

# Evanston Monthly Meeting of Friends

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## EVANSTON FRIENDS MEETING STATE OF SOCIETY REPORT 2008

### **Spiritual Life**

Spiritual life is clearly at the center of Evanston Friends Meeting, with attendance of 60 or more at weekly Meetings for Worship. The Meeting has visitors each week, a number of whom have become quite regular attenders. Even attenders have commented on a strong perception of the Spirit in Meeting for Worship. The practice of asking for prayer requests near the end of Meeting nurtures individuals who are able to share their concerns for loved ones while also enabling us all to appreciate the challenges some are facing. Collectively holding in the Light those who are ill or in transition has been an important part of our ministry. The Meeting held a Fall retreat "Grounded in the Spirit" which generated energy to head into the year as well as identifying some shared convictions: that we can grow in the Spirit better together than alone; a willingness to be guided by the Spirit; a desire to get to know one another more deeply; and a concern for the outer world.

A Sunday evening Meeting for Worship was initiated by a member and draws a small, but continuing number of seekers. Twice a month on Saturdays, the Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ meets at the Meeting House, attracting Friends from the metropolitan area and north into Wisconsin. The annual Silent Retreat, held in Williams Point, Wisconsin, each year on a weekend in late October, continues to provide grounding for many in the Meeting. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business has been enriched by the presence of a person designated by Ministry & Counsel to pray throughout the Meeting.

### **Membership**

New members in 2008 were Kathie and Clem Biddle, Madelyn George, Phyllis Reynolds, and Laura Krughoff. New associate members were Duncan Reilly and Nicole Barker. We celebrated the wedding of Ken Laughlin and Deb Cronkrite in June. A memorial service was held for longtime attender Phyllis Van Leer.

Midway through the year, we lost the active participation of some devoted members when Jim Strait and Yonny Levy departed for a year in Geneva and the Holloway family decided to spend most of the year in Santa Fe.

### **Learning**

A themed approach to Meeting for Learning (formerly Second Hour) has resonated with members and attenders. Through the first half of the year, the theme was the Peace Testimony with sessions on such topics as Peacemaking between Palestinians and Israelis, Conflict Resolution, A.J. Muste, and classes for prisoners. In the fall, under the umbrella of "Nourishing Our Roots", we explored the value of retreats, group spiritual direction, inspirational poetry and music, and songs of conviction. We have strived for a balance between bringing in outside speakers to inform us about issues and drawing on our own members' experience and expertise in sharing their insights through worship sharing or personal presentation. Some of the most popular sessions are the fourth Sunday spiritual journeys. Most this year have featured two or three people focused on a common theme, exploring the way in which living in an interfaith household, for example, has shaped their spiritual journeys. Other sessions addressed creativity, relationships and personal spiritual practice. Worship Sharing Meetings on early spiritual experiences, simplicity and gratitude provided opportunities to know each other better as well as to reflect deeply on a topic.

A highlight of the year was a fall workshop on "The Joy of Simplicity and Stewardship," held with the support of Metropolitan Chicago General Meeting. It featured a presentation by Roland Kreager, General Secretary of Right Sharing for World Resources. Other Friends and community friends were invited, and a number joined in the workshop.

## **Challenges**

Two committees faced significant challenges this year. The committee working to develop and implement new landscaping for our side yard came to a point in its deliberations where clearness could not be found. Rather than strive to create it through compromise or prolonged conversation, the Meeting decided to “rest” the committee and its issues until after the first of the New Year, making room for the Spirit to work and for the project to again become joyful, enthusiastic work for those involved.

The Religious Education Committee struggled with a loss of leadership and direction, with the resignation of some Committee members. Illinois Yearly Meeting Religious Education Committee minutes were helpful in pointing up the commonality of this concern among Friends. A joint meeting of Ministry & Counsel and Religious Education agreed that religious education is the responsibility of the Meeting as a whole, and not just the parents. The concept of a unified curriculum for First Day School was approved, with three emphases: Understanding Quaker Beliefs and History, Peace and Social Action, and Biblical Study. The Religious Education Committee found new vigor in the fall with new leadership and the participation of two adult young friends as teachers.

## **Outreach and Service**

Concern for the wider world is an integral part of the Meeting. The Meeting supported Sara Gmitter in her trip to Burundi as part of the Friends Peace Teams/African Great Lakes Initiative work camps, and Sara gave a presentation to the Meeting on her experience. Another Friend Barbara Williamson is on a mission to work for some months at Koinonia. Our Friends of Latin America continue to support the higher education of a student in Guatemala.

Our Peace, Social Concerns, and Earthcare Committee have a strong membership and attendance, with individuals taking leadership for various causes. The Meeting as a whole held a potluck for Sudan in the spring and monthly simple lunches to benefit Right Sharing of World Resources. Concern for the environment is being addressed through promotion of low-energy fluorescent lights and awareness of one’s carbon footprint. A Meeting for Learning session on the awareness of racism and White privilege stimulated interest that will be pursued in 2009. Many participated in the Night Ministry dinner for Homeless Youth at nearby Lake Street Church. In another project with Lake Street Church, money was raised to purchase solar cookers for Darfur.

## **Fellowship**

The social time after Meeting for Worship is something many look forward to each week. The Friendly Dinners did not get established in the fall, but other fellowship opportunities continue, such as the pancake breakfast first Sunday, the potluck luncheon second Sunday, and simple lunch fourth Sunday. Third Sunday, there is a celebration of those having birthdays that month with cake for all. Movies are shown at the Meetinghouse on two Friday evenings each month. Second hours on fifth Sundays have been designated as a fellowship time led by the Friendship and Hospitality Committee.

A young adult group has been growing in strength, holding activities outside Meeting and forming a community within the larger Meeting community. The Meeting is planning for intervisitation with Northside Friends. We also frequently welcome visitors from Meetings throughout the Midwest and indeed throughout the country. Some of our members, in turn, have made a point of visiting with these other Meetings.

“We know the power of God’s Spirit at work in the lives of people within the community of our meeting.... We also know that we are engaged in a life-long growth into faith, and experience a continuing irruption of grace into our lives which demands and sustains a commitment to a life of discipleship. We recognize this power at work in people of all ages, races and creeds: a transforming power which can issue in lives of joy, humility, and service.”

London Yearly Meeting, 1986