

Spiritual State of the Meeting
London Grove Friends
Third Month 2022

- 1. In July 2021 PYM approved minutes of action to be taken on anti-racism and climate change. How has your meeting been called to address these issues? What other concerns and initiatives has your meeting been led to address this past year?*

Statement on Anti-racism

London Grove Monthly Meeting began more focused work in social justice and equity this past year by facilitating opportunities for increasing our own awareness of racial injustice and working towards building a meaningful and personal relationship with a congregation of color. One individual in our meeting introduced us to a virtual Racial Justice and Social Equity Awareness program sponsored by United Way and The YMCA of Wilmington entitled “The 21 Day Challenge.” In this program readings, videos, and lectures on many tentacles of racism such as white privilege, policing and racism, housing inequities, environmental racism, and becoming an ally were offered daily. After a small group of individuals began the challenge, it was offered to the full meeting as a 21 WEEK program giving participants a full week to consider and fully participate in each topic. We had good participation. Two First Day School Programs were planned to use these and additional resources.

A contact was made with the Allen A.M.E. Church in Oxford, PA where we were warmly welcomed through a virtual introductory meeting involving three people from London Grove with the Pastor and two A.M.E members. This small group met several times and we have virtually shared worship in one another’s meeting and church as well as planned an activity. In response to the Tenth Month Query—Witnessing the World: Ministry of Outreach the comments were made as follows: “There has been renewed energy in the gatherings many members/attenders have been experiencing through technology- including recent connections with the Allen A.M.E. Church in Oxford. A third Friend shared in this optimism and spoke of our presence in the larger community’s recent Juneteenth Celebration...[Another] Friend ... had been contemplating the concept of walking in someone else’s shoes and referenced the experience of viewing together with members of the Allen A.M.E. Church, a film based on actual events involving racism. This Friend also had joined in the Allen AME Church’s Spring Revival with others from London Grove, and through witnessing how the outward expression of the Spirit was so different from Quaker silence, was grateful for that opportunity to experience walking in someone else’s shoes. The final Friend who responded observed that though there is strong Spirit, Light and connection between us, it can be made stronger. The recent connections

that some of us have with the Allen A.M.E. Church have yielded a respect for each other's practices in finding Spirit- and as the previous responder had observed, it has been an experience in walking in each other's shoes." We continue to grow this relationship.

Statement on Climate Change Group

London Grove members, in response to a PYM Query on Climate Change, found unity that the goals of PYM's Eco-Justice Collaborative are consistent with our Testimonies and approved the creation of our own Climate Change Working Group. The group has spent the past year focusing on the three recommended areas: Education, Leading By Example, and Advocacy. We conducted a multi-month book study on Bill Gates' *How To Avoid A Climate Disaster* and enjoyed a terrific program by Bill Moore and his family on Sustainable Farming. We also studied the information contained in *Project Drawdown* to determine areas where we as individuals (and as a collective body) can have a positive impact in our own lives. Finally, as a first step as Advocates, in March London Grove approved a minute to be sent to PYM and Western Quarter.

Growing the Meeting

In March 2020, the Meeting formed an ad hoc task force to gather information and make recommendations about how we might grow our membership. The task force met regularly from May 2020 until September 2021, when its final report and recommendations were approved by the Meeting. The report focused on steps that seemed realistic for the meeting to consider in the next year or so, and invited committees to take up those recommendations that fell in their area of responsibility for further consideration and action. Emphasis was placed on nurturing the sense of community and spiritual health within the meeting as well as on outreach efforts. As of December 2021, progress was noted on 6 of 11 specific recommendations. These included Adult First Day School sessions that helped Friends to articulate what is important to them about Quakerism, launching an updated Meeting website, continuing our new connection with Allen A.M.E. Church, encouraging Friends to join the London Grove Friends Kindergarten Christmas Celebration (which many did), and becoming more prepared to welcome children on every First Day. We are experiencing some challenges related to implementing the task force's recommendations, due in part to the pandemic and the small size of some key committees, but our Committee of Clerks reviews progress at each of its quarterly meetings, thus keeping the concern alive.

Reopening the Meeting

The Ad Hoc Committee on Reopening the Meetinghouse was formed to provide support and guidance to the Clerk and Meeting on how to safely gather and join in worship during the COVID-19 pandemic and to consider what practices were needed for eventual return to the

Meetinghouse. It was important that we found an agreed upon protocol to meet safely and limit the spread of the virus within our Meeting community at a time when guidance and opinions were so varied. Our goal has been to protect the health of our Meeting community and encourage safe practices at Meeting functions. The Committee has made periodic updated recommendations to Meeting as the virus and our knowledge of it have evolved. We have made recommendations on issues such as Outdoor Meeting, opening the Kindergarten, Memorial Services, and use of the Meetinghouse and grounds. We continue to meet and report to the Meeting regularly and look forward to the time when conditions allow us to return to being together without safety precautions for COVID-19.

- 2. How has your meeting evolved as a spiritual community given the ongoing opportunities and challenges of the pandemic?*

The spiritual state of London Grove Friends is vital, and has been strengthened through the need to adapt our practices because of the pandemic. We are grateful for the quick response from many friends in establishing regular outdoor meetings for worship, and then implementing a highly functional hybrid system for worship as the pandemic continued into the colder months. In some ways we feel more connected as we truly listen to each other and can see individual faces and names through Zoom. We welcome the presence of members who have moved away and are able to join our hybrid meeting, and appreciate the ease with which friends can gather for committee work through Zoom. Through monthly coffee hours and Quaker book groups, we have continued to grow spiritually while strengthening our social connections. We do miss those friends who have been unable to join us in person or virtually, but continue to reach out to them in other ways. There is nothing that equals a centered meeting for worship in our shared sacred spiritual space, but with the limitations imposed by the pandemic, we have found many ways to grow and thrive.

- 3. What practices and strategies are employed by your meeting to help members and attenders of all ages prepare for worship-whether in meeting for worship or in meeting for business?*

As an unprogrammed meeting, we do not have practices such as a spiritual reading or guided worship, but rather feel that there is strength in each individual preparing for worship in their own way. The coordinator gives just enough structure and can read a brief explanation of Quaker practice when there are guests. First day school programs and small worship sharing groups in which members share their practices have been helpful and will continue to be offered. Vocal ministry early during worship can open the way for others to share, but it is not our desire to program this. Book discussions and first day school lessons on Biblical messages that help us to relate them to our current time are often sources of inspiration for vocal ministry. Some London Grove friends find that meeting for worship prepares them to continue the week in Quaker practice.

Preparations for Meeting for Worship with Attention for Business include sending the agenda to friends before the meeting. Business meeting always begins with a period of silent worship so that our discernments may be Spirit-led. One of the positive outgrowths of the pandemic has been that, with our hybrid format, more friends are able to attend Business Meeting, and so more voices are heard.

4. What is most needed to strengthen the communal witness of the meeting to the local community and beyond?

In response to this query, Friends cited a number of recent initiatives that provide a foundation for further outreach. The work of the Ad Hoc Task Force on Membership Growth, development of a new website, our engagement with Allen A.M.E. Church, the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge, and our contributions to Kennett Square's interdenominational Juneteenth celebration have all been important steps. Friends also acknowledged that we need to spread the word more effectively about ongoing activities (currently on Zoom) such as our Book Discussions, the Climate Change group, Coffee Gatherings, and others. We could do more to use and advertise resources available from groups larger and stronger than our meeting, such as PYM and QuakerSpeak. Resumption of the Plant Sale, which makes us visible to the larger community, will help, and we need to initiate other activities that the community can see.

Friends noted that outreach to the larger community in the form of advocacy needs to be based on a sense of the meeting about the issue in question, such as racial justice or climate change. It is sometimes difficult to reach the unity that is needed for an effective witness.

Friends suggested some specific programs that might be opened to the wider community, such as a women's group focused on particular queries or other topics of interest, and a Marriage Enrichment program. The need to expand outreach to our Kindergarten families and to minority communities was cited in particular. Some Friends felt that we need to be able to gather more freely in person to expand our outreach effectively, but it was noted that programs offered through Zoom can also contribute to outreach.

An underlying factor that affects our ability to carry out any of these ideas is the number of Friends available to carry them out. More are needed to expand our outreach efforts, and the participation of younger Friends would be especially valuable as we expand our use of technology.

5. Is there a query, or are there queries that your meeting would like to respond to that have not been included here? Please share it/them and your response.

In response to this question, Friends identified a number of queries, but did not generate responses to them. We asked how we might as a meeting encourage participation in wider Quaker organizations, such as Western Quarter, PYM, and Pendle Hill. How might we use these resources more effectively? With respect to outreach, Friends asked: How might we help Quakerism to become better known in the larger community? Several queries revolved around how we can best structure and enhance our worship together. What kind of structure best supports the depth of worship? Are “prompts” in the form of introductory spiritual readings or quotes presented on a blackboard helpful, or do they interfere with learning how to enter into and participate fully in unprogrammed worship? How are Afterthoughts important to the spiritual growth of the meeting? What kinds of opportunities might we structure to help us know each other better, which could deepen our worship together? Underlying all of these queries is the recognition that we will not return to the “old normal” that existed before the pandemic. What do we miss that cannot be replaced, and what alternatives can we create? How can we continue to seek and find new, creative paths forward? It may prove fruitful for the Meeting to consider these queries at another worship sharing session.