**2023 Annual State of the Meeting Report**

**for the**

**Boulder Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends**

*Overview*

The core focus for Boulder Friends Meeting in 2023 was restructuring and revitalization. It has been apparent for some time that our outsize committee structure has grown burdensome and that, as our community ages, fewer and fewer members are willing and able to carry on the Meeting’s work as organized this way. A first result is that it has become ever harder for our Nominating Committee to recruit participants in Meeting affairs. However, a more concerning outcome has been increasing demoralization and a concomitant decline in membership. To be sure, the COVID pandemic played a significant role in this, not least because a number of members withdrew owing to discomfort with the masking and vaccination mandates put in place at that time. But, in general, Boulder Friends responded heroically and creatively to COVID conditions, making extensive use of technology to foster hybrid Worship and to enhance communication with and for all those whose well-being keeps them from direct physical contact. Indeed, hybrid Worship has turned out to be a blessing in that it enables ailing, older, and distant Friends to join us, and has even made it possible for visitors to worship with us from around the world. So while the pandemic exacerbated our woes, it didn’t cause them. On the contrary, it dramatized difficulties we were already experiencing, especially when, with the end of the pandemic, the time came to reassemble the community in the Meetinghouse.

A first step, initiated in 2022, was a series of threshing sessions, program presentations, and workshops aimed at diagnosing our problems and at inviting everyone in the community, Friends and Attenders alike, to propose solutions in the form of new initiatives that would deepen and reanimate both Worship and the way we conduct everything from religious education and concerns for peace and social justice to finding the people needed to maintain our buildings and grounds, manage our financial affairs, and see to the spiritual and personal needs of our members. This process led to the creation of 7 working groups, each exploring one of the 7 key areas in which we identified the chance for renewal: restructuring the work traditionally undertaken by standing committees; encouraging and supporting the concerns and leadings of individuals outside our committee structure; revamping religious education; increasing outreach to the wider community; making greater and more effective use of technology and social media; reconsidering how we conduct the work of our Peace & Social Justice and Indigenous Peoples’ Concerns committees in order to tie them more directly into the general life of the Meeting; and exploring new ways of promoting spiritual unity and growth.

Meeting both among themselves and once a month with a coordinating council that serves as a sounding board, the working groups have made real progress in all of these areas:

1. reducing the number of committees by encouraging less formal gatherings of Friends and Attenders who share given interests or concerns;
2. reorganizing and, where possible, combining those committees we need to retain for the good of the Meeting;
3. reimagining the work of the Clerk in order make the position less onerous and get more people involved in (and so well-informed about) the life of the community;
4. increasing outreach to the wider community in order to make our presence felt and more widely known, in part with the aim of increasing membership; and
5. making the Meeting more appealing to younger people and to families with children.

The Meeting approved three major changes last year:

1. In the past, clerks were appointed for 4 years, 2 as Clerk preceded by 2 as Associate Clerk. Beginning in May, clerks will serve for 3 years, one as Rising Clerk, one as Clerk, and one as Outgoing Clerk. In addition to shortening terms, this will also give the Clerk greater support.
2. Ministry & Worship and Oversight & Membership, each with 6 Meeting members, have been combined in one new committee of 6 Meeting members: Spiritual Life & Membership.
3. The new, smaller committee is made possible by assigning the personal-support functions formerly carried out by Oversight & Membership to a new Care Committee. A feature of this committee is that committee members need not be members of Meeting. The Care Committee, whose convenor is nominated and approved by Meeting, will rather respond directly to the material, health, and social needs of community members as they arise.

In addition, three new working groups emerged that have already had a tremendous impact.

One focuses on religious education, and grew out of the old Religious Education committee. Though this group has at present two active conveners, it has replaced traditional committee meetings with more informal conversations with parents and students as well as teachers, thereby giving religious education greater relevance and appeal.

The second is the Spiritual Growth & Continuing Education working group, in which a number of individuals came together around the common concern of deepening the community’s spiritual life. To date, the members of this group have organized a monthly gathering for new attenders to answer questions about the Faith & Practice of Friends and a well-attended class on the practice of compassion. The group has also just announced a revival of regular worship-sharing sessions.

The third group formed in April 2023 through a merger of the former Web Committee with a technology planning group. The group maintained the Meeting’s website and facilitated communications through our online announcements page, calendar, and weekly Friday Bulletin, and it began posting on social media to reach an expanding public. The group committed to using hybrid technology whenever possible to include those who are unable to attend in person, and figured out ways to manage our technology and train Zoom volunteers. The group also identified the individual tech and communication jobs that need to be performed in order to keep track of its work and help determine which can be filled by volunteers and which may require formal hires.

*Committee Work*

Though our committee structure is still in flux, existing committees have remained active. Here follow brief highlights.

Buildings & Grounds: Again this year it dealt with issues related to an aging building, to which were added two cases of vandalism that required replacing our mailbox and two of the large windows in the Fellowship Room. Flooding in the rear of the Meetinghouse continues to be a problem, and the roof needs work. The committee also replaced the fence for the playground out back and the HVAC systems for the Worship Room and the New Horizons pre-school. Regular maintenance was greatly facilitated by excellent attendance of Meeting work days, and the wider community continues to make good use of our building, with 6 ongoing and 9 one-time use occupants. Though, to the delighted surprise of the outside groups involved, our rentals are priced very reasonably, they brought in a total of $16,840, which went far toward covering the costs Meeting incurred.

Fellowship: With the help of 10-12 regular volunteers, seconded by episodic others, the committee has restored fellowship activities to something approaching pre-COVID levels, including providing refreshments at Rise of Meeting and, in collaboration with Ministry & Worship, hosting a Holiday Potluck that was attended by around 45 people. Going forward, the committee plans to host one potluck gathering per quarter.

Finance: In addition to carrying out routine functions like presenting reports, monitoring cash flows, and paying Meeting’s bills, the Committee faced declining membership due to our aging community. In particular, we lack an Associate Treasurer, which has increased the pressure on all concerned. For this reason, Finance has been a major theme of the work of the restructuring group that oversees the Meeting’s reorganization.

Indigenous Peoples’ Concerns: IPC invited Dyllon Mills, vice-chairman of the board of directors of the Kwiyagat Community Academy, to speak about this unique charter school on the Ute Mountain reservation and the importance of teaching the Ute language, culture, history, and traditional skills. IPC continued to build relationships with Indigenous Peoples by responding to their requests for support in exercising their rights and achieving their goals. For example, the Mestaa’ehehe Coalition, led by the Southern Arapaho and Cheyenne Tribes, asked for the support to change the name “Mount Evans,” honoring the governor who authorized the Sand Creek Massacre, to “Mount Blue Sky,” a name that honors the cultures of both the Cheyenne and Arapaho. Boulder and Fort Collins Friends made phone calls and sent letters to Governor Polis and to members of the Colorado and the U.S. renaming boards. Meanwhile, Paula Palmer’s research on the harm done by some 30 Quaker Indian Boarding Schools motivated us to continue asking Friends and others to urge their representatives and senators to support legislation to create a Truth and Healing Commission to address multigenerational trauma stemming from the experience. Paula also presented a summary of Quaker history in boarding schools at Colorado Regional Meeting in October.

Library: As of May 2023, the Library Committee has had no convener, and met only three times. Nevertheless, longtime committee member Anne Marie Pois has completed all essential tasks, including collaborating with Marilyn Hayes to post short descriptions of new donations in the Miscellany. Moreover, the committee collaborated with the Technology Planning Group to use our Zoom resources to revive the Spiritual Journeys program, in which individual members of the community share their spiritual experiences. The hope now is that BFM’s revitalization process will come up with a long-term solution for care of the library.

Ministry & Worship: M&W initiated and oversees the Meeting’s revitalization process, bringing the various changes that have already been made to the community for discussion and formal approval. Throughout the process, it has continued to perform all of its many traditional functions. Chief among these are: monitoring the quality of worship and vocal ministry; deepening spiritual community through potluck discussion groups and extended families; sponsoring Meeting’s Christmas Eve service and Christmas potluck; seeing to the Meeting’s physical as well as spiritual well-being in view of the contagions that still afflict us; and overseeing both in-person and hybrid worship, including streamlining the scripts that Zoom coordinators use to integrate the worship of in-person and virtual attenders. In addition, M&W has been in conversation with Religious Education about bringing Young Friends more regularly to worship, sponsored a series of hybrid sessions of Quaker Studies, revived the *Dear Lucretia* essay series in the Miscellany, and has begun planning for BFM’s 70th anniversary celebration in Fall 2024.

Nominating Committee: While awaiting the results of the revitalization process in hopes of a significant lightening of the burden its members bear, Nominating continued to recruit volunteers for Meeting offices, functions, and committees. It has also engaged in close conversation with the restructuring group and with the coordinating council to ensure that all of Meeting’s needs for personnel are properly identified and met.

Oversight & Membership: O&M continued with its responsibilities of caring for community members’ well-being, guiding Attenders through the membership process, and dealing with other concerns regarding membership, such as maintaining contact with distant and absent Friends. The Committee, which normally has six members, was reduced to three in May owing to our aging membership’s growing unwillingness or inability to serve on committees. Despite diminished numbers, the committee redoubled its efforts to meet its responsibilities, pending its incorporation in the new Spiritual Life & Membership Committee in May 2024. Typical tasks accomplished over the year included providing food or arranging for meals and participating in the financial assistance process for community members in need. We also arranged visits, phone calls, and cards for people in need to help Meeting keep in touch with them. The committee completed the membership process for 5 people in 2023, all of them approved for membership by the Meeting: George Banks, Makaan Burt, Austin Lear, Robert Nichols, and Steven Sherman-Boemker. Finally, O&M oversaw the writing of Memorial Minutes. The committee manages this process and frequently writes the minutes as well. Two Memorial Minutes were written, one for Tony Umile and another for Sharon Reimer.

Peace & Social Justice: Committee members are very active in various peace and justice activities, including Elders for Climate Action, the NAACP, immigrant rights, and the promotion of Palestinian rights and sovereignty. The committee wrote a letter of support to local Jewish synagogues when they faced bomb threats, signed on to an external organization letter calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, and led Meeting to sign our own version of an IMYM letter calling for peace and justice in Israel/Palestine. Finally, one of the committee’s members has been instrumental in organizing a monthly IMYM peace and justice roundtable.

Religious Education: REC continued to oversee the First Day School program, meeting monthly to discuss issues. FDS takes place twice a month and, in Spring of 2023, we found that it was attended on average by 7-9 youths, ages 5-13, with 2-3 children under age 5 in the nursery/preschool program. However, attendance was more sporadic in the Fall semester, with about half as many students as in the Spring. Special events like the Reverse Easter Egg Hunt, in which the kids hide eggs for the adults, the FDS Harvest Celebration in October, or the FDS Christmas Program proved fruitful, attracting a half dozen families along with a large number of other Meeting attenders. Following the stepping down of convener Susan Stephens after 8 years in that role, the new co-conveners began experimenting with a new, project-based curriculum in place of the monthly topic-oriented classes of the past. This involved greater collaboration with our teaching staff and closer communication with children and their parents to learn what they would like. REC also tried to deepen Young Friends’ connection to the Meeting by encouraging Meeting’s participation in the service-learning project chosen and designed by the children themselves last Fall, in which the children solicit donations of pet food and pet toys for the Boulder Humane Society. REC plans to add intergenerational activities such as game-and-pizza nights and REC-sponsored potlucks to the Meeting’s regular calendar.

Service: In addition to collaborating with O&M in caring for Friends who live alone, have been ill, or have lost loved ones, Service continued to provide basic household and personal-care products for Echo House, a project funded in large part by the $1,800 raised at last year’s Echo House potluck. Committee members participated once a month in food service at the Boulder Homeless Shelter and made donations to a number of local service organizations, including the Emergency Family Assistance Association, Boulder Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence, Boulder Bridge House, the Harvest of Hope Pantry, and HOPE For Longmont.

Respectfully submitted by Chris Braider, Associate Clerk, in consultation with Rebecca Morris, Clerk, and Chris Griffin-Wehr, Outgoing Clerk