**LEYM Ministry & Nurture Committee Summary of State of the Meeting Reports**

**Summer 2020**

The 18 State of the Meeting reports we received are clearly divided into conditions before and after the arrival of COVID-19.

Generally the spiritual state of the monthly meetings and worship groups making up Lake Erie Yearly Meeting remains strong. We value the time spent together in unprogrammed worship, seen as the heart of the Meeting, and we enjoy additional fellowship through potlucks, worship sharing, ongoing small groups, social action and retreats.

We are generally aging, predominantly white and relatively affluent. Some meetings report new attenders drawn in by their increased web presence, activities or outreach. Several meetings have revised their social media presence, most with rewarding results. Other meetings struggle with their small size or aging membership. There is a sense from several meetings that we are not providing adequate care and spiritual nurture for families with children. Some meetings lack any regularly attending young people and offer child care or programs only when young people do come. Several meetings have had or are facing major transitions in their physical space for worship.

Quality of worship is mixed, with some meetings worshipping mostly in silence, while others experience varied and spiritually rich vocal ministry. Sometimes political or intellectual messages are not felt to be Spirit-led. Occasionally ministry during worship has been disruptive. Several meetings have experienced interpersonal problems between members, creating tensions that affect trust and cooperation within the meeting.

Two meetings have adopted the practice of reading back decisions or minutes during Meetings for Business. Reading a *Faith and Practice* document together is another approach two meetings have taken to deepen knowledge of Quakerism and support rightly ordered practice.

Meetings meet needs for spiritual deepening with Spiritual Formation groups, Seekers series, viewing *Quaker Speak* videos, groups on aging, sharing individual spiritual journeys, and supporting multiple individual ministries.

Fellowship is further experienced through outreach, such as helping a student financially, eating meals with college students and neighbors, writing letters to U.S. government representatives and Amnesty International, and supporting a Peace Park. Meetings have joined with other faith groups for social action like serving at soup kitchens and food pantries, Alternatives to Violence Program, sanctuary, engaging in local and national racial equity and social justice initiatives, environmental and immigration issues .

Most meetings are involved with wider Quaker organizations in addition to Lake Erie Yearly Meeting, such as Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting, Michigan Friends Center, Friends General Conference, American Friends Service Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation, the School of the Spirit and Friends World Committee for Consultation. We also reach out to other faith groups for social action issues. Two Meetings are supporting small worship groups.

The arrival of COVID-19 changed the rhythm and dynamics of our meetings significantly. Meeting responses to the sudden end to face-to-face worship ranged from confusion about process to worry about members unwilling or unable to join online worship. Some smaller meetings did not shift to online meetings for worship. In those meetings, members joined online worship with other meetings, reached out to each other with phone calls, held worship simultaneously from separate homes or experimented with outdoor distanced meetings.

Most meetings quickly shifted to online worship using Zoom. Those that shifted reported relief and pleasure that the process was not too onerous, actually enhanced the ability to hear ministry and increased attendance due to the presence of those who could not otherwise attend One Meeting wrote, “Perhaps the biggest surprise for some is the discovery that we still experience being gathered in the Spirit when we are only connected virtually. This reaffirms for us that Spirit is not bound by time or space; that when we are one in Spirit, we transcend limitations.”

State of the Meeting Reports from each of the individual meetings and worship groups will be included in the annual records. Please read them if you are interested in having more information on any of the actions mentioned here.