

Canadian Yearly Meeting
State of Society
2019

In 2019 Canadian Friends celebrated a deepening sense of spiritual connectedness with the Divine and with one another through our meetings for worship. While most local meetings revelled in a gathered and restorative silence, meaningful ministry often punctuated the peace—some meetings preferring the predominance of silence, others desirous of more vocal ministry.

Most Monthly Meetings reported steady (if sometimes quite moderate) attendance, some adding new attenders and members, some welcoming babies, and others suffering the loss of dear ones, sometimes through death. While there are promising signs in some meetings of attracting younger people—some initiating or continuing children’s programs, some deliberately focussed upon bringing young Friends into fellowship and the administration of meetings—concern persists about aging meetings and the diminution in both numbers and human resources that implies. Because of this reality, a number of meetings are increasingly open to reconstituting how they go about doing the business of the meeting, and how they constitute committees and address the work for which meeting committees have traditionally provided leadership. Several are considering the meaning of membership and its relationship to service. Some, indeed, are finding virtue in this necessity and finding themselves working more closely and communally because of it. In addition to energies devoted to sustaining the ministries of local meetings, Friends from all parts of the country are also engaged in the wider work of the Yearly Meeting. A lack of Friends to fill the roles that CYM requires to keep itself vital is also an issue.

Canadian Friends are intentional about building community, and about educating themselves in Quaker ways. For larger meetings, the energy required for the ongoing upkeep and renovation of meeting houses is repaid with a sense of being able to offer members and visitors a sense of “home.” Most meetings engage in some form of pre-and/or-post-worship fellowship, and most hold meeting-wide retreats and encourage participation in larger Quaker gatherings. Potlucks, picnics, restaurant visits, and coffee houses and game nights were among the means of bringing Friends together to share more deeply in each other’s lives. Finding the right balance between the promptings of love on the one hand and truth on the other, and learning in this to attend to the voice of the Inward Teacher, continues to challenge us. Finding unity amongst our often profound differences is an issue. Indeed, a desire for better pastoral care overall was expressed. One meeting stressed that we need to balance our excessive earnestness with more fun. Study and discussion groups and workshops are commonly organized for the furthering of Quaker education and the exploration of issues of concern to Friends, as well as for spiritual growth. Creating opportunities for a more deliberate mentoring of younger Friends by more seasoned Friends also figured among the opportunities Friends are committed to realizing.

The year was marked in part by the visit to many of our meetings by Matthew Legge of the Canadian Friends Service Committee who helped us explore issues around peacemaking that are the subject of his recent book, *Are We Done Fighting?* Friends expressed appreciation for Matt's serious work and deep insight into this long-standing, Quaker concern, and for the positive provocation that the book brings to the Quaker community and beyond.

Friends across the country continued to explore indigenous issues and participate in initiatives to promote justice for Canada's native peoples. Activities centred around climate education and action also figured prominently in the work of Friends. A variety of other social and charitable concerns were the focus of Canadian Friends in 2019, either for meetings as a collective, or for individual Friends who engaged in them with the encouragement and support of their Friends: ecumenical and inter-faith work; hunger; reconciliation (in the many areas where it is required); work around issues of death and grieving; mental health advocacy; homelessness; addiction; peace; alternatives to violence (the AVP program); work with seniors and hospice care; intercultural and intergenerational community building; education; community gardens; gender identity issues; sexual orientation; legislative support (or opposition); sponsoring refugees; couple's enrichment; racism; marginalization and inclusion; prison visitation and offender reintegration; the occupation of Palestine; suicide; and immigration policy.

Despite the many and deep involvements of Friends and Friends meetings in this myriad of worthwhile causes, cultivating the spiritual basis for such work—the coordination of the outer work and the inner, spiritual space—was also on the minds of Friends in 2019, and learning and deepening Quaker ways and processes remains a priority.