

*Query: What has been on the hearts of our meeting members this year?*

Among Friends in the Chapel Hill Monthly Meeting there is overwhelming clarity that there is much work to be done. The world; our country, are in turmoil: fraught by divisive politics, environmental disasters, and social upheaval. The effect of government policies on the lives of our most vulnerable is especially troubling. Many members feel deep anger, anguish or grief. They turn to Meeting for Worship (MFW) as a place for answers to the question: how do we live in this world but not of this world?

Central in many of us is a deep desire to connect with the Light Within, to find in MFW a refuge from the world's chaos. Others see MFW as a springboard for action, a place for airing concern. Finding the right balance as we worship has been challenging this year. As Quakers, how do we replenish our spiritual life and bring it out into the world? How do we keep each other centered and able to live with tenderness? How do we together seek the Truth? These are queries that we continue to wrestle with.

At our Spiritual State of the Meeting gathering, members spoke of how much they cherish our community. When they attend MFW, they are grateful for each person present. Many spoke of the continued Light, joy and enrichment that the men from the Orange Correctional Center bring to our Meeting. Others spoke of the joy of working with the children in First Day School. We strive to build and retain the number of children, youth and young adults in our meeting community.

Being adjacent to a large college campus, we often welcome visitors who come out of curiosity or in search of solace. Given the vocal ministry in MFW at times, some in our meeting are concerned that first-time attenders may find us a more a political action group rather than a spiritual community. Messages that offer prayers for peace and understanding can – and do – change the tone of the meeting. It is important that all of us model Quaker practice in our vocal ministry, and not just for newcomers.

Bracketing our hour of worship with the reading of the query in the beginning and sharing joys and sorrows/concerns toward the end has had a positive impact on our community. We are likely to hear more varied voices among these messages. It is a way for us to embrace those people in our meeting who may have been suffering in silence. It also serves to knit the community together.

Looking forward, many members are preparing to forge stronger bonds within our CHFM community through participation in Quaker Eight discussion groups, strengthening the spiritual aspects of committee meetings, and finding new ways to celebrate each other. Commenting on the current cultural climate, one member put it, “joy is a revolutionary act.”

Lastly, members spoke of their desire to complete the ongoing renovations of our worship space. The disruption of the space has impacted the quality of worship for some. We look forward to our space “being whole again.” The need for stewardship and spiritual nourishment is a constant presence, in our meeting and in the greater world.