

Hamilton Monthly Meeting State of Society report for 2008

Despite our deep Meeting for Worship and our many spirit-led activities, we are concerned that Meeting is diminishing. An attender recently suggested that, in a sense, Quakers are selfish; we have the best thing going, but we keep it under our hat. We have been planning steps to improve the situation.

Meeting for Worship has in general been deeply settled with sufficient but not excessive spoken ministry. Spoken ministry has been of a good length, helpful to our seeking, and while often personal, it is also well-shared. We find that two of our practices have been especially helpful in deepening our worship. Every week we read an item from the Advices and Queries as Meeting for Worship settles in. In addition, our “Afterword” session – ten minutes of sharing ministry that was not quite ready to be spoken in Meeting or things that were not quite ministry – has deepened our appreciation of our worship and provided an opportunity for those hesitant to speak in Meeting. This has been especially valuable to newcomers. We continued to have one meeting in the spring in the garden of a Friend and several summer meetings in our own garden at the Meeting house.

We have found the change of the Meeting hour to 10:30-11:30 to be working well, and with coffee or tea in hand, conversations afterwards tend to be warm and friendly and often go another hour. Our financial position continues to be secure. Each year we seem to arrive at a small and manageable deficit or surplus. We have ample cash reserves. We note however that we are achieving budget balance because both our revenues and expenditures are less than expected. This is perhaps less a virtue than a sign of reduced activity.

First Day School has been active on 1st and 3rd Sundays, on the theme of “Stories that inspire us.” The children sometimes join the adults at the close of Meeting to share what they are doing. They sometimes meet at the home of a Friend for their First Day School Programme. On an out-trip the children went to pay a visit to a hospitalized Friend and sang to him. The Christmas programme had to be cancelled at the last minute due to a snowstorm. A few parents and their children came so that we would not be disappointed. They treated us with beautifully sung and guitar accompanied Christmas

carols. It was a very moving event and one of the high points of the year. Although we have made several attempts to have better contact with the children, we believe this area needs improvement. We need to find ways to give more attention and support.

The Meeting was saddened by the death of a much-loved friend. Her Memorial Meeting showed the positive influence she had on so many people in the Hamilton community and beyond. We joyfully welcomed two new members – one by transfer and the other by conviction.

Our Meeting has a feeling of fellowship and Friendship. This has been cultivated and sustained by events outside of Meeting for Worship. We see these activities as manifestations of the Spirit, working in tandem with our Meetings for Worship. We have had monthly pot-luck suppers with presentations of interest including one by a Friend who is devoting his life to sustainability and permaculture; a presentation of the Conscience Canada (war tax resistance) video; a discussion of how we may individually plan for the end of our lives and a sharing of our views on the end of life; Peace and Social Action Committee's activities in the campaign for a Federal Department of Peace and the value of putting our Hamilton Monthly Meeting archives in good order. We built community in our Meeting by working together in common projects such as cleaning-bees, garden cleanup, and helping Friends in need. A number of Hamilton Friends are involved in various peace and social justice activities. Brown-bag discussions have included sustained discussion and recommendations in response to the queries sent by the Canadian Yearly Meeting's Consultation and Renewal working group, and we also had one more consideration of the challenging criteria set out by Friends United Meeting. We participated in the making of and reviewing and approving of a video documentary about Canadian Quakers, including our Meeting. We enjoyed a "family fun" night.

A significant event was an all-day retreat held at the natural and tranquil setting at the home of Friends, on the theme of "Slowing down to the speed of life". It was attended by twenty-two Friends and attenders. It was a day of quietness, interesting discussions, challenging questions and gentle pacing. It was clear that most were refreshed by our day together. Many Friends attended Yonge Street Half-Yearly Meeting at Camp NeeKauNis, in the spring. HMM presented the programme section, on "Peace, responsibility,

conscience, and action.” Camp NeeKauNis continued to enjoy the work and programmes of many Hamilton Friends.

Once again we had “Cookies and Carols” day where we visited and sang to older Friends who were no longer able to attend Meeting. Several Friends participated in the annual Gandhi Festival in September, which this year included the Gandhi-King day. In September, some attended the Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas, Great Lakes Regional gathering which was held locally. We provided overnight accommodation for the Caravan Against Torture. The Meeting House has been used weekly by several groups from the community. We held the much-loved Thanksgiving dinner which was well-attended. In November we hosted the Yearly Meeting Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Council.

We have tried to care for each other during life’s diminishments, with an exemplary caring of one Friend through the last year of her life by another elderly Friend who was subsequently severely injured. While in hospital, he has been cared for and visited by many Friends. A Friend was named as Pastoral Care Coordinator to facilitate visits by friends to those unable to attend Meeting for Worship.

Meeting outreach has been mainly through individuals whose concerns are shared within the Meeting, Half-Yearly Meeting, and Yearly Meeting, and through the Peace and Social Action Committee (PSAC). PSAC has taken Hanna Newcombe’s advice and chosen to select one concern for our sustained attention.... and has taken on the Canadian Department of Peace Initiative (CDPI). The effect of this is that PSAC has been expanded to become the Hamilton Chapter of the CDPI, and the Hamilton chapter now welcomes many people who are not members or attenders. The chapter continues to meet at the Meeting House. Some Friends are part of the Hamilton Culture of Peace Network, developing ties with other peace groups, and now with the Hamilton Mayor and Council. They are also working toward a Peace Garden and Interfaith Garden to be located in the area around the renovated City Hall.

Despite our presence in the peace community, we feel the need for further outreach. Friends General Conference and British Friends are promoting an existing program “Quaker Quest”, to help stimulate interest in and understanding of contemporary

Quakerism, and we plan to try this or a similar approach.

Our Meeting House garden has been maintained by a small and faithful gardening committee, assisted by willing weeders, and has been a place of peace and joy for all the Meeting. The shady trees, native plants, peace pole, and benches provide a green space for birds and squirrels, and on warm days Meeting for Worship, contemplation and rest.

The renovation of one bathroom made it wheelchair accessible, and renovations to the kitchen have made the facilities more user-friendly. We are exploring more ways to “green” the Meeting House. We feel that our Meeting House is welcoming and that our Meeting is Friendly and nurturing. We find our spoken and lived ministries fairly express the Spirit within and among us. And yet, Hamilton Monthly Meeting is in danger of gradually slipping away - our attendance is diminishing and our average age is increasing. New jobs or retirement have brought relocation of some of our members to other areas. Responsibilities in regard to family and illness have taken some away for extended periods, as does travel. Nominating Committee finds it difficult to fill all our positions. We hope to rebuild our base, and to develop a closer bond with Meeting children.