

State of Society, Bellingham Friends Meeting, 2016

Bellingham Friends Meeting is managing with agility and creativity, and Meeting attendance is growing. Outreach and Welcoming Committee reported weekly adult and children attendance averages increased by 6% from the previous year.

Several operating changes occurred during the year. Lopez Preparatory Meeting (long under our care) became an independent Meeting. The Outreach and Welcoming Group became a committee of its own, no longer within Ministry and Counsel. Production of *Metamorphosis*, our monthly newsletter, was laid down, with the continuation of our E-news newsletter, which has been a big success. Explorations Academy, the location where we currently meet, underwent a significant remodel. A document regarding clarification of our process of decision-making and working with committees, after several years of development and seasoning, was accepted and approved because members had expressed concern about improving clarity about discernment.

Many activities and ongoing events continue to deepen our community, including: second hours on spiritual journeys; mid-week worship; monthly Spirit group, monthly Earthcare group, a retreat in June, and an overnight camping trip in August. Friends continue to participate in community activities and Quaker groups: FCNL, QEW, Quaker Voice (formally FCWPP), Pendle Hill, FGC, as well as local interfaith events.

Two Meeting outreach committees were very active. Outreach and Welcoming Committee brought and shared literature at three public city-wide events, and sponsored second-hour programs on examining "Quaker Ways", the testimonies, discernment, and diversity among Friends.

The Social and Environmental Concerns Committee (SEC) experienced several changes in its composition, yet continued to actively and effectively nurture Friends' collective and individual witness to the wider world. SEC encouraged Friends' participation at numerous events promoting peace and understanding as well as gender, LGBTQQA, racial, environmental, economic, and social justice. SEC's presentations for 'concerns of the month' and legislative issues facilitated Friends' civic witness and enhanced support for local groups working in harmony with Quaker testimonies.

Under the leadership of the Finance Committee, BFM once again met its budget. Saved funds, most set aside for a Meetinghouse, have grown substantially through investment with Friends Fiduciary Funds.

A pleasing development during the year was the reinvigoration of the children's program under the stewardship of the Children's Program Committee. The increased level of organization and member participation coincided with an increase in the number of children attending. This was a great joy to Bellingham Friends.

While our Meeting remains strong, the location for worship is an ongoing unresolved issue. Unity about renting, building, buying hasn't been reached. Clarity about a way forward is being discerned. Recent steps include discussion of and seasoning of the Meetinghouse scout job description and of a scouting committee vs. an individual scout.

As our Meeting grows, it struggles on occasion with communicating with loving care. Feelings have been hurt and trust challenged. M&C brought its attention to assist healing and increase listening with Spirit, cultivating mutual respect, and not personalizing conflicts. Friends understood there was an opportunity for learning how to listen better and to bring Spirit more into our communications. BFM continues as a strong community and grows deeper every year.