

Westport Monthly Meeting State of Society Report 2008

I. As a spiritual community we are successfully coming through a period of loss and great transition. Many challenges still face us, but we continue to come together as a supportive, resilient, and Spirit-led community – yet one that is much different than it was 10, 7, even 5 years ago.

II. Somehow we maintain a Spirit-led community that, despite our small size, can accommodate and support our great diversity, a community in which some members can say with comfort, “I have a vibrant, personal relationship with the risen Christ,” while others can say with equal comfort, “I am not a Christian.” What is it that brings and holds us together?

There is a core, common sense of a Spirit that leads but does not mandate.

There is something special here that even people who don’t know us seem to recognize – a sense of expectation of goodness.

There is a rich sense of Spirit in our worship, a sense of confidence even in our silence – we have no need to fill that silence with more than our expectant waiting and openness.

There is a sense that we as a community and as individuals struggle to balance our limited resources with the unlimited needs we perceive around and within us. Property Committee has led our small meeting in the challenges of maintaining our large property. Ministry & Counsel Committee, in addition to nurturing the spiritual life of the meeting, has led us in assisting four members with active support and/or oversight committees. The Book Fair Clearness Committee has creatively led us toward what we hope will be a sustainable plan for continuing the event that is our main source of income.

There is a sense that we are a community of women, men, and youth who act in the Spirit both within our worship community and throughout our daily lives. We strive to be ordinary people who live from an extraordinary Spiritual grounding.

There is a striving for an open flow between our meeting for worship and our outside lives, as we struggle with the challenge of infusing our daily businesses and their realities with our spiritual work and with what is right.

There is a sense of being brought in and held, and a sense of being sent out again – of being nurtured yet nudged to do more, or to do what we do with more of a Spirit-led constancy.

III. We face many challenges as we evolve, as limited and imperfect human beings, living in diversity and in the tension of striving to lead Spirit-led lives in our imperfect world. None of our challenges is unusual, unexpected, or irresolvable.

We recognize the remarkable, sustaining work of our committees, yet we are also mindful that we in Quaker communities are notable for our openness and seemingly limitless patience in waiting on the Spirit. How, then, do we balance this openness and patience with the realities of mission, vision, and resources that we need to survive as a community? When do our openness and patience actually do a disservice to our spiritual growth, our community, and our Spirit-led work in the wider world?

Ministry & Counsel Committee, and our entire community, have labored mightily over the question of recording ministers. Remarkably, this laboring has brought us closer together rather than driven us apart. We remain in discernment and know that we are not yet at clarity, and we struggle to determine the best way to move forward. How can we support our members most deeply affected by this issue – not only those whose names have been put forward for recording, but also those who are so strongly, though often silently, moved by this issue? The Religious Education Committee cultivates a curriculum that meets the needs and challenges of our young First Day school attenders.

Perhaps one of our most striking changes has been the wonderful growth of our youth membership, and our response to their needs. Yet do we also do enough to reach out to and support our adults?

How should we balance our craving for worship out of the silence with the desire for enlivening our worship again with music? And similarly, how should we balance the “joyful noise unto the Lord” of our young members with the craving of others for quiet worship?

As individuals, we try to balance our need and desire to give of ourselves, both to our worship community and to the wider world, with the need not to spend our energy into a downward cycle of frustration, exhaustion, and sometimes guilt. How can we support each other individually through this lifelong and very human dilemma?

IV. We recognize that all of these are ongoing challenges and tensions that can be resolved only temporarily – for this day, this year, this decade – while the unchanging Spirit leads us as imperfect individuals through a chaotic and constantly changing world. Yet when we come together as a community we are, somehow, less imperfect than we are as individuals.

Perhaps, then, our main challenge is how to enhance our coming together to labor with, and grow through, all of these challenges, both as a community and as individuals under the sway of a constant, guiding Spirit that we perceive and attend to only partially and by moments.

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