**North Carolina Fellowship of Friends**

**Spiritual Condition Report**

**28 October 2024**

New Garden Friends Meeting ispleased to share greetings and provide a sense of the spiritual health of our community. We have many items to share in this brief report, which addresses a period of meaningful transition for New Gardeners.

Spirit is alive among F/friends at NGFM, a fact that is perhaps most evident in the wonderful result of our intentional search for a new settled pastor. We are overjoyed to have welcomed Brenda Esch back to our community, knowing that she felt a mutual call to relocate and take up this role at NGFM. Brenda had participated with New Garden Friends Meeting during her years as a Guilford College student.The search for a new settled pastor involved a careful process of discernment—one that included a pre-search transition team and then a selection committee to oversee the recruitment, application, and interview processes. We were fortunate to be able to invite four candidates to visit our Meeting. We found each of their prepared messages moving and additional conversations with themmeaningful. Our community overwhelmingly considered Brenda to be uniquely well-positioned to assume the role of pastoral minister. A lifelong Quaker, recentHead of School at Wilmington (N.C.) Friends School, she assumed this role in September. Our Meeting has responded enthusiastically to Brenda’s warmth, energy, and vision.

We are also uplifted to know that Ashley Wilcox, who served as our interim pastor for two years, is now able to focus her professional efforts more fully on her nonprofit organization, Public Friends. Ashley expertly supported our community as we interviewed finalists for the pastoral position and was especially helpful in ensuring Brenda’s smooth transition into her new role. These most recent activities serve as a coda to the many gifts that Ashley shared with our community during her tenure as interim pastor. Ashley’s final message to NGFM, entitled “With You Always” helped us reflect on our collective growth, change, and loss. A shared transitional Meeting for Worship with both Ashley and Brenda on 1 September featured three blessings, delivered by Deborah Shaw, Wess Daniels, and Deborah Suess, respectively. The service of Ashley and two other recent pastors will soon be recognized with a ceremony and by trees planted at the NGFM parsonage. Our community will long benefit from Ashley's wisdom and guidance during a time of transition, reflection, and new beginnings.

There are many additional F/friends whose efforts contribute to our vibrant community. Deborah Suess continues to provide part-time pastoral visitation, a service that remains a significant need especially because of our aging population**.** Additional staff members are Karin Heller, Director of Youth and Family Ministry; Charlene Cufr, Office Manager; Caretta Brown, Administrative Assistant; Liddie Hurst, Housekeeping; Marc Alley, Music Director; Andy Mock, organist; and Heather Saake, Childcare. We are also much indebted to many F/friends, members, and attenders who serve on multiple committees to carry forth work within our Meeting and outwardly to the greater community.

A special and recent experience among those at New Garden Friends Meeting was a memorial meeting held in remembrance of all whom the Meeting lost between 2020 and 2024. We felt compelled to mark the significant losses caused and/or exacerbated by COVID-19 by dedicating one First Day to a simple, if poignant, memorial. Reading the names of those who passed, lighting a candle in their memory, and sharing silence as individuals stood in honor of those they lost offered us time for collective remembering and space for healing. This was our first attempt at holding such an event. It seems to have brought comfort to many despite the ongoing pain of losing so many F/friends in recent years.

Another significant contribution to the spiritual vibrancy of the Meetingis our recent upgrade of technology in our worship room. Thanks to the generosity of many people—and one anonymous donor providing matching funds—we have been able to purchase and install audiovisual equipment in our meeting room that enables a more seamless experience for the many F/friends who worship with us on Zoom and through Facebook. We are pleased to make this shared commitment to our expansive community, enabling in-person and remote ways ofenhancing Meeting for Worship, fellowship, and business.

Our First Dayworship attendance varies from 125-175 over all platforms.

Additional gatherings on First Dayinclude Spiritual Disciplines and First Day Forum. The former invites thoughtful engagement with one text over a period of time. Having recently finished reading *The Women’s Lectionary: Preaching the Women of the Bible Throughout the Year*, the Spiritual Disciplines class is now reading *Quaker Process for Friends on the Benches.* The latter—First Day Forum—features speakers who share perspectives from their professional, civic, or personal lives. Some speakers are local community members who do not attend NGFM and others are F/friends from within the Meeting who have a perspective to share. Recent speakers include the League of Women Voters, Earth Quaker Action Team, the Divan Center, and Cone Health. New Garden speakers have shared their knowledge on themes such as the history of gerrymandering and the philosophical roots of Critical Race Theory.

Karin Heller has recently shifted from her longtime role as Religious Education Coordinator for NGFM and into the related, but distinct, role of Director of Youth and Family Ministry. Karin has been working diligently to identify needs of families who might be able to benefit from various resources of our Meeting. As such, she has been cultivating a homeschoolgroup/educational play co-op that gathers regularly at the meeting house and whose members are invited to attend Meeting for Worship. The Religious Education Committee has reconfigured the intergenerational worship time as “Gathered Light,” an opportunity for F/friends of all ages to come together to play, craft, hear stories, and/or discuss Pendle Hill pamphlets. These efforts are all opportunities for New Garden to demonstrate their interest in being welcoming and supportive to families in the Triad.

Our parsonage has been a resource that supports our efforts to bring comfort to others and was used to sequentially house 12 refugee families temporarily during the last year and a half. Brenda has chosen to live in the parsonage, a change that opened an opportunity for reassessing the overall health of the home. Some professionals were hired to paint, lay new flooring, install new appliances and remediate the basement. A number of Meeting volunteers also worked very hard to prepare the house, which Brenda moved into at the end of August.

Our annual fall salehas recently concluded. More than a fundraiser, the event is also an opportunity for F/friends to pitch in to process donations and prepare to open our doors to the public. This event represents a labor of love for all involved and affords NGFM an opportunity to support sustainability through reuse/rehoming of items. The Meeting will donate half of the proceeds from this year’s sale to recovery efforts in Western North Carolina after Hurricane Helene.

In an effort to meaningfully engage with the larger community, New Garden Friends Meeting continues its long tradition of providing an evening meal the first Tuesday of every month to Greensboro Urban Ministry guests. Several volunteers cook the food and others serve it at the facility. There is also a large group of New Garden Friends volunteering with Meals on Wheels. We have used our resources for three items concerning refugees. Our community is also sponsoring one family of six who needed clothing and items for their home; we have contributed funds for snacks for the Refugee School Impact Program at the New Arrivals Institute; and we gave funds to a family of seven to get physicals in order to get their Green Cards.

We look forward to soon having a newly designed website to debut in 2025. This critical communication update will allow us to share information about our Meetingin word and image and to provide a more current reflection of who our community is and what all it does. The redesign also aims to decrease the labor of website maintenance through a simple, yet dynamic, format.

At a time of much political division and various forms of suffering near and far, New Garden Friends Meeting finds solace in community and the pursuit of peace. We are grateful to feel supported by North Carolina Fellowship of Friends and other Friends around the world.