful and balanced sound. This piano was funded entirely by contributions from the meeting, thus providing stewardship of our investments. Careful stewardship of all of the Meetings investments by Trustees ensures that Cincinnati Friends Meeting will be in the world for as far as we can see into the future.

Care of our earth is foundational. If we damage our planet to the point that it is uninhabitable, all of our other plans and dreams will not be realized. We are confirmed in our recent emphasis on stewardship of the earth by the knowledge that Wilmington Yearly Meeting has been led to the same emphasis independently.