

## Bellingham Friends Meeting State of Society Report for 2014

Bellingham Friends enjoyed a deepening sense of community in 2014, manifested as vocal ministry; social justice activism; greater participation in events such as second-hour programs and annual retreat; mutual support in times of loss; and, last but not least, increased attendance.

Social actions in 2014 included:

- \*Co-sponsorship of short plays on prison reform and electoral process reform, as well as the Human Rights Film Festival;

- \*Support for inspection of rental housing in Bellingham;

- \*Gathering funds for and maintaining awareness of the work of the Friends New Underground Railroad, a project of Olympia Friends Meeting; and

- \*Raising funds for a “Concern of the Month” to support organizations that share Friends' values.

Bellingham Friends last year worked on empowering ourselves to recognize and honor leadings, both collective and individual. This is reflected in our new Social and Environmental Concerns Committee job description, and in the second-hour programs it sponsored on recognizing and following leadings. Simultaneously, we supported each other in such leadings and increased our awareness of opportunities that might speak to them. Friends appreciate this emphasis on social action arising from spiritual callings, and it appears that more Friends are making commitments to individual leadings. Donations to our “Concern of the Month” increased as well.

Two of our eldest active Friends, Tom Hall and Howard Harris, passed away in the latter half of 2014. These losses, combined with the death of Doris Ferm in 2013, left us feeling both a loss of spiritual wisdom and a renewed sense of mutual support and an awareness of the need to carry on their legacies of leadership. We were comforted by opportunities to support family members of these departed Friends and others whose close relatives who died or were gravely ill.

Despite – perhaps partly because of – our recent losses, we feel a renewed sense of energy toward the goal of finding our own meetinghouse. Several of us attended the meetinghouse-warming in Port Townsend during November and were inspired by the way their transition excited new life for that Meeting.

We celebrate an increase in our average attendance, with the mean number of adults attending weekly going from about 20 in 2013 to almost 24.5 in 2014. Several of our relatively new attenders stepped up to make significant contributions to the life of the Meeting. Our children's program is still small but vital, and blessed by the addition of a newborn to our community last fall. To enrich our growing community, we began a series of adult education programs using the curriculum “Quakerism – Experience It!” developed by Elaine Craudereuff and adapted by Steven Smith.

Our connection with Quaker and other organizations that share our values enhances our sense of community. We continued oversight of Lopez Island Preparative Meeting and enjoyed visits with Lopez Friends. We also again sponsored a Friend to attend the Friends General Conference Gathering, and assisted others to attend NPYM last summer. We also made connections with other organizations and programs that share our values, including Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship, Restorative Community Coalition, League of Women Voters, Center for Spiritual Living, Bellingham Human Rights Film Festival, Death Café, *Western Friend*, Friends Committee on Washington Public Policy, and the Alternatives to Violence Project. We hope to continue and deepen these associations.

As our relationships with the wider community deepened, so did the vocal ministry offered during meetings for worship and business, coming from a deeply spiritual and centered place. The same tendency was also evident during our enriching annual Meeting Retreat in November, on the theme of “Building Connections.” Ministry and Counsel committee has sponsored second-hour programs and developed guidelines for vocal ministering, in order to nurture that aspect of our Meeting.