

## Review of **LEYM** State of the Meeting Reports **2024-2025**

(Reviewed: Ann Arbor, Athens, Birmingham, Broadmead, Cleveland, Delaware, Grand Rapids, Granville, Kalamazoo, Kent, Mid-Ohio Valley, Oberlin, Red Cedar, Pittsburgh, Wooster)

### Membership Situation

Most Meetings appeared to feel that their membership relations were strong. A few of the larger Meetings noted some new attenders and increased numbers of visitors. A number of smaller Meetings mentioned that while they get a steady stream of visitors and short term attenders, they are not holding on to them. One Meeting felt it was growing (Athens). Other Meetings felt that membership was steady. Smaller Meetings, however, felt the strain on activities due to the small number of Friends and attenders. Several smaller meetings now hold their Meeting for Business every other month (Birmingham, Granville) and one Meeting (Wooster) now holds business meeting quarterly. One Meeting is down to one recorded Friend among those attending and does not hold meetings for worship in the summer months (Delaware). A number of Meetings expressed a concern for increased visibility.

### Meeting Location Situation

The situation of meeting facilities varies. Ann Arbor, Athens, Kalamazoo, Red Cedar, Pittsburgh have their own meeting houses. Birmingham, Cleveland, Delaware, Grand Rapids, Granville, Mid-Ohio Valley, North Columbus, Wooster rent space. Grand Rapids will be losing its rented space in June and needs to find a new location. Cleveland is actively looking for a new meeting house of its own.

Broadmead meets in two locations. It mentioned that when both Toledo and Bluffton Worship Groups are able to worship together in person, their worship is deeper.

### Worship

Most Meetings hold hybrid worship, although the quality of the technology may vary. Several Meetings (Wooster and Bluffton) hold two in-person meetings and two Zoom meetings for worship a month. Red Cedar holds two meetings for worship each week – an earlier one exclusively in-person and a later hybrid one.

The amount of vocal ministry varies, with most Meetings being fairly silent, although Friends in these Meetings are generally comfortable with the silence. Two Meetings (Birmingham, Ann Arbor) have held discussions on the quality of vocal ministry.

One Meeting has had friction over hybrid worship, and has held several called meetings to discuss the issue.

## Fellowship Activities

Meetings hold a broad range of fellowship activities. Fellowship activities include:

- Potlucks (Ann Arbor, Athens, Kalamazoo)
- Birthday celebrations (Athens)
- Men's Breakfast meetings (Kalamazoo)
- Women's Gatherings (Kalamazoo and Ann Arbor)
- Quaker 8s (Athens)
- Quaker Teas (Cleveland)
- Shared meals once a month (Kent)
- Singing before Meeting for Worship (Athens, Ann Arbor, Kent)
- Picnics (Cleveland,)
- Anniversary celebrations (Kalamazoo, Broadmead). Cleveland is planning to hold a 100th Anniversary event in September.
- Social Evenings (Ann Arbor).
- Hiking/walking and other group outings (Pittsburgh, Ann Arbor).

## Spiritual Strengthening

Several Meetings use worship sharing (Athens, Cleveland) on a regular basis. Ann Arbor uses worship sharing as part of planned discussions outside of worship. Cleveland has held six pre-meeting Deepening into Worship sessions of a half-hour on techniques to center down. Several Meetings hold regular Bible Study (Cleveland, Ann Arbor).

A number of Meetings are reflecting on who and what the Meeting is. Kalamazoo has a "Visioning Committee" to look forward to the future needs of the Meeting. Ann Arbor has held a number of sessions to explore what it means to be part of a Quaker spiritual community, as well as sessions on Eldering, Vocal Ministry, One's relationship with Spirit, One's relationship with the Meeting Community, and one's Relationship with the outer world. Kent held a retreat in February on the role of individual conscience on the Meeting and the Meeting's role on individual conscience.

A large number of members of Red Cedar MM participated in last year's LEYM Spiritual Formation retreat, and more have participated in the Meeting's small group discussions.

Ann Arbor holds spiritual companionship groups and spiritual formation.

Few Meetings mentioned religious education, except to say that they needed more (Delaware).

## Educational Activities

A number of Meetings hold discussions on topics of interest (Wooster, Kalamazoo, Ann Arbor). Several have had guest speakers (Kalamazoo, Cleveland, Ann Arbor).

Cleveland, Ann Arbor, and Oberlin have regular reading and discussion groups. Cleveland's meets weekly along with members of Wooster, and have just spent the past 16 months reading George Fox's Journal.

### Social and Community Action

A number of Meetings are active to some degree or another working with various outside organizations (Mid-Ohio, Kalamazoo, Ann Arbor, Kent). One Meeting (Athens) contributes 10% of its annual budget to help community organizations. Cleveland contributes the interest from its investments to various local organizations in which Friends participate. A number of Meetings work with AFSC and FCNL.

A number of Meetings provide community meals (Birmingham) several times year. Others provide meals monthly (Cleveland). Kent volunteers help out weekly at social services kitchen. Ann Arbor offers its meetinghouse as a day shelter for two weeks once a year and an overnight shelter for one week in the year.

One Meeting has recently revived its Social Action Committee (Birmingham). Several Meetings are active in environmental issues (Kalamazoo, Mid-Ohio, Ann Arbor). Ann Arbor is also involved in a wide range of other peace and social action issues. Ann Arbor and Red Cedar are also actively committed to reparations. One Meeting (Cleveland) is trying to identify a project that the Meeting as a whole can participate in in order to build fellowship and to be more visible in the community. Kent contributes to World Central Kitchen and to AFSC work aiding those in need in Gaza and as a result of the hurricane in North Carolina.

One smaller Meeting (Granville) writes Letters to the Editor and sends minutes to other Meetings. Birmingham recently sent Valentines cards to elected officials.

Red Cedar reports becoming more active in several national and international Quaker organizations. Through AFSC's Apartheid-Free pledge, Red Cedar Friends have worked in partnership with another congregation on a Palestinian Interfaith Network. Red Cedar has also continued to be actively involved in FCNL's Advocacy Teams.

Kent provided an education grant to a doctoral student from Niger. Red Cedar seeks to use its meeting house purposefully, sharing it with various community service and support organizations and with another faith community.

### Children

Few Meetings mentioned children in their reports. Birmingham's First Day School is inactive, and Cleveland's is small. Athens mentions paying for child care, but it is not clear whether they have a FDS. Pittsburgh has a concern about identifying enough FDS teachers and is considering paying for a teacher to work with volunteer teachers. Cleveland has a paid teacher and childcare person working with volunteers. Ann Arbor

has also hired a person to support the committee. Ann Arbor and Red Cedar have indicated growth in the number of children attending FDS.

## Finances

One Meeting (Red Cedar) has faced budget shortfalls, which has led to discussions about giving patterns.

## Concerns

A recurring concern among smaller Meetings, especially, is the need for more visibility in order to stop the decline in attendance and to actually increase the number of active attenders. Small Meetings find it difficult to maintain committees and even when there are formally set up committees these are often too small to maintain much activity. There is also a concern for attracting more younger people and families. Several Meetings also expressed a concern with finding people to fill necessary meeting positions, especially those of Clerk and Assistant Clerk and committee clerks.

All Meetings are concerned about finding ways to address the political and social conditions in the country as Quakers.