

Westport Monthly Meeting of Friends State of Society Report, 1998

In preparation for this year's State of Society, we formed three groups of members and attenders to discuss and prepare preliminary reports. Their common and most powerful theme was "unity through diversity." No two of us use, or feel obliged to use, the same religious language, hold identical beliefs, or find ourselves at the same place in our spiritual journeys. Out of the threads of our dissimilarities, however, we have woven together a group of seekers and a community of love. We are bound together by mutual respect and affection.

Our growth in numbers continued through 1998. Of equal significance, our growth in the Spirit was maintained. Vocal ministry in Meeting for Worship has increased and continues to reflect the Inner Light. In turn, this has raised the commitment and quality of our committee work as we wrestle with issues of space, new building, and the still unresolved problem mentioned in last year's report -- the exodus of adult First Day School teachers early in Meeting for Worship.

During the summer a well-attended "Homecoming" was held. Many former members and First Day School attenders testified to the joy experienced, and the guidance received, at Westport Meeting in previous years. Another happy occasion was the celebration of our member Kevin Lee's graduation from Andover Newton Theological Seminary.

Concern has arisen that in our busy-ness and the hubbub of our social hour after Meeting, we may not be sensitive to the presence of new faces or the signs of distress or disinterest in familiar ones. Bonding with new attenders requires tact, sensitivity and love. These qualities are even more necessary if bonds are loosening or when illness or misfortune strikes.

Our outreach in the community has been less evident than in some previous years. As 1998 drew to a close we were starting to work with the local Coalitions Against Poverty and for Social Justice. Much work needs to be done not only in outreach but also in public witness to our beliefs and testimonies. The gathered storm in Eastern Europe underlines the need for our voice to be heard. We are powerfully reminded of the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me," and of the advice of Friends of bygone days, "Let your lives speak."