

## Gunpowder Friends Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report for 2024

**We are strong. We live in hope. We remain open to the Light.**

At a worship-sharing meeting on the Spiritual State of the Meeting, January 18, 2025, Gunpowder Friends considered the following queries, responses to which are quoted throughout the report.

**What are the specific ways in which our spirits have been nurtured? Are there aspects of nurture missing?**

**Do we encounter limits in our practice of the Beloved Community ideal?**

**As we work for peace, are we nourished by peace and justice within and among us?**

Gunpowder Friends often describe our Meeting as a "family" in a beautiful spiritual "home." Many feel its warm embrace, the open flow of spiritual life, the beauty of our meetinghouse and the surrounding countryside, and a deepening sense of Beloved Community here. "Gunpowder is so much a family for me. . . the experience here is that of being embraced by friend with open arms and it is a sense that we as humans all yearn for, that sense of belonging."

By continuously holding ourselves open to Spirit/the Light/God/the Creator we are able to hold "the paradox of the presence of love amid the chaos" in our country today, while also tending to grief and worry in our Meeting. " I think our highest aim as spiritual beings is to seek, continually, our connection with the source that gives us life, what calls us to love, what gives us vision and hope and life. And this I think Gunpowder does spectacularly well. We stay open to Spirit."

This openness has helped us cope with serious challenges. Shortly after the 2024 election, we held a special meeting for worship-sharing, and another on January 20, 2025, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday and Inauguration Day, and at these inflection points felt a transcendent outpouring of Spirit, love, and hope. "What I found here was a remarkably open community — one that honored the flow of Spirit." "Meeting for Worship is a great gift of nurture and I know that this is true for others as evidenced by so many faithful attenders and so many newcomers who feel the pull of nurture and hospitality in our community." We continue to see young adults attend and join our Meeting, promising its future.

The Meeting nurtures us specifically through the depth of our Meetings for Worship, both in the profound silence, and in the moving messages. Silent retreats, a drumming circle, Spiritual Formation program, monthly Forums, monthly singing before worship, our collaborations with the McKim Center, and our One Book program all foster a robust, creative, nourishing spiritual life at Gunpowder. This year we read Kazu Haga, [Healing Resistance](#), together, and it continues to shape our understanding both of Kingian nonviolence as peace testimony, and of our own Beloved Community at Gunpowder as a microcosm. We plan to continue in this vein.

Our physical home atop an unusual geological formation of solid granite is a source of beauty and joy that calls us outside ourselves and into worship together. Worship on the porch remains an option chosen by some year-round. "The connection with spirit through Nature has always been a vital part of my spiritual journey, and I think the way this Meeting has maintained this place as a beacon is a gift to our community and to the larger community."

"A lot has changed over the years . . . but one thing has remained the same: that openness to the flow of Spirit." "This made me think of hospitality as nurture; we make it a point to open all of our activities to the wider world." Particularly in times of crisis, our familial sensibility holds us together: "I want to add that I have been the recipient of the outpouring of help and support when I needed it. I also continue to find joy and gratitude in offering some service to the Meeting."

Our recent grappling with the challenges of "hybrid" technology-assisted worship has been painful for some. We continue to hold healing space for Friends who remain unsettled about the presence of The Bridge (our vernacular name for Zoom) in worship and the process by which we came to this decision. Over time we experimented creatively with zoom-free early morning worship and outdoor and evening meetings for worship. We softened the appearance of the video screen using a theatrical scrim and experimented with a variety of options for tech free worship. We listened deeply to one another's concerns. Finally, in March 2024, we chose to keep the Bridge connecting us to Friends who cannot, regularly or occasionally, for various reasons of health, mobility, weather, travel, or scheduling, worship in person every Sunday at 10am. We usually have 10 to 15 Friends who use the Bridge to join Meeting for Worship, who express very deep gratitude for it. Several Friends have chosen to worship elsewhere, and we feel their absence.

Friends who were present during this time of discernment reflected, "[W]e have experienced a particularly difficult journey with Zoom because of our ideals — because we have listened and listened hard and we were so reluctant to make a choice that would exclude or wound someone." "I feel the warmth, I feel that if I am absent I am missed, and that when I return I am welcomed."

We also feel the loss of families with children some related to post-Covid realities and some due to the "aging out" of a large cohort of young Friends. We have made changes to expand our welcome to them by setting up a children's corner in the Meeting Room and by devoting four Sundays in the coming year to Family Centered Worship using Faith and Play and other programming.

We know that compassionate care is needed to embrace all of these Friends. Paradoxically, our loss and discomfort at these post-Covid changes have deepened our understanding of just how much we cherish this beloved community, this Light within and among us.

"The gift is that when I am in this Meeting for Worship, I am reminded again that I am of God and that there is this treasure inside me. In no other place does this happen [for me] than in this Meeting. [W]hen . . . the conflict began about whether we would keep the bridge open, something else happened. I made friends with conflict and learned that struggle isn't something to be afraid of. Someone said it is important to learn to be with what is, and to be open to be with what is."