

## Bellingham Friends Meeting, State of Society Report for 2007

Bellingham Friends strengthened our community in many ways, building on the period of growth and change that began with our move to Explorations Academy in 2006. Meeting continues to draw new attenders, both seasoned Friends and newcomers to Quakerism, who enrich our worship and our community. It is a delight to see longtime Bellingham Friends and new attenders mesh and get to know one another in what seems a very short time. We have sought and found new ways to connect with one another, even as we continue to reach out to others in the wider community, working for peace, social justice and a healthy environment.

Our weekly worship hour grounds our Quaker “family” and remains the core of our Meeting, renewing our inspiration for continued work in the world. This year the deep silence that characterizes our group's worship hour has sometimes given rise to lively and inspiring vocal ministry. Some wish for more vocal ministry, seeing it as a way that everyone can care for and support the Meeting. Others treasure the times of silent worship together as a source of deep connection. We are fortunate to have a dedicated group of Friends who open up, set up, rearrange and clean up our meeting space and prepare coffee and tea before worship each week. Their work makes our shared worship possible and greatly enhances our time together.

We also have several avenues outside First-Day worship to share our spiritual journeys. Our annual spring “clerk's potluck” has proven to be an inspirational and grounding approach to each year, setting goals and sharing concerns. The Meeting also formed a Spirit Study group midyear, which meets monthly to share spirit-filled books and ideas. This is in addition to our long-standing book group, which continues to be well-attended. Another group is studying End of Life issues, supporting Friends living through the loss of a loved one, and helping plan how we wish to express our spiritual beliefs as we face our own mortality. Several Friends have lost loved ones this year, giving our Meeting the opportunity to show compassion and caring. A temporary midweek worship group formed in the last half of the year, holding a monthly silent worship at a local nursing home with a Friend who is rarely able to come to meeting.

Ministry and Counsel Committee has been striving to improve our Friendly practices. The committee sponsored two workshops led by a local NVC “Compassionate Communication” trainer, introducing Friends to skills that hold promise for resolving disagreements lovingly. We have improved our system of establishing the Business Meeting agenda ahead of time. These measures and others have supported our Meeting's growth in being able to hold Light-filled Meetings for Worship for Business.

We cherish our children's program, rejoicing in the energy our many children bring when they join us in worship, and celebrating their growth as Friends. We have built on the many successes of our Children's Program this year, providing a stable and consistent program for elementary-age children and warm, loving care for infants and toddlers. Although the large number of children has sometimes offered challenges in establishing routine and a peaceful culture of problem-solving, the Children's Program leaders and volunteers have worked to create a stable, welcoming program that fosters respect among the children, and between children and adults.

We are blessed with a high proportion of actively participating members and attenders. Yet ours is still a small meeting. Nominating committee this year chose to

leave some positions empty, respecting the limits of individuals in the Meeting to achieve all our corporate goals at once! We celebrate the many gifts of our members and attenders. We have a really talented and dedicated group!

Our Peace and Social Concerns and Earthcare committees continue to be an outlet for Friends to express their commitment to Quaker testimonies in their everyday lives and in the wider world. Earthcare committee's "Eco-suggestion of the Month" educates and inspires us to do what we can in small and large ways to protect the Earth. We welcomed Louis Cox and Ruah Swennerfelt, visiting Friends from Vermont on a pilgrimage -- walking from Vancouver, B.C. to San Diego to demonstrate and educate around the need to curb consumerism and energy consumption.

The Meeting held its annual peace vigil at the Peace Pole on Harris Avenue on Nov. 11, Armistice Day. Committed Friends constitute a regular Quaker presence at the weekly Peace Vigil at the Federal Building downtown, and at the Saturday Bellingham Farmer's Market, where our table offers education and opportunities for letter-writing. Peace and Social Concerns offers a wonderful weekly letter-writing campaign to Friends, providing pre-written letters to political leaders on a wide variety of issues.

The Meeting's financial health is good: our funds suffice to support the work of the Meeting, including space for worship, children's program and committee meetings at Explorations Academy; good works within our Meeting and beyond; and a Meetinghouse Fund, which reflects our hope to someday have a home of our own.

We recognize that there is more to be done. We want to improve our record-keeping, to honor our Meeting's history, make it accessible to all Friends, and lighten our present labor by learning from the past. We want to assure that all Friends feel welcome and able to work with our children regularly, and hope to offer more training for volunteers in the coming year. We hope to encourage more members and attenders to become a visible presence at community events. We plan to streamline our committee structure, to improve communication and efficiency. And, finally, we strive always to maintain a loving awareness of our shared humanity and individual frailties, realizing that by sharing our journey, whether painful or joyful, we enrich our ability to know one another in ways that are eternal.