

2008 STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT

The gifts of our community are many and varied. The spirit moves amongst Atlanta Friends Meeting (AFM) to support the ministry of our members, their well-being, and the material stability of the Meeting.

The impetus for the formation of the **Refugee Support Group** in April 2008 was an eight-mile walk taken by two Burundi men in late 2007 from their apartment complex to attend our Meeting for Worship. These men, recently relocated from refugee camps in Tanzania, were Quakers who had attended a programmed Friends church in Africa. They and their families, along with another Burundi family, have been attending regularly since their first visit.

The group supported the Burundi families in their transition to America and unprogrammed Friends worship and reached out to the meeting community to find resources – by organizing carpools, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and bi-lingual singing and worship sharing sessions; and by providing material assistance. Building these relationships enriched the spiritual lives of members and attenders, and the Burundi Friends presence brought a new spiritual energy and life to the Meeting. The language, worship, and cultural differences, as well as the special needs of those who have experienced the ravages of war, presented new opportunities for the Meeting to learn and grow.

Though the work of the **Administration** Committee can seem mundane, the improvements of the facilities and in paper-saving information technology were informed by environmentalism; new hiring policies and anti-racism work were based in the testimony of equality; the development of clear, defined administrative processes was rooted in the simplicity testimony; and all of the committee's work stemmed from love of community and the goal of making the Meeting more welcoming and inclusive. The committee was especially gratified that the new employees -- Valerie Barlow, Friend in Residence, and Jonah McDonald, Office Coordinator – also approached their work from these spiritual foundations.

The **Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting** (CURAFM) continued to raise awareness of racism through a Listening Ear for concerns about racism, coordinating forums, and providing articles for the welcome packets, the AFM website, and the newsletter. The **Nurturing Young Friends** Ad Hoc committee met frequently to find ways to nurture our young people and to help them grow into functioning Quaker adults. After implementing a number of changes, they transferred their work to other standing AFM committees.

Care and Counsel Committee focused on the testimony of community. They sought to encourage gatherings of members and attenders outside regular Meeting for Worship, with the goal of increasing and deepening individuals' care of each other. From the Couple Enrichment sessions held in February to the Thanksgiving potluck at the end of the year, they filled the year with Welcome Dinners, Friendly Eights gatherings, a Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast, a Welcome to Babies and Toddlers, and a member's 90th birthday party. They also held memorial services (four); arranged clearness committees (at least six); sent get-well cards, sympathy cards and congratulatory cards; and gave out candles to departing members.

Despite best efforts by the **Finance** Committee and **Treasurer**, among others, the meeting ended 2008 with the largest deficit in its history -- slightly over \$10,000. Contributions, interest income, and rental income were lower than in 2007; the total number of contributors decreased as well. The **Fundraising** Committee focused on creating a website and adding amenities to attract renters, but produced no income. Expenses were under budget in some areas (employee expenses, utilities, and expenses for most committees). But building maintenance expenses exceeded budget because of an active **Meetinghouse** committee that addressed many long standing issues.

The **Educational Scholarship** Committee awarded \$500 scholarships for the 2008-2009 academic year to eight students in the Meeting.

Is our Meeting a place of spiritual power and impact? The **Ministry and Worship** committee reflected on this and other characteristics of vital Meetings at its retreat, especially the impact it makes upon its members, its attenders, the local community, and the wider world. At Meeting for Worship there were familiar concerns over the vocal ministry—is it of a spiritual nature or personal or political? A newly created early morning weekday worship was consistently attended. Sharing spiritual journeys the first of each month in adult religious education class was uplifting, along with class study of various publications. Forums were held less frequently during the year, although one --- “Quakers and Money: right work, right investing, right contributions and right sharing” --- generated considerable interest and attendees. 2008 saw four new membership requests that were approved, four transfers of memberships to other meetings, and one membership resignation. Three marriages took place during the year under the care of the Meeting.

Advancement Committee: The Gwinnett Community Worship group was unable to find a satisfactory meeting space and was laid down. The committee helped with the formation of a new worship group in Rome, Georgia; and late in the year, they also began working with a new worship group in Carrollton, Georgia.

Social Concerns Committee: Green Friends studied ways to reduce individual electric & other energy consumption. Those who attended the Quaker EarthCare Witness annual meeting learned ways to strengthen people as integral in nature and therefore motivated to greater efforts in Earth care. AFM funds supported Friends' efforts in a strenuous but successful neighborhood voter registration/gentrification education campaign. Friends prayerfully considered the Universal Health Care concern both in committee & in Monthly Meeting, though not to unity for support of any particular bill.

Nominating Committee worked to find ways to match the gifts and leadings of members of the Meeting with the needs of the community. Recognizing that people's professions may not be their avocations, they sought to help them identify the latter. They held a committee fair in September to help in this effort, and most major positions were filled by year's end. In order to reduce the workload on the Newsletter Editor, they recommended the establishment of an editorial board to assist the editor each month.

This indeed is a 'blessed and beloved community' that in 2009 will continue to grow in spirit as we reach out to others.