

ATLANTA FRIENDS MEETING OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS  
**2009 STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT**

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

The **Religious Education** committee, led by the Spirit and with the hands of many Friends, started a quiet revolution in our First Day School (FDS) program for young Friends. Many in the community commented about the different energy in FDS.

An average of thirty to fifty young Friends attended FDS each First Day during the year and about ten during the summer weeks. Ten teachers showed extraordinary commitment in nurturing the spiritual lives of the younger members of the community and in the joy they brought to the work. We were blessed with the bright light of the nursery coordinator, Dawanda Pearson, in her tender care of the infants and toddlers in our community.

The theme for the school year, "Living Your Faith, Loving Your Neighbor," let us explore how our lives reflect our values and our love for one another -- through sharing, storytelling, art, sacred stories, song, the revolutionary life of Jesus, and personal action. Green Friends taught a monthly class for preschool through 2nd grade Friends on the gifts of nature. Young Friends raised money for causes important to them, including a building fund for a Burundi meeting house and Heifer International. Middle School Friends hosted a holiday bazaar that raised funds, showcased Meeting artisans, and provided a means to reduce consumerism during the winter holidays. Over the summer, other AFM committees led classes to introduce their important work to young Friends.

To deepen our worshipful time together and make it easier for new teachers to join us, the Meeting began to use a new approach and structure – Godly Play® and Faith and Play curriculum – with our youngest Friends. In the first classrooms to transition to this approach, classes were generally found to be more reflective, centered, and spirit-led. The transition, although not without a few bumps and hiccups, was eased by patience, a sense of humor, and a few lists.

The **Young Friends Support** committee, which oversees the youth programs and activities for the Meeting, conducted a job search to fill the Youth Program Coordinator position. This was a task made especially challenging by the excellent work of the departing coordinator, Laura Norlin, during her tenure in the job. After interviewing and evaluating applicants with a panel of six Meeting members (that included three young Friends), the job offer went to Aaron Ruscetta, a respected, long-time volunteer with the Southern Appalachian Young Friends (SAYF) program. His experience and enthusiasm enabled a smooth transition to a new season for our youth programs, and we look forward to continuing our service to the young Friends of the Quaker community.

The 2009 **Treasurer's** report indicated that the Meeting ended the year with a surplus of approximately \$270, with expenses below budget by 6.9% and income below budget by 6.7%. Contributions to our general fund, though slightly higher than in 2008 (\$112,000 versus \$109,000), were over \$21,000 less than budgeted. This could have put us in a difficult situation had rental income not been so high and had expenses not come in under budget. Rental income totaled \$16,467, twice as much as expected.

As usual, a small number of people made the majority of contributions to the general fund (25% of the money contributed was from eight donors). We noted a decline in contributors from 166 in 2008 to 159 in 2009. Contributions to special funds, which are not income and thus do not contribute to meeting our budget, were significantly higher than in 2008 (approximately \$45,000 in 2009 versus \$21,000), primarily due to the Ferguson Cabin fundraising efforts.

The Meeting wished a fond farewell to our good Friend -- and **Friend in Residence** -- Valerie Barlow, as she left for another job opportunity. While we were sad to see her leave, in December we were happy to greet the new Friend in Residence, John Roberts, who was selected after an extensive search process. At year's end, we looked forward to fully welcoming him into the life of the Meeting in 2010.

The **Social Concerns** committee continued to be active regarding climate change, peace building, racism, and various forms of outreach to the wider community of Atlanta. The committee also felt called to address additional concerns and minister more to people in need, especially during the economic crisis. However, this desire to more actively nurture Friends' peace and justice leadings was difficult to fulfill due to the shortage of committee members and energy necessary to follow all of the ways opened.

The **Green Friends** group felt a strong moving of the Spirit to join with many others worldwide in "Climate Action" to stop global warming. Beginning with a March forum about the Transition Towns movement, activity focused on the approaching Copenhagen Climate talks. A British Friends' Minute on Climate Change was shared with the Meeting and then sent to SAYMA for further consideration, with a recommendation that it be sent to all SAYMA meetings.

The film "Six Degrees Could Change the World" was shown after the rise of Meeting. Via the 350.org Climate Action Campaign, two spiritually uplifting and well-attended vigils were organized -- one was by the permanent new "EarthCare Not Warfare" banner on the Meetinghouse grounds and the other was a candlelight vigil on Decatur Square in concert with many other community groups.

To encourage energy conservation and recycling, a survey of Meeting use of paper was conducted, a sale of 100% post-consumer paper was held, and a paper recycling bin was purchased.

The Meeting continued its anti-racism work through the **Committee on Undoing Racism in Atlanta Friends Meeting** (CURAFM) and **Our Roles as Individuals in America's Racial History** (ORAIARH). These two groups co-sponsored four anti-racism workshops: Ethnic Identity, Early Experiences of Race, White Privilege, and Whites as Allies against Racism (the first two of which were also presented at SAYMA). Friend in Residence, Valerie Barlow, helped plan and facilitate several of these workshops as part of her ministry.

CURAFM and ORAIARH also sponsored a visit to AFM by the authors of *Fit for Freedom, not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice*. The groups also showed the film, "Making Whiteness Visible," led one religious education class for younger children, and updated the Queries on Welcoming. CURAFM continued offering a Listening Ear for concerns related to racism twice a month, and ORAIARH staffed a literature table every week.

Three families of Burundi Friends enriched the life of our meeting, by participating actively through attendance and vocal ministry at Meeting for Worship, singing in Kirundi and English before meeting, participating in and bringing additional Burundi children to First Day School, attending Bible Study, volunteering in the kitchen, and attending SAYMA. The **Refugee Support Group** assisted Burundi Friends through carpools, ESL tutoring, material assistance, collecting donations for a church building

project in Cene Monthly Meeting in Burundi, making contacts to try to bring relatives from a refugee camp to the U.S., and helping sponsor a trip to Mid America Yearly Meeting (Evangelical Friends) on the historic occasion of the 75th anniversary of the founding of Friends Church in Burundi. We continued to be blessed by the presence of Burundi Friends who, through their strong religious commitment and widening interactions with other F/friends in the meeting, added a new dimension to our spiritual lives.

The **Administration Committee's** work centered on several themes: hiring and staff support, long-term visioning, and financial discernment. They approved employee grievance procedures; discussed general principles regarding employee relations, policies and practices; and created a new volunteer position called Personnel Liaison. In the midst of this policy work, the committee facilitated the hiring of three new employees and created a new employee position: nursery coordinator.

Much of the committee's work focused on the long-term well-being of the Meeting. Administration spent considerable time analyzing and then approving changes to the Meeting's insurance policy. We looked at cost and risk and decided to increase several aspects of our policy's coverage. We also helped the Meetinghouse Committee clerk prioritize long-term improvements to the lighting and HVAC systems.

Though all of this work connects to money, our work was particularly informed by financial concerns because contributions were about 15% less than budgeted. As a result, we decided to replace some, but not all, HVAC units. We did a good amount of work vetting long-term rental agreements, and the office coordinator, Jonah McDonald, brought in many short-term rentals, more than doubling the amount of income to the Meeting from rentals in the prior year. We recommended that employees receive a 3% cost of living allowance (COLA) pay increase for 2010, although the COLA increase as determined by the Social Security Administration (SSA) was zero. This was prompted by a desire to bring salaries up to the 2009 suggested level because in the 2009 budget the Meeting had supported only a 3% raise instead of the 6% recommended by the SSA for that year.

Finally, the committee struggled with one internal issue: what role should committee development play in our meetings? In past years, the Administration Committee read and discussed books/articles on race and prejudice as a way of reflecting on personal racism and recognizing the possibility of racism in the decisions and work of the committee. This year, the committee was split on whether this development work was necessary. Though we temporarily laid down our readings, clearness was not reached on how to proceed in 2010.

The **Ferguson Cabin** committee increased in size and strength, both in members and spiritually, as efforts coalesced to prepare for building a small new cabin with modern bathroom facilities. The cabin property saw much greater use (by more than fifty people) in 2009, as well as growing appreciation of this beautiful, wild land on Lake Burton. Enthusiasm within AFM increased as well, helping achieve most of the sizable fundraising goal. A significant part of the first phase building work was accomplished and will resume in the spring of 2010.

The **Care and Counsel** committee greeted the youngest members of our community in May, welcoming in the newborns from the last year. We also said goodbye to some, with memorial services for Meg McDonough and Ski Helenski, among others.

The committee held a luncheon for the elders of our community, both to honor them and to find out what they needed from AFM and what they could offer. The first tangible result of this luncheon was a

bench outside the front door of the Meetinghouse to allow elders to greet the community as they arrive to meeting.

Other activities included a volunteer appreciation breakfast for all the people who allowed the meeting to function during the year, a forum on wills to help members make informed late-life decisions, and helping to set up 'friendly eights' groups which enable members and attenders to get to know one another in small groups. Also, the physical needs of the Meeting were attended to by sending memorial cards, bringing meals, arranging transportation, loaning out the care quilt, and bringing meeting to those who could not attend.

The **Educational Scholarship Fund Committee** awarded \$500 college scholarships for the 2009-2010 school year to seven young people associated with the Meeting.

The **Ministry and Worship** committee continued to seek ways to help everyone feel welcome, accepted, and nurtured. Our Meetings for Worship reflected the diversity of our community of regular participants and the many visitors who joined us. Spoken messages in Meeting for Worship included spiritual, personal, and political ones; we endeavored to receive these messages in the spirit that each may have meaning for some, if not all, who were present.

Several opportunities for weekly worship at the Meetinghouse were available, not only on First Days, but also on weekday mornings and Wednesday evenings. The new Wednesday evening worship services were well attended, with silent and occasionally semi-programmed worship. Continuing were the weekly Bible study group, an adult religious education class, and a spiritual nurture group.

The committee coordinated clearness committees for membership and marriages. The year brought four new members by application: Christina Repoley, Annamarie Harmon, Heather Barbour, and Harry Lefever, and four transfers in from other meetings: Maia Hallward, Stoph Hallward, Denny Webster, and Jenny Foster. One member transferred out: Ian Simpson. There were two marriages under the care of the Meeting: Hannah MacDermott and Laura Norlin, and Caroline Morris and Mike Aland. Clearness committees arising from spiritual leadings included School of the Spirit and two members' yearly visit to North Carolina Yearly Meeting, Conservative.

Work of the **Advancement** committee was conducted as an adjunct of the Ministry and Worship committee. The Carrollton and Rome, Georgia, worship groups were visited, and phone contact with both was maintained. The committee also handled requests for contact with Friends in other Georgia communities -- Columbus, Macon, and Griffin.

The **Nominating** committee continued to pursue ways to match the gifts and leadings of members and attenders of the Meeting with the needs of the community. Recognizing that people's professions may not be their avocations, the committee sought to help them identify the latter. Most major positions were filled by year's end.

The Meeting continued to support and to hold in the Light the leadings of members, such as Mary Ann Downey and Bill Holland in their traveling ministries work with other Friends meetings.

This indeed is a "blessed and beloved community." While more hands are always needed for the work of the Meeting, we look forward to 2010 with hopeful hearts so that we can continue to grow in spirit as we reach out to others.