

Westport Monthly Meeting State of Society Report, 2002

At the core of all we do and are is the Meeting for Worship, where the energy of the Spirit flows naturally from the hour of silence to the moments after when we hold in the Light those Friends with specific needs. From this flow our announcements, Business Meeting, and social gatherings. There is a rich sense of integrating these activities, and it seems that there is more spiritual energy for our committee work as well as for other aspects of our community life.

The Meeting has been tested this past year by both external events and those intensely personal. Out of our experiences we see opportunities for growth.

The threat of war on Iraq tried us all and we responded collectively and as individuals. Some members signed and helped pay for the "No More Victims" advertisement sponsored by the local AFSC, which has been a good resource for us. Two signs were posted on our grounds, one saying simply "Pray for Peace" and the other "No More Victims Anywhere". We approved and distributed a minute against war. We hosted a well-attended gathering of the local Interchurch Council that allowed those of diverse faiths to address their concerns about war in worship sharing. A few of our members began a one-hour weekly vigil across the street from a busy market. This gradually increased to 12-20 people, including several from the community. It inspired a similar vigil in a neighboring town. Some Friends participated in online and other protests. All this has drawn support from our Young Friends and our most senior members.

Besides our peace efforts, there were activities that made the Meeting feel part of a changing and challenging world. These ranged from supporting a homeless family at Christmas to learning about needs in parts of Africa from a Ugandan Friend. Some of our members participated actively in far-reaching Quaker groups and projects; their experiences enriched us all.

The sudden death of Hayden Tatman struck to the core of the Meeting's spiritual roots. Through two memorial meetings- one especially for young people- through sharing love, through holding one another in the Light and in our arms, we endured and felt stronger for it.

There are those among us who have had to give up driving and those who are unable to be with us on a regular basis; Friends helped by driving and aiding them in their homes. There has been sickness; Friends responded with visits, food and prayers. A great deal of emotional and physical energy and nurture has gone into holding each other up.

One of our new attendees gave us a special view of our Meeting. She said she saw "lovely models of behavior" as Friends handled "serious, troubled, sad issues". She also saw "sheer merriment" even in serious situations. We are humbled by such perspectives, for we know in how many ways we fall short of our own ideals. Yet, there is a sense that this has been a special year in which the community has pulled together in that wonderful way that makes us aware that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.