

MIDDLEBURY FRIENDS MEETING

STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT FOR 2011

Two dozen Friends gathered for two hours of worship sharing to reflect on the year, 2011. We identified areas of stability and growth as well as edges of discomfort, which inspire our desire to improve.

Spiritual Community and Worship: Friends expressed that MFM is a source of personal grounding, safety, peace and renewal. Many expressed gratitude for MFM and for our times of worship. Meetings for worship are usually deeply centered, whether totally silent or enriched by vocal ministry. A variety of topics have been explored in Friendly Forums providing vehicles to search within ourselves and as a spiritual community. When one Friend relinquished her long time practice of placing flowers in the middle of our worship circle other Friends responded to the invitation to provide something natural and simple. We note, with regret, that we did not provide active support to two worship groups under our care.

Children: This year saw a concerted effort to focus on the needs and well-being of our children. It was decided to create a part time position, Children's Program Coordinator. We dedicated funds and hired a coordinator to start January 2012. We recognize the unique challenges of families with young children to come to meeting on Sunday mornings; we are grateful to these families and their commitment to integrate their children into Quaker values, practices and community. We welcomed the birth of a new child.

Pastoral Care: We welcomed several newcomers over the year, tended to Friends who are facing challenges and provided support to Friends experiencing life transitions. When Friends ask one another, "How are you?" we are secure in knowing the asker is truly interested in our well-being.

Fellowship: We have shared joyful events such as intergenerational meetings, potlucks and Friendly 8s potluck groups. There is a vibrant group of college students who join us for worship and social gatherings. Especially noted are the men's and women's groups, long time monthly gatherings that continue to provide support to those who attend.

Outreach and the wider Quaker community: We usually have representation at quarterly and yearly meetings. However, we struggle with balancing the need to participate in wider Quaker groups and the environmental impact of traveling distances in order to do so. We sent a Minute directly to Friends United Meeting concerning their denial to include gay men, lesbians and unmarried couples in positions of leadership.

We appreciate our various vehicles of communication and outreach. One Friend continues to create a beautiful monthly newsletter, as well as various information cards, pamphlets and nametags; our librarian keeps the library in good order and current with new books and pamphlets; our listserv is actively used by all of us to send out information, solicit help for practical needs, share poems and theological reflections and report on activities. Our representatives to other groups keep us informed through announcements and listserv, e.g., Interfaith Power and Light and the Middlebury Area Clergy Association. Within our local community we hosted 2 Friday night community suppers, providing 200 meals on each occasion.

We struggle with how much social action to undertake as a corporate body. While many Friends derive strength and support from MFM to carry out their individual leadings, we wonder if we should do more as a faith group. We are challenged to find ways to express our love beyond those who love us back.

Organization and Finances: Our committee structure, honed a few years ago, provides the oversight for all our activities. It enables more people to be involved and alleviates stress to the few Friends who used to carry the load. The change of meeting time for monthly meeting for business to earlier in the morning on the third Sunday has worked well for most Friends who regularly attend.

We have met for several years in the Fellowship Room of Havurah House. Given our desire to not own property we have found a good partnership and home in this space. However, we acknowledge some limitations. The need for sound abatement was addressed in 2011 and we now enjoy improved acoustics, especially during worship. MFM is in good financial health. Friends respond to appeals when needs arise. Recognizing growing needs within our local community and beyond, we decided to increase most of our annual benevolences. It is noted, however, that only a few households provide the largest share of financial support to MFM.

Future: Our reflections on the past year prompt us to identify areas in which we hope to improve in the year ahead.

1. We would like to connect with the two worship groups under our care as well as other meetings in our area.
2. Develop and expand the children's program with the new coordinator by maintaining a high level of involvement among all Friends.
3. Explore ways to improve the path of arrival into the worship space which is often slippery in the winter and congested inside the door.
4. Encourage broader financial participation.
5. Develop Friendly Forums on Quakerism.
6. Include reading Advices during the monthly reading of Queries.
7. Find ways to use the restlessness felt by some to create ways MFM can take action to address such issues as climate change, perhaps in collaboration with other faith groups.
8. Stay alert to sparks that may arise to lead us into corporate action.