

Tending Our Roots, Nurturing Our Future: A Vision for Adelphi Friends Meeting

Report on the first two stages of Adelphi's *Appreciative Inquiry* planning process.
Submitted by the Ad-Hoc Long-Range Planning Committee, September 10, 2007.

Introduction

What is our identity as a community? Where are we on our faith journeys – both as individuals and as a community? In what ways would we like to grow and stretch and – more significantly – what is that God is calling us to do and be? These are some of the questions that arose as a group of Adelphi Friends, led by representatives of the Trustees, met in 2005 to consider how the Meeting might create of vision of its future.

The meetings grew out of a gathering sense within our community that we have the capacity to deepen the spiritual foundation of the Meeting and better support individual faith and practice. We also sensed a leading both to improve the quality of our fellowship and outreach and strengthen our action and witness in the world. The group became an Ad-Hoc Long-Range Planning Committee, charged with designing and carrying out a Meeting-wide process of reflection and discernment that would enable Adelphi to articulate a shared vision of our community identity and purpose. The Committee was also asked, on the basis of this vision, to formulate goals for strengthening the Meeting, identify the actions needed to achieve those goals, and to formulate a plan for implementing the actions.

After receiving its charge from the Meeting, the Committee decided to use a methodology known as Appreciative Inquiry to guide the reflective process needed for long-range planning. This participatory process, which is described below, includes four steps for creating a new future for an organization: discover, dream, design, and deliver.

This report is based on activities carried out in the first step of *discovery*. Based on the stories and information gathered in the process described below, the Committee has crafted scenarios for the future, called **provocative proposals**. This constitutes the *dream* step of the process.

The locus of action for the last two steps shifts to the Meeting as a whole. Together, it will be the job of the Meeting to review these provocative proposals of “what might be” and seek clearness about “what should be.” On the basis of that clearness, Meeting will also need to make decisions about actions, that is, to *design* an action plan to create this agreed-upon future. In carrying out the action plan, the Meeting will *deliver* on its vision of the future.

This report, then, describes the background to the long-range planning process, the process used, an overview of Adelphi Friends Meeting (AFM), and the narrative

description of five thematic areas, each followed by a provocative proposal for future directions. It finishes by outlining the next steps in the process, which depend on engagement by the entire Meeting in innovating and acting to bring these proposed futures to life.

BACKGROUND

As Adelphi Friends Meeting approached its fiftieth anniversary, a growing number of people felt the need to pause to take stock of our community and seek clearness about new directions for the future. Those who met to discuss this leading agreed that while the Meeting community is currently strong and vibrant, the creation of a shared vision would allow us to strengthen our witness, deepen our community life and develop further our capacity to support the spiritual life and growth of members and attenders.

The initial group of committee representatives identified a number of factors that pointed to the need and opportunity for long-range planning. These included:

The AFM community has changed over time and we need to understand and build on those changes. Among the changes that were noted were the growth of Meeting, the fact that Members and participants seem to have less free time to devote to Meeting activities, and the Meeting's improved financial stability. A process of reflection on these changes could help both to deepen our sense of community and to provide clearness about how these and other changes may require adjustments in how we operate.

There is a need to reflect on our collective decision making, to strengthen our institutional memory, and standardize some of our operations and committee work.

We have accumulated some modest financial surpluses, which suggests a greater capacity to mobilize financial resources.

Our decision-making processes have not kept pace with our potential financial capacity to consider more big ticket, multi-year expenditures (e.g. Memorial Garden, air conditioning, improved energy efficiencies for Meeting facilities).

There are recurring questions about the use of our grounds and physical space, which can be incorporated into the long-range planning.

Finally, significant change and growth at Friends Community School (FCS) also provides cause for reflection about Meeting's relationship with the school.

To engage the Meeting as a whole in this reflective process, the Committee adopted a planning method called *Appreciative Inquiry*. This method, which is highly participatory and collaborative, engages those involved in a search to identify "life giving forces" within a community or organization. It asserts that the best way to move toward the future is to bring with us the best of our past. Appreciating the best of "what is" provides a positive, affirming foundation for envisioning "what might be." Imagining what might be, we can work together to agree on "what should be" and collaborate to invent "what will be."

There are five steps to Appreciative Inquiry:

1. Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry.
2. Inquire into stories of life-giving forces.
3. Locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry.
4. Create shared images for a preferred future.
5. Find innovative ways to create that future.

Adelphi's fiftieth anniversary celebration on September 23 - 25, 2006, provided the ideal opportunity to gather together to begin our search for what gives life to our community. During the weekend we interviewed one another, reflected individually, and worked in neighborhood groups. (The interview questions are attached at the end of this report.) The questions were formulated to focus our reflections on the community's spiritual life, our relationships, and our outreach. We talked about the importance of Meeting in our lives and how we have each contributed to the Meeting. To conclude our reflections, each person made three birthday wishes for the Meeting.

Notes on the interviews were recorded by each interviewer and these were later transcribed to form the "data" from which key themes were then distilled. Two Second Hour discussions were held to feed back the initial results of our inquiry and to further reflect on the themes. Notes from these sessions were also recorded and used in formulating future scenarios, in the form of *provocative proposals*.

Provocative Proposals and the Way Forward

Provocative proposals are statements about the future, written in the present tense, as if the imagined future had already been realized. They build on our stories of our community history. They are meant to stimulate creative thinking and enable us together to imagine a different future for our community that embodies our most faithful witness.

To craft these provocative proposals, the Long-Range Planning Committee, as described above, identified key themes that emerged from our reflections and identified examples within that theme of our community at its best. We then analyzed the factors that contributed to making this "goodness" and, building on this, envisioned how we might create an even better, more faithful future in this thematic area.

Five thematic areas clearly emerged from the reflected process in which the Meeting has engaged. They are:

- i) spiritual growth and nurture, including through worship;
- ii) a caring, sharing community as cornerstone;
- iii) nurturing children and youth;
- iv) faithful stewardship of facilities, resources, and the environment; and
- v) reaching out to the wider world.

What follows are narrative descriptions and a provocative proposal for each theme. To provide the context for these proposals, we include a brief, historical description of Adelphi Friends Meeting.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: OVERVIEW OF ADELPHI FRIENDS MEETING

Established in 1956 through the merger of two smaller Meetings (one in Washington, DC and the other in College Park), AFM currently has a membership of 212 members and 125 associated members, with an average weekly attendance at Meeting for Worship of about 100. Among Quaker Meetings, one of Adelphi's most distinctive features is the large proportion of families with children and young Friends. Situated just outside Washington, DC, and close to the boundary between Prince George's and Montgomery counties, Adelphi draws its members and participants from both counties and, to a much lesser extent, from the District of Columbia. Because of its proximity to the nation's capital and to the University of Maryland, the Meeting tends to have a relatively high degree of transience, reflecting the dynamics associated with academia and national politics. Members and attenders are engaged in a variety of professions and vocations, including education, health and mental health, research, social services, politics and policy making, and construction.

One particular extended family – the Wetheralds -- was a cornerstone in the establishment of the AFM. As well, the founding families also included several in which the husband had served in Civilian Public Service (alternative service for conscientious objectors) during World War II. These two factors created dynamics that have persisted throughout AFM's fifty year history: an especially close-knit community and individual and collective engagement in social witness and action.

[Add language that describes the explicitly Christian character of AFM's founding.]

The five decades of AFM's history have coincided with a time of rapid and profound social changes, which are reflected in changes and challenges within the Meeting. In particular, the change in women's roles has lessened the overall time available for the work of the Meeting, which continues to function without paid staff.

In contrast with the current membership, members of the original AFM were predominantly birthright Quakers. Today there are only a few individuals at AFM who grew up within the Quaker tradition. And though there is presently greater racial and ethnic diversity in AFM than in the past, the level of such diversity – like that in the wider Quaker community -- remains quite low.

Sitting on the outskirts of the political epicenter of the U.S., AFM continually struggles with the influence of partisan politics, which have grown more polarized and uncivil in recent years. The Meeting is challenged to be faithful to Quaker testimonies without being captive to a particular political party or perspective.

[Add a paragraph about the wider social and political context, linking it to the involvement of Adelphi members and attenders through their jobs, volunteerism, and activism.]

I. SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND NURTURE, INCLUDING THROUGH WORSHIP

A. Narrative Description

Meeting for Worship is at the center of spiritual growth and nurture for Adelphi's members and attenders. Most found their way to Quakerism through spiritual seeking, or as "refugees" from other traditions, rather than having grown up in the tradition. Quaker worship, with its silence, its vocal ministry, and its acceptance of spiritual questioning is fundamental to what drew many of us to Quakerism.

We find that the spiritual depth of Meeting for Worship is greater when it is built on a strong sense of community. This is especially evident at weddings and memorial meetings. We have a sense of the importance of the presence of each one of us as we wait together in expectant silence. For our children and youth, the friendships and community that they experience at Adelphi are foundational to their spirituality and their spiritual growth and development.

In Meeting for Worship, we value both the silence and space for quiet reflection and the powerful messages that speak to our condition, which we often carry with us and share with others. We value the gifted vocal ministry of some of our Members and we also find that giving messages is a spiritually moving experience. The giving and receiving of messages creates strong spiritual relationships among us. At the same time, we do not sense that all vocal ministry comes from a deep spiritual leading and that messages that may be intended just for the individuals receiving them are sometimes given to the Meeting as a whole.

Many of us experienced a sense of "coming home" when we found Quakerism. While some felt initially intimidated by the unfamiliar worship format, others found it to be freeing. The openness, lack of creed, and acceptance that we find at Adelphi supports our spiritual seeking and provides a home for exploring and following the parameters of our faith, as well as our spiritual leadings. Many who have sought direct support for their spiritual struggles and leadings have found it at Adelphi, both informally and through support and clearness committees.

A range of Quaker practices nurture our spiritual growth. The disciplines of waiting, listening, and discerning, as applied in Meeting for Business, committee work, and clearness and support committees allow us to deepen our spiritual practice. Serving on a committee, in particular, allows us to deepen our engagement with Quaker faith and practice and many of us have found spiritual growth in this service. Optimally, these practices guide our committee working and allow us to address difficult situations, seeking the leadings of the Spirit. Because many of us are new to Quakerism, working knowledge and understanding of Quaker processes is not so deep as we would like and

we are sometimes frustrated by the pace of Quaker deliberations and decision making . We wish for opportunities for more in-depth learning about Quaker faith and practice and the use of queries for spiritual growth.

We find inspiration and spiritual guidance from the living testimony of others in Meeting. We learn by observing how they integrate Quaker values in their lives and how they live the testimonies. In fact, we would like to deepen this aspect of our community by finding ways to learn about each other's spiritual life, to inspire and motivate each other to live our faith, and to support one another in living the testimonies.

Other Meeting activities also provide opportunities for spiritual growth. These include Adult Religious Education sessions, teaching First Day School, singing before Meeting and with special groups, participation in the men's group, and the annual Quaker Women's retreat.

B. Provocative Proposal

AFM is a spiritual community deeply grounded in Quaker faith and practice. Meeting for Worship is the spiritual bedrock of the community. In worship, we listen to vocal ministry with open hearts and there is an ongoing process of learning and reflection about the nature and expression of vocal ministry and what is considered appropriate vocal ministry for our Meeting. We draw on a range of spiritual sources and teachings, which are reflected in messages expressed in Christian vocabulary as well as other traditions, such as Buddhist and Native American spirituality.

The spiritual life of the community, its members and attenders is nurtured through ongoing opportunities for study and reflection, drawing especially on Quaker testimonies, queries, history, and the lives of Quakers. This has led to a deeper communion in Meeting for Worship. The Meeting embraces a wide variety of paths for spiritual seeking, which includes vocational and affinity groupings, neighborhood gatherings, spiritual pairings and partnerships, retreats, classes, and study groups. Special care is given to ensure that those new to Quakerism are actively engaged and helped to learn about Quaker faith and practice. An annual retreat gathers together the Meeting as a whole – including children and youth – for shared spiritual reflection.

AFM recognizes and affirms that service on Meeting Committees is another opportunity for spiritual growth. It nurtures this aspect of its committees by supporting the development of spiritual leadership among committee clerks. It also reaches out to newcomers to ensure that they have the opportunity to join committees and engage more deeply in the spiritual life of the Meeting.

Music and singing are integral to the spiritual life of AFM. Several individuals serve as music leaders within Meeting and they plan a variety of musical experiences throughout the year, including reflection on the spirituality of music. Many of the spiritual growth groups also incorporate music into their activities.

II. A CARING, SHARING COMMUNITY AS CORNERSTONE

A. Narrative Description

The beginnings of the Adelphi community were those of family – the Wetherald and Broadbent families, the families of Friends who had been involved in conscientious objection to war, and in the “family” of those involved in Quaker action organizations. To that were added Friends arriving from other places, and those seeking a different way of worship, a different way to experience God.

These family ties created strong bonds of community that many still experience at Adelphi. In this loving community, individuals and families have found support and caring, especially in times of personal transition – both joys and sorrows. Those in need have found kindness, compassion, thoughtful caring, and practical and financial support. They have also learned the humbling importance of learning to receive from others.

These close bonds of community are nurtured by the acceptance and respect that growing out of the non-creedal dimension of Quakerism. This is a place where people feel that they can be themselves, but can also be challenged and held accountable. Community is also built on our Meeting’s many traditions and common experiences. Worshipping together, singing together, and sharing joys and concerns creates an intimacy, which is the foundation of community. In the past, a custom of Friendly Eights provided opportunities to share meals in one another’s homes. Service on committees, House and Ground Committee work days, and our annual Strawberry Festival nourish Friends by providing an opportunity to work side by side in a common cause. Our meetinghouse provides a natural center for our activities and physical stability for our community. The new, permanent site for Friends Community School similarly provides stability for that enterprise. Certainly this will affect the Meeting’s future relationship with the school, even if the direction is not entirely clear.

Over time, changes in the Meeting and changes in the larger society have been reflected in the community dynamic. In the last few decades, the Meeting’s demographics have shifted to include more single-parent families, and dual-wage-earner families. A significant number of young adults attend Adelphi, but few are active in other aspects of Meeting life. This changing demographic translates into time challenges that limit the availability of members and attenders to work on committees, and to plan and facilitate Meeting events. Our Meeting includes many families with small children in which all adults are employed outside the home. Many of us find ourselves in the “sandwich generation,” caught between the needs of children and aging parents.

Many Friends are saddened at the loss of the community-based energy that had created a sense of family among all our members. This has been replaced by the energy of the younger friends among us. Our children bond with each other, and often have social time with each other outside of Meeting. The Friends who work with our older young people have structured activities that build those bonds of community and caring. The camping experience teaches our youth that it is possible to build strong community, even with those who start out as strangers. And because we have fewer opportunities for all of us to come together, we value them more.

There has been a resurgence of interest in pot luck meals, after a number of years in which there was a hiatus. We recognize the need to work together on events such as the Warm Nights Shelter/Safe Haven, and our annual Strawberry Festival, even though the complexity of those projects is daunting, and sometimes leaves us shorthanded.

While we entrust the planning and infrastructure work of our Meeting to our committees, we are finding it increasingly difficult to find people willing to accept a longer-term commitment to those tasks. It has become clear that people are more willing to take on project-based tasks, such as establishing our new Memorial Garden to which they feel led by either the Spirit, or an overwhelming need in the Meeting, or both. The continuing need for longer term commitments is evident in the requirements for upkeep of the Memorial Garden.

Our Meeting includes only a few birthright Friends and the breadth and depth of experience of convinced Friends and attenders varies widely. We often fail to notice our economic and social diversity, but the varieties of experience we can bring to a task are a source of strength and delight.

In our communal life, we seek a shared life of the Spirit where values transcend materialism and where spiritual issues can be shared and discussed seriously and unselfconsciously. We need opportunities to work and play together and to find opportunities for service to the wider community and world. Although many of us hesitate to say so, we all need encouragement, appreciation, and acceptance by the group.

B. Provocative Proposal

The people who, decades ago, came together to form Adelphi Meeting were women and men, children and families, neighbors, relatives and strangers, seeking that direct experience of God's presence that we know is available to us, and that we are advised to look for and answer in others. *That work of building a worshiping community continues.*

Adelphi Meeting is a place where we, with God's grace, can craft a lens through which we can see the most important things in our lives, and create a way to see the world that will let us respond to it from a place of centeredness. While over time the meeting place has changed, and the people have changed, the focus is the same. As we take part in the worship experience – the practice of being present to God – it becomes easier to travel with that presence beyond the doors of the Meeting room, and to be aware of that presence when we encounter it elsewhere.

We recognize that many of our past events and traditions provide a basis for a new way of approaching both our corporate and our individual needs and desires for a strong community. We incorporate simple meals into many committee meetings and find that sharing food (even a "supermarket potluck") provides both community and more time for committee business, because Friends don't have to rush home for supper and then rush to committee meetings. We recognize that part of our diversity arises from the variety of experiences (or lack thereof) we have had with Friends traditions and practices. In

structuring the work of the Meeting, therefore, we make a conscious effort to incorporate Friends with varying experiences into small groups and committees. We are also finding ways to structure Meeting work into more short-term, discrete projects that provide opportunities for students and young families to participate without the long-term commitment that some of them are unable to make.

We bring to all that we do playfulness, encouragement, appreciation, and celebration.

Being present to God in others is difficult work and, at Adelphi, we mindfully do this work for and with each other. And we sometimes fail. In spite of our attempts to move always in the direction of love, we sometimes hurt each other, sometimes act thoughtlessly toward each other, and sometimes let each other down. But more often we nurture each other, teach and guide each other, are patient with each other, forgive each other, and make the effort to be present to each other as we walk, in the Light.

III. NURTURING CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A. Narrative Description

The care and nurturing of our most precious gift, our children, has always been a cornerstone of Adelphi Friends Meeting. The Meeting was started, in fact, by a group of families with young children. Families continue to be drawn to Adelphi as a safe, encouraging community for their children and one that provides support for parenting. This has been especially important for gay people, who seek an environment in which their children can feel welcome and comfortable.

Meeting works hard to provide its children and youth with religious education through a strong First Day School program. Teaching responsibility is widely shared and, for many, First Day School provides an opportunity for mutual teaching and learning for the children and adults. Many of the children affirm the spiritual growth they have experienced in Junior Meeting. Many of those who attend camp consider it to be one of the experiences that have contributed most to their spiritual life. Adelphi strongly supports the Baltimore Yearly Meeting camping programs, both financially and through volunteer service.

The establishment of Friends Community School (FCS) was an especially significant expression of Adelphi's emphasis on our responsibility for nurturing and teaching children. Many FCS families have come to Adelphi to find a community for their children's spiritual growth and development. Adelphi's relationship with FCS has changed over the years. From the close connection of the school's establishment, a more arms-length relationship developed as the school grew and matured. Today, some in Meeting express concern about this distance and wish for a closer relationship, including, some suggest, physically co-locating Meeting with the newly-built school in Greenbelt.

A more recent expression of our concern for children and youth is the outreach and tutoring program for students at Mother Jones Elementary School. This is an extension

of other, earlier efforts to find meaningful ways to support public schools. There are a significant number of teachers among Adelphi's members and participants.

B. Provocative Proposal

Adelphi Friends Meeting continues to hold the nurture and education of children and youth at the center of its community life. Adelphi's Religious Education is creative and strong and continues the ongoing reflection that has allowed it to grow and improve from year to year. Children and Young Friends continue to find a spiritual foundation for their lives through their participation at Adelphi and the loving relationships with peers and adults that they find here. Their formative experience here allows them to explore and understand Christian tradition and Quakerism's grounding in that tradition while also appreciating the broader spiritual pathways that have guided and influenced Quakers. The unfolding lives of those young people who have grown up in Meeting speak of their faith and commitment to Quaker beliefs and values and Meeting has developed ways of recognizing and honoring these commitments. The meeting ensures that financial resources are available so that every child who wants to attend a BYM camp is able to do so.

FCS continues to provide a link for families seeking a spiritual home to raise their children. The relationship between the Meeting and FCS has been strengthened as a result of a joint, loving, and Spirit-led reflection process, which produced greater clarity of shared vision and purpose.

Meeting has reflected on its understanding of the significance of Quaker education and the distinctive contribution of Quaker schools and has actively sought ways to support Thornton Friends School and other Quaker schools. Among the concerns addressed by Peace and Social Justice committee is the quality of public school education and the teaching of peace, social justice, and non-violence in public schools. AFM has found ways to provide emotional and spiritual support to those in Meeting who teach or are otherwise involved in education.

IV. FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP OF FACILITIES, RESOURCES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A. Narrative Description

Stewardship is the conducting, supervising, or managing of something, especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care.

Faithful stewardship includes caring for our physical facilities and grounds as well as our financial resources. Our facilities and resources are integral to some of our community activities, beyond weekly Meetings and First Day School. The facilities and resources at Adelphi Friends Meeting are the result of efforts of many Friends over the past half century. From the first purchase of the property in 1957, to the building of the present Meetinghouse in 1964, to the renovations required to open Friends Community School in

1987, to our just-opened Memorial Garden, Adelphi Friends have created a facility and financial structure that enables our community to thrive.

Most recently, the creation of the Memorial Garden on the grounds is meant to provide space for quiet meditation, reflection, and remembrance. At other times, the facilities have provided living space for individuals and families in emergencies and transition, and a place for Young Friends to gather. Many report that they contribute to the life of Meeting through their participation in work days or by serving on the House and Grounds Committee.

We appreciate how our Adelphi facilities and resources have supported our Meeting, but we are also open to improving the spiritual and aesthetic qualities of our facilities as well as ensuring faithful stewardship of both our physical and financial resources. Adelphi is moving forward to engage emerging concern that our facilities and resources be more sustainable. Friends' concern with responsible stewardship embodies an awareness of the divine in all realms of existence and a desire to act with integrity towards the earth and our consumption of its resources, be they monetary or physical.

Individual stewardship, as a faith discipline, is expressed in the giving to the Meeting of our time, talent, and resources. In particular, many note their financial gifts as one of the important ways that they contribute to Adelphi. Financial gifts to the capital campaign for the new Friends Community School have helped to make the vision of the new school a reality.

Some within Meeting have sought support for lifestyles that embrace the simplicity testimony, in part, by resisting and finding affirmative alternatives to consumerism. The recycling ethic of much of the sales activities at Strawberry Festival is another way that Adelphi has acted on environmental concerns. A Quaker Earth Care Witness group has been established and links to the larger Quaker Earth Care Witness. There is increasing interest within Meeting to integrate environmental sustainability concerns into the life of the Meeting and to address environmental issues through our corporate action on peace and social concerns.

As additional aspects of stewardship, we seek to make our facilities fully accessible to those with disabilities in order to make Adelphi a space for all. We are also aware of the inefficiency of using our facility for only a few hours each week and acknowledge an interest in discerning a way to allow the facilities to be utilized to a greater extent for purposes that are in harmony with our principles and practices.

B. Provocative Proposal

We are a sanctuary to those in our own community as well as those in need, providing a spiritually and aesthetically welcoming place of refuge, refreshment, and renewal. We are accessible and open to all, offering everyone the opportunity for community, service, and friendship. We manage our physical and financial resources carefully and respectfully, reflecting our Quaker testimonies and enhancing our spiritual life and growth. We have come to unity on the balance between simplicity, aesthetic beauty, and

comfort. We have effective institutional processes that allow us to plan ahead for long-term care of these resources as well as meeting our ongoing daily needs as a community.

Reflection on the spiritual dimensions and requirements of faithful stewardship has been integrated into a range of activities to nurture spiritual growth within the Adelphi community. As this reflection has deepened, community members have been led to increase giving to Meeting. In addition, Adelphi has developed and encouraged additional options for giving, including deferred giving and automatic payments. The Meeting conscientiously invests its income in socially responsible ways that produce increased income. As a result, Adelphi has sufficient income to allow it to undertake initiatives that require longer-term funding.

Care for the Creation has become an important part of our understanding of faith and practice at Adelphi. The Meeting has reviewed its practices to find more environmentally sustainable ways of carrying out our community activities. It periodically updates the environmental audit of its facilities and practices and offer audits to individuals and families. Adelphi's Quaker Earth Care Witness committee provides leadership and support for the community's efforts to be involved in environmental issues, through advocacy, program activities, projects, and outreach.

V. REACHING OUT TO THE WIDER WORLD

A. Narrative Description

From its founding, AFM has sought to be part of a strong and consistent Quaker presence in the world. Its outreach projects bring Quaker perspectives and values to bear in our local community, country, the community of nations, and the global environment. These creative interventions focus on educational, political, and social issues and address long-standing human injustices and tragedies.

Some AFM outreach projects have helped to create and support new organizations, such as CASA de Maryland, Friends Community School, and the Takoma Park Preparatory Meeting. This process of helping to birth new organizations grows out of AFM's rich and deep spiritual grounding, which, in turn, is reflected in the Quaker principles that are reflected in their unique missions.

Outreach projects have emerged from the leadings of individuals, interest groups, and formal committees within Meeting. This collective action has an exponential impact that no single individual could equal and galvanizes members and attenders, encouraging them to be a witness for their spiritual beliefs.

Meeting's process of discernment for determining its collective response to social concerns has been both rich and stormy, reflecting the complexity of the issues themselves. Examples include tax and war resistance, prison ministry, homelessness, immigration, gay relationships under the care of Meeting, and the examination of the Meeting's ecological footprint.

These diverse outreach projects provide opportunities to be a visible witness to the injustices in the world, while also having a real and tangible impact on individuals and local communities. Through these actions, we can speak truth to power and -- in whatever small or large way -- bring Quaker spiritual perspectives to bear on the world's actions or omissions. We continue to light candles in the darkness.

B. Provocative Proposal

AFM's outreach and witness is Spirit-led. It originates and is carried out on at least three different levels: by individuals in their own personal witness, through the collective action of Meeting, and through support for organizations and initiatives beyond AFM.

Through the support and nourishment of the Meeting, individuals seek to live the Quaker testimonies through transformed lives. This is reflected in intentional and committed response by individuals to social concerns. The witness and testimony of individuals, nurtured by Christian beliefs, Quaker faith and practice, and other spiritual wellsprings continues to be a backbone of spiritual growth for individuals and the Meeting.

Meeting collectively becomes aware and informed about emerging social concerns, often brought before it by members and attenders. As awareness grows, the Meeting holds these concerns in the light of spiritual reflection, grappling to discern whether or how Meeting may be led to respond collectively. This process awakens and broadens the spiritual awareness of individuals and of the Meeting as a whole. This leads to an inclusive spirituality and faith that embraces the diversity of human experience, values all living beings, and seeks to protect and nurture all of Creation. One of the priorities that the Meeting addresses collectively is the justice and equality concerns of gay, bi-sexual, and transgendered people.

The Finance and Peace and Social Concerns Committees have helped Meeting determine how best to use its budgetary resources to support more directly Meeting's overarching goals. Wonderful possibilities for strengthening AFM's corporate outreach are being explored. Meeting is moving toward the establishment of stronger, clearer, outreach projects, backed by a strong financial commitment.

Meeting has established a clear process for discernment regarding social concerns and collective outreach, building on its past experience in considering, meditating, threshing, and seasoning ideas and proposals. This involves AFM, as a whole, reaching agreement on outreach projects, individuals committing time and energy to the projects, and providing direct financial backing from the Meeting. It is an endeavor that brings different groups of people in Meeting together, achieving the additional benefits of increased community, new ideas, and increased energy within Meeting.

In this process, the Meeting has found ways to engage directly and personally in responding to the vast and growing inequality in the world.

One of many outreach projects under consideration is how to respond to the dangerous developments over the last year in which Quaker organizations, nationally

internationally, have gotten caught in the cross fire of war. Meetings, schools, and orphanages have been attacked, destroyed or put in grave danger. Meeting is considering whether this is an issue to which it is called to respond with action, weighing it together with many other local and worldwide crises that call out for a response. Meeting as a whole is growing in many ways as it expands its role in the world through spiritually-grounded, thoughtful, and committed outreach projects.

QUERIES TO GUIDE OUR REFLECTION OF WHAT AFM'S FUTURE SHOULD BE

1. What would have to happen for us to actualize the visions outlined in the provocative proposals?
2. What new structures and processes would we need?
3. What new relationships would we need? Internal? External?
4. What resources would we need?
5. How can we bridge the best of “what is” toward achieving this vision?

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The Committee wishes to acknowledge the valuable contribution made to its work by Deborah Haines.

Others who were involved during earlier phases of the Long-Range Planning process include:

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Appendix

Appreciative Inquiry Questions forming the basis of interview questions during Adelphi's 50th Anniversary events, September 23-25, 2006.

1. Reflecting on your entire experience at Adelphi Friends Meeting, remember a time when you felt the most engaged, alive, and motivated. Who was involved? What did you do? How did it feel? What happened?
2. When you consider all of your experiences at Meeting, what has contributed most to your **spiritual life**?
What relationships or programs or events have been most powerful and helpful in fostering the Meeting's relationship with God?
Are there particular characteristics or traits of our Meeting that are most valuable as we grow spiritually, both personally and as a faith community?
Tell me what has made a difference and how it has happened.
3. What are the healthiest, most life-giving aspects of the **relationships among people** at our Meeting?
What would you say has been most valuable about your friendships?
Have certain groups been valuable for you?
What would you say is most important about how we relate to each other?
Give me some examples of how we live together at our best. Describe those times when you believe the Meeting was most faithful or effective in its outreach and witness.
What have been your own most valuable experiences?
4. In all the ways we connect with the local community, the nation, and the world, what do you believe are the most important and meaningful elements of our Meeting's **outreach**?

Gathered in neighborhood groups, personal reflection:

5. What are the most important contributions the Meeting has made to your life? When did this happen? Who made a difference? How did it affect you?
6. What are the most valuable ways you contribute to Meeting personally – your personality, your perspectives, your skills, your activities, your financial resources, you character? Think of some examples.

Worship sharing

Make three wishes for the future of our Meeting. Describe what Meeting would look like if these wishes come true.