

2017 State of the Society Western Yearly Meeting

WYM Ministry and Evangelism revised its queries for this year by asking the meetings these questions:

1. How is your meeting nurturing the community?
2. How is your meeting nurturing your members?
3. What is your greatest challenge?
4. How are children and young Friends participating in your Meeting?
5. Name one thing you would like to see happen in the coming year.

We can only summarize the responses here, but we do make the individual meetings' responses available for your study and commend them to you for the variety of information that they contain.

The good news is that our meetings are reaching out to each other and to the community through many activities. Some are reaching out on the local level by supporting homeless families, local fire departments, food pantries, rescue missions, and a county home, both as individual meetings and as part of interfaith efforts. Some have reached out to others through their music programs that include nearby Friends meetings as well as their neighbors. Others have reached out through National Road Sale, Quaker Day festivities, and a Quaker Peace Essay contest. Vacation Bible School is offered by smaller meetings in cooperation with other local churches. One meeting provides clothing for young elementary school children at the school nurse office. First Friends Indianapolis has joined with four other churches to form a "Shalom Zone" to take on service projects together.

Hadley Friends Meeting added "A Quaker Church" to their name to clarify their identity to the outside world. Fairfield Friends has welcomed a Syrian immigrant family and helped them transition to independence in their new homeland. Downer's Grove is standing with a local coalition that promotes support of their Muslim brethren and West Newton has reached out to become better acquainted with their Buddhist neighbors. Most meetings support the Quaker alphabet of FUM & WYM Outreach missions, and several support FCNL concerns. Even Evansville, which considers itself too small for any meeting outreach, named several efforts that its members support individually—reminding us how much every meeting nurtures its community through the unheralded work of its members and attenders.

Meetings nurture their members in many ways: with breakfasts and Monthly Meeting pitch ins, Bible study, Meetings for Learning, and Affinity Groups. Carmel is experimenting with "Messy Church" (which is based on creativity, hospitality, and celebration). For some meetings, USFW and Quaker Men keep the Body of Christ in community. Some meetings rely on the pastor to provide hospital visits and care to the ill, while others allow members to share visiting responsibilities. First Friends has a Circle of Care that supports Friends in need through visits, encouragement, and a meal ministry. Fairfield is expanding adult class options for members. Downer's Grove nurtures members through unprogrammed worship. West Newton has chosen

not to hire a pastor; rather, they share responsibilities to lead meeting for worship, make pastoral visits, and handle administrative duties. First Friends is welcoming Bob Henry with Ruthie Tippin's recent retirement.

The majority of Friends express a similar concern: they are concerned about the aging membership, and especially in smaller communities, families moving away for other job opportunities, along with a lack of new attenders. Newport Friends worries that Sunday sports tournaments keep many from committing to Sunday morning worship. Sheridan has sold their building so that they may lay down their meeting in peace and Second Friends hopes to find a buyer as well. On the other hand, Fairfield Friends reports that they are growing: having several families join in 2016, with more in the membership process. Downer's Grove and Noblesville First have experienced the loss of several members, but have seen enough new attenders, especially several young families, attracted to the Quaker message to maintain their attendance levels.

The majority of WYM meetings are aging with few children. The meetings with children are First Friends Indianapolis, Fairfield Friends, Hadley, New London, Downer's Grove, Coloma, and Carmel Friends.

Hadley Friends joyfully shares that they are experiencing Jesus's commands to Friends in "our love for God and our love for one another." All desire to grow in spiritual depth and health and invite others into the rich relationship with Friends of Jesus. Noblesville First aspires to be "very welcoming" and has started offering classes to acquaint new members with Quaker roots, traditions, faith, and practice. And Sheridan asserts that deciding to lay down their meeting "does not signify that we have failed as a meeting. For nearly 130 years, Sheridan Friends has faithfully served the Lord in northwest Hamilton County" with preaching, praying, and singing.

In summary, the state of the Society of Friends within Western Yearly Meeting can best be described as challenging, but active and engaged.