

MCGM GATHER & GROW MEETING, AUGUST 6, 2011

LAKE FOREST FRIENDS MEETING

Notes by Judy Erickson

SESSION I (morning session)

Twenty-four Friends attended, affiliated with the following monthly meetings (MMs): Chicago, Downers Grove, Duneland, Evanston, 57th Street, Lake Forest, Oak Park, and Upper Fox Valley. All are in Illinois Yearly Meeting except Chicago MM, which is in Western Yearly Meeting. There were no attenders from Northside, Oshkosh, Rock Valley, nor South Bend MMs. There was no current attender from 57th St. MM.

We are glad that David & Nancy Finke were able to accept our invitation to attend this meeting. David was, until June, Presiding Clerk of ILYM; he & Nancy currently attend Columbia MM in Missouri and Blue River Quarterly Meeting of ILYM. To prepare for this meeting, David had reviewed recent "State of Society" reports from MMs in the MCGM area. He shared his thoughts about the strengths and challenges shared by many of these meetings.

We were invited to journal individually on the three queries given by Ken Jacobsen. Here are some responses from that journaling experience, which I have listed by MM.

Query 1. Where are the signs of life and growth among us and in our meetings?

Chicago MM has come through a dark time of conflict, doing Listening Circles in 2009. Sadly, some people left. It is transforming itself into a more flexible, self regulating group with a minimalist approach. This summer they have a thriving garden which helps them feel rooted in their community. Western YM has a "Youth Cabinet" (ages 13 to college) that is inspiring to a young person at CMM: it provides young people with opportunities for singing, bible study, and study of Quaker testimonies.

There is a deepening sense of connection between new & older attenders at **Downers Grove MM**. The Aging & Saging and Sewing groups are very popular; a thought was expressed about how important it is for the MM to provide other opportunities besides First Days.

There is a lot of intellectual and spiritual talent at **Duneland MM**, which are signs of growth. New people come occasionally. A decision was made to not have a conventional business meeting, but to use a blackboard to allow people to express their thoughts and concerns. A renewed commitment was made to insure that someone will arrive early to open every First Day. They are using new electronic tools to communicate, but concern was expressed about implied messages in social media, including the perception that they are engaging in "marketing" the Quaker message.

We must be careful to be Spirit led: the Spirit has a lot in store for us, but we must listen and be faithful.

Evanston MM will be doing Quaker Quest early next year. There are 7 new babies at Evanston! It is very exciting. The young people are increasingly willing to help out. They bring their love to many of the older people.

There was a wonderful opportunity provided by **57th St. MM** to meet and learn from a family of Quakers who work in Belize. It was noted, however, that only two friends came to share this opportunity. Such opportunities, frequently provided by 57th St., deserve wider attendance.

Some new people are attending **Lake Forest MM**, and taking on new roles. This has led to a larger role for the Peace & Justice Committee, which in turn is leading to new ways for how the MM works. The fundraiser to buy their new windows was very well supported.

Growth & development of spiritual connections at **Oak Park MM** are reported. It is beginning to see children and their families attend again. The Nominating Committee took special care to try to prevent burnout among those who often serve. There is more of a sense of caring and developing a support system to care for each other.

Upper Fox Valley MM seems very alive with many individuals doing many things. A young adult friend is in an emerging Quaker leadership group, which is being encouraged. If Way does not open for something, there is an attitude of acceptance similar to the "lilies of the field" concept in the Bible.

Query 2. What are our greatest challenges as meetings?

Chicago MM does not have enough people/money to sustain their buildings & property. It's sad to think of letting it go; it could have so much potential. People are so busy & there is a lack of spiritual commitment. It requires more time to go deeper, but time is what is in short supply.

There are 3 challenges facing **Downers Grove MM**. 1 - They are still struggling with details of the new building; they need to refocus on other needs. 2 - Many members don't have enough time & energy, which doesn't allow them to know each other in their spirits. 3 - They have difficulty in coming to a collective approach to individual needs (e.g., financial). Another challenge: it is amazing what one strong person can do; it's important to recognize & nurture our leaders & potential leaders, which implies that we need to be better followers of our leaders.

Evanston MM is challenged to help people realize they are part of a larger group (beyond the MM). Sunday morning seems to be "it." There is a problem with people arriving late to worship.

Lake Forest MM is challenged to go deep in our relationship together in the Divine, to not be afraid to be together in our diversity & wholeness.

There is a lack of unity in our spiritual vocabulary at **Oak Park MM**.

Upper Fox Valley MM has geographic challenges. Transportation difficulties are increasing due to more stop lights and greater congestion on the roads.

Query 3. What new work are we being called to? Is it a collective call?

One friend suggests a need to link up with & support the evangelical Quaker group in the south Chicago area. Upper Fox Valley friends have contacted this group to invite them to the MCGM Corn Roast on 9/4.

Another friend suggests that MCGM have more community events like the corn roast. He challenges us to think of nontraditional ways, such as The Quake (organized via Facebook) and the Quake That Rocked the Midwest. They manage to overcome their transportation problems but need help. Should ILYM buy a small school bus to provide transportation & an opportunity to engage in fellowship en route to such Quaker events?

Downers Grove may feel a call to meet the needs of our aging population, and the needs of the dying.

Another friend challenges us to be the change we wish to see, spreading Quaker process as we go. We need to model new relationships (spiritual, economic, etc.).

Another friend asks, "why not promote ourselves?" She praises the example of one friend wearing a t-shirt that reads "Quakers do it silently" & others such as "Quakers are way cooler than you think" & "Quakers are not old hat." She mentioned that many people of many religions take the Belief.net quiz which often tells them that their beliefs are most closely aligned with Quaker beliefs. Can we reach out to these people?

Another friend suggests that the peace & justice aspect of Quaker faith blends easily into our lives, but the spiritual aspect needs to be strengthened. Do we need to tend more to it? Some feel there is an imbalance between the spiritual aspect & the social justice aspect.

SESSION II (afternoon session)

Ken summarized what he observed during the morning session, drawing upon the following phrases from the easel notes.

Query 1:

Commitment, tenderness, children.

What are we leaving/giving our children, planet-wise?

Social action

Renewal, stewardship, talents & gifts, support

Query 2:

Time & distance

Age

Spiritual vocabulary

Lack of flexibility & openness

Query 3:

Attracting or dealing with people who are different

More events together

Outreach & inreach (balance is needed)

A voice in Chicago's wider religious community

David Finke summarized the history & main roles of MCGM over the years.

There were 2 predecessor quarterly meetings (1 ILYM and 1 WYM) that merged into MCGM. Those quarterly meetings met together in a 1-day event (not a weekend event). Separate sessions were held to season the business of each yearly meeting.

There were both educational & social roles, which sometimes involved seeking the relevance of social justice issues. It was also an opportunity to be with seasoned friends who "broke the mold" of what was experienced in the individual MMs. These opportunities have continued throughout MCGM's history.

About 40 years ago the 2 quarterly meetings were laid down, at which time they formed MCGM. Sometimes the WYM MMs (including the united MMs) would separate to do WYM business, which was not relevant to the ILYM MMs.

For some time women would get together about once a month to make quilting squares (at Fellowship of Friends MM at Cabrini Green). These would be sewn into blankets for needy families. There was also an AFSC clothing repair project, which was supported mostly by Evanston MM.

At one time Milwaukee, Madison, & MCGM meetings sponsored an FCNL event (Friends Committee on National Legislation).

After hearing this summary, which helped deepen the context for our work, we broke into 4 small worship sharing groups to consider the afternoon queries. Here are some responses given by the groups when all reconvened.

Query 1. Are we hearing a clear and vital need among Chicago Friends that MCGM might serve at this time? If so, what is it?

We began with a reminder of the difference between "need" and "want" (like a Chevy versus a Cadillac).

Some key words are flexibility & openness to new relationships. We can't get anything done without a real relationship sustaining us. Sometimes relationships outside of MMs are vital. In Blue River Quarterly (BRQ) the young people keep coming because of their sustaining relationships. Also because of the relationships that have been built over the years, they are able to forward the business of the yearly meeting.

Structure: why do we need to do business 4 times a year? One example is seasoning issues regionally.

Advancing our lives individually and collectively

Leadership development

Quaker Quest

Affirmation of our fellowship (not just once a year at yearly mtg)

There is a vital need to get young people together more often

To experience the diversity of Quakerism regionally

BRQ receives State of Society reports in a way that they can be cared for

Business could be called as needed, not scheduled for every meeting

Because we are getting smaller, we may need to gather regionally for social purposes (e.g. potlucks)

There is still "a great people to be gathered" similar to what George Fox saw on Pendle Hill. Can we build a "critical mass" to grow & share Quakerism? Is there a way to use MCGM to help each MM "recruit" new people? Network with AFSC? Hire a young person for a year to go to various meetings as a catalyst to set up outreach programs? There is an Earlham School of Religion program to promote Quaker volunteer service all over the country; could we use this as a structure to think of ideas like fundraising to hire such a person? If someone is to be hired, what kind of structure would be needed for oversight? How can MMs be invited into it? MMs would also need to carefully consider how to integrate new people who are attracted to their mtgs.

Would it help to change the name of MCGM?

There is a vital need for a Friends organization that knits us together, that provides social service work with fellowship events. Proposal: Change the name of MCGM to include "Quaker," "social service," & "fellowship."

Query 2. If there is no clear and vital need for MCGM in its present form, is it time to lay it down?

Yes, it is time to lay it down to create a new Quaker organization.

MCGM should continue. It forges relationships on multiple levels. There is a reason and need to address yearly meeting business for both YMs, & there is a need for a forum to share larger issues. There is a need for a regional Quaker body to endorse the work of a specific Friend in an ecumenical setting.

Do not lay it down, but go in a different direction. What structure is needed now?

At this time Katharine (who was holding us in the Light as we did our work) shared with us that the word **accountability** keeps coming to her.

BRQ has developed a balance between spiritual nurture and business.

If the ILYM MMs form a quarterly meeting, what would that mean for Chicago MM?

Lay down MCGM? No. Transform it? Yes.
There is a desire to do some service work together.
There is a desire to avoid the messy business of "business"

Ken helped us summarize what we have been hearing.

Key words are "clear & vital needs" & "could/should serve"
Building relationships
Fellowship (across the Quaker spectrum)
Letting others (non-Quakers) in the wider Chicago area know of the possibility of Quaker worship in their communities
Sharing our experience of Quaker process with each other
Grow Quakerism in the Chicago area -- establish worship groups in neighborhoods (through relationships)
To endorse Garnet Faye's membership
To advocate regarding Chicago area issues
How to go/be deeper spiritually, adult religious education topics beyond the local MMs
Separate ourselves from both yearly meetings

Ken feels some energy for another day to explore a different organization. There could be service project/s to bridge across yearly meetings. He proposed another gathering to build on this one. What is God asking us to do with Friends here? Would any of these solutions require input/support from ILYM? (David Finke answered "no.") Or can it grow here, organically, fresh, from the ground. Should it involve partnering with other religious groups, across religions -- we are not alone!

Our next meeting will be November 12th, at Evanston MM if EMM approves.