

**State of Society**  
**Madison Monthly Meeting of**  
**the Religious Society of Friends**

*Approved May 1, 2011*

The Madison Monthly Meeting continues to be a Meeting with great vitality, activity and energy. Five people have been added as members, four members have resigned, and one member died. With two youth members changing their status to associate member, our Meeting numbers 307 full members. The real message about our membership is that many of us have been engaged steadily in the life and work of the Meeting.

Money and budgets have been much discussed over the past couple of years. Our Meeting was faced with a budget shortfall, and we needed to implement changes. Our choice was to empower an ad hoc committee to raise awareness and funds. The committee encouraged us all to look at our talents, time, and money, and asked us to contribute a mix of those in amounts that would support a vibrant Meeting community. Everyone in the Meeting received a letter which expressed the value of all forms of commitment—spiritual, physical, and financial—and also carefully explained our financial needs. The result on our budget was to go from shortfall to surplus. As the ad hoc committee completes its work, there are discussions in the committee and around our Meeting community about how to use surplus funds, and how much is “enough” in our budget. We are learning more about how closely our spiritual values and our financial decisions are linked.

We each attempt to live our values in the society around us, including matters of public participation in democratic governance. We found ourselves deeply grieved about the content of recent state budget and legislative proposals, and the growing divisiveness among Wisconsin legislators and citizens that has accompanied them. As part of a public minute expressing our concerns, we called on “legislators and citizens alike to reach out to one another and to listen deeply to each other’s concerns.” Many of our high school students were particularly active in the protests at the Capitol. One way we are beginning to reach out is by working with George Lakey (founder and executive director of Training for Change) to bring focus on important issues to the wider community. We continue to wrestle with the questions of how to respond to these complex issues as a corporate Quaker community.

On occasion, we need to freshen, clean, and renew an area of our Meeting life that requires tenderness, precision, and persistence. Our Friends Directory is one such area. We frequently consult entries as an index for communication, turning phone numbers and addresses into conversations and community. In perusing the directory, one sometimes bumps into a name that releases memories and unlocks emotions. This past year, our directory committee put extra emphasis on reaching out to everyone to update information, renew acquaintances, and to determine the listing status for each person.

Sometimes, our cleaning needs are in the physical realm. In listening to the concerns of guests, attenders, and members, we began working on a different cleaning issue: mold. With professional help, we identified numerous concerns in both the Meetinghouse and caretaker's house and have begun the process of addressing these issues.

Individuals or small groups of people in our Meeting continue to put their values and testimonies into action in the wider community. One friend brought his concern with the marginalization and persecution of those of the Muslim faith. In response, we wrote and circulated a minute in support of Muslims in America, and in particular in their ability to exercise their First Amendment rights of worship.

Several members of Meeting continue their extensive work to continue the operation of Camp Woodbrooke, the summer Quaker camp located near Richland Center which, without the support of Friends, might not have been able to continue. Another way that Friends are engaged in larger social issues is the work being done to found the Linda and Gene Farley Center for Peace, Justice and Sustainability. During the past year, a Friend has skillfully nurtured the expansion of sustainable agricultural activities at the Center. Other Friends/friends have testified at hearings and participated on several committees to support the birth of the Natural Path Sanctuary, a nature preserve cemetery at the Center.

An Inquirers' group was held for six weeks in mid-winter, which used Claremont Dialogue queries as a basis for exploring Quakerism.

Our First Day School Committee has continued to develop structures to help us proactively protect children and the adults who work with them. Meeting has approved volunteer screening policies and nomination of a committee to hold the concern of inappropriate sexual behavior, again as a proactive measure. We produced our first Parent Handbook, a guide to First Day programs as well as to Meeting and wider Quaker community. Soon to follow: guidelines for adults working with children.

We are pleased with how adults and children are learning how to resonate with each other. This has been fostered in large part by the weekly gathering every First Day. Adults and children meet together for brunch between the 8:45 and 11:15 Meetings for worship. The gatherings are well attended and seem to meet the needs of younger families in particular. The weekly gathering includes worship sharing on Quaker topics and intergenerational activities such as cooperative paintings. Some of this artwork has been incorporated into the Meeting Directory. Once a month we have an Intergenerational Worship, which has fostered, as its name implies, greater connectedness among the generations. We are pleased with the wholesome, buoyant, and heartfelt energy of this ever-changing community!

In many ways, this year has held edges of tension, as there have been differences of perspective regarding what Meeting should be doing. Continually, though, members of the community have drawn us back to our Center, to the place where both our search and our witness in the world are grounded. For all this and more, we are deeply thankful.