

Westport Monthly Meeting

State of Society Report 2004

Westport Monthly Meeting met for worship sharing with the purpose of corporate discernment of our State of society. The worship was deeply centered with messages so clear, careful, long and profound, that one member reflected, "that if this session is about the health of our meeting then I'm very encouraged." On our better days in worship, we experience the grace and presence of the Spirit in our midst. On other days, we find sustenance in the quiet and peace of waiting on the Holy Spirit, or, clearing of the mind, the prayerful holding up of the sick, or fellowship shared at the rise of Meeting. And what's said at fellowship provide sustenance for us as well. Our meeting is a spiritual home that prayerfully grows out of our testimonies, love for one another and spiritual connections. Friends expressed their gratefulness for the feeling of warmth, welcoming, and of being cherished and helped by the Meeting. "It's our tears and tasks that connect me to the meeting and tells my children about God and about who and what they are in the world."

There is a clear sense that our meeting is in transition. We are grieving the losses of dearly loved and respected elders. We are affected by the long absences of others due to age-related issues. Our elders have sustained us through the years by their presence, wisdom, and experience, providing us with grounding our community in history and faith. Some Friends are anxious, wondering how the spiritual and physical work of the meeting will get done. Who will step into the leadership roles that our elders filled? One member wrote, "It's like losing my spiritual parents and I have to grow up."

Concurrently, we are experiencing hope and energy for what can be new and different. We saw the formation Several Meeting members and attenders formed of a "Spiritual Nurturers" group for the purpose of exploring our spiritual journeys, which was facilitated by one of our meeting members. The Meeting, following a lengthy and deep search for clarity and unity, proudly and joyfully approved the same gender marriage of one of our members. Under the care of the Meeting and a Rabbi, we joyfully celebrated the marriage union in a ceremony that drew upon traditions of the Jewish and Quaker faiths. We are blessed too by the growth and change within our faith community. We are grateful for the committed teens and Young Friends that keep coming and who remain active in our Meeting even as we are aware that they will soon be moving on, as life requires. We eagerly await the arrival of new babies and the joy of young families in the coming year. Our faith community is also nourished and strengthened by the new members and attenders in our midst as well and the many visitors who join us in worship and for hospitality.

While we are concerned about the empty seats benches, we recognize that size doesn't reflect spiritual health. This concern led us to explore new ways of outreach to the community and individuals, examples of which include the building of our new meeting website and the "Conversation Café," a series of meetings with the purpose of listening to divergent points of view.

Some of our members stood to witness for peace in response to our going to war in Iraq, on another member's front lawn, opposite a supermarket. It gained momentum and attention in the media about an urgent issue. Our meeting has done other things with respect to peace and social concerns, but they have arisen spontaneously rather than through our Peace and Social Concerns Committee, which has been struggling. We have a message for the world, the community, and for individuals. How do we get the word out?

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Our Young Friends' reminded us about the consequences of how easy it is to think ourselves into action, compelled to take on projects for the Meeting or as a witness to our faith. In our need for busy-y-ness, and we are less available and present to others, leaving somehow that can lead to people feeling sidelined. How do we maintain balance? While it is

important to strive to make the world a better place, some of our greatest ministry is with the grace, love, and prayer, one-to-one, on an individual basis shared person to person. We know that the foundation of our Meeting is our shared intention to be in community with one another and the Holy Spirit. This relationship is likened to the feeling of, the coming home; it, that is at the heart of our community.

With change and the passage of time, periods of mourning give way to periods of gathering and renewal. Friends We believe that our elders who have passed are still among and live within us and so remain a part of our faith community. As winter gives way to spring, we are comforted by the faith that the seeds of the Holy in our community and there are underground changes that will bloom and flourish in new and unexpected ways. This all seems consonant with a natural process. We are both humbled and assured.

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