



Victoria Monthly Meeting

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with contributions from Janet Lehde, Nancy Dalby,
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Those of us who are part of the Meeting on Vancouver Island have a heritage that goes back to 1907. At that time a provisional meeting was begun in a rented downtown Victoria location. Coming from various places, mainly in the U.K., these Friends felt ties more with England than faraway Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM). Thus by 1913 they raised funds among themselves and Friends in the U.K., to build the fine Meeting House we now have on Fern Street in Victoria, British Columbia.

Over the next 43 years, until union with Canadian Yearly Meeting in 1955, it is an irregular story. These years of boom and bust, war and depression, saw many Friends come and go. At times a single Friend maintained wider connections. One Friend, Martha Vallance, was at the 1955 Meeting, and it was probably her steady presence that kept the connection with CYM and the budding

Canadian Friends Service Committee. Finally, increased

social awareness during the 1960s and the Vietnam War gave rise to a new generation of Friends who were drawn to our testimony for Peace. Then in 1970, the first Yearly Meeting held in the West (Saskatoon), resulted in continuing personal connections with CYM.

Victoria Monthly Meeting (VMM) has long had Friends in membership elsewhere on Vancouver Island. Originally they commuted to Victoria, and eventually began meeting as separate worship groups in various homes during the 1970s. In the 1990s there was a stronger intention on the part of these Friends to connect and serve on VMM Committees. In 2001-2002, Saanich Peninsula Friends decided to form their own Monthly Meeting. We collaborate with them on a number of shared concerns.

Victoria Monthly Meeting now encompasses four groups that meet regularly: Victoria (Fern Street), Duncan, Mid-Island (Nanaimo-Port Alberni area), and North

Island (Courtenay, Campbell River area). We have begun to rotate the location of Meetings for Worship for Business among the three larger groups. An annual Island Gathering is held each year in one of the three locations. Each Meeting has its own sense of identity, pastoral care oversight, and worship frequency. Matters of finance and membership remain with the Monthly Meeting, as does a Ministry and Counsel Committee that includes all groups.

One Clerk's questions and reflections

- How do we redevelop our Monthly Meeting's structure to better encourage and support the growth of all the worshipping groups?
- How do we distinguish which responsibilities (such as social concerns) are Monthly Meeting's, or local worshipping groups, and bring local seasoning to Monthly or Yearly Meeting concerns?

- What do we call ourselves now? Particularly Victoria - Fern Street Meeting is confused as to whether we are Victoria Monthly Meeting or in reality Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting? (Excluding Saanich).

- We think about distributing committees while offering local support from Ministry & Counsel, while other committees are attached only to local worshipping groups (e.g. our PESAC Committee is based in Fern Street).

- We think about scheduling our business meetings to suit the booking schedules of local groups, and wonder how we can best bring local seasoning to our business processes.

A Member's reflections

Mid-Island Allowed Meeting (MIAM) meets twice a month. It gathers Friends from Nanaimo, Parksville, Qualicum, Ladysmith, and Port Alberni, with an average of fifteen people worshipping together at either Bethlehem Retreat Centre or in individual homes. MIAM does its own business as needed, but the restructuring of VMM allows us to be more involved with Monthly Meeting responsibilities, learn more of Friends' ways, and build a closer sense of community on the Island.

A variety of spiritual approaches, including Buddhist meditation, as well as Christian practices, help to enrich and complement Friends' ways. Individuals have been led to be involved with a number of meetings such as Western Half-

Yearly, CYM and FGC. Friends in Victoria and Duncan also contribute to local groups like KAIROS, the recent establishment of a Vancouver Island Elizabeth Fry Society, and the Nanaimo Interfaith Committee.

Duncan Worship Group

From the 1960s to the 1990s, Friends in the Duncan area traveled to Victoria or traded meeting locations with Friends up-Island.

Meetings have included Friends from Quadra Island to Duncan. In the mid-1990s Duncan Friends decided that they were enough in number to form their own Worship Group. They met in homes and eventually found space at Providence Farm. DWG tends to be an older group with a few vibrant young people who are busy students. There are active study/discussion groups (presently one on Quaker history). Some members have served on Yearly Meeting committees. Meetings for business are now held as needed. Friends in DWG are connected to the local community through individual involvement with the Earth Charter, mental health groups, Hospice and KAIROS.

North Island Group

North Vancouver Island Friends gather from Courtenay and Campbell River. They meet twice a month in homes. Their worship experience is enriched by fellowship, discussions and visitations from the wider community of Friends. They keep connected to

the larger Island Meeting by *The Island Friend* (newsletter), email, and the Island Gathering.

Victoria (Fern Street) Meeting

We are a distinct worshipping group, with the privilege of having Meeting for Worship every First Day. We reflect on our heritage.

For more than ninety years Friends have sought to live their lives in the Light, within these wood-paneled walls. Our Meeting House and garden, used continuously since 1913, provide a quiet and calm setting for 35-50 regulars, travelers, visitors, and enquirers.

Our Meetings for Worship are quiet with occasional spoken ministry. In the "transition time" that follows, Friends are invited to share thoughts that are important but do not fit as ministry. Finally, during announcements we voice Quaker, social and personal concerns. A lively refreshment time follows for visiting and mingling.

The Meeting House continues to anchor the Quaker presence on the Island with its Meeting records, library, and resident Friends. We have a full range of committees to care for the Meeting, an informative bulletin board, and a well-provided library with pamphlets and leaflets for enquirers. We are blessed to have all this as part of our heritage.

We are fortunate to have Resident Friends who care for the Meeting House and garden and are pleased that the Meeting House is used by outside groups, including Storytellers, Buddhists, Sufis and Amnesty International.

A View of the spiritual life of the Meeting, with a focus on the worshipping group at Victoria (Fern Street) Monthly Meeting

One Friend's reflections: our changing world

In a sense Victoria Monthly Meeting is returning to the pre-1960s situation but for somewhat different reasons. As with many other Faith communities, our Meeting is being changed by the shift in general population-age demographics. Many of our long-term members are aging and desire to be released from service. A recent spate of deaths among members and long-time attenders was quite overwhelming. Middle-aged Friends are still raising families, and/or caring for their older family members, while many of the younger adults have to leave the Island to find work. The inability to maintain a steady children's program means losing that particular "sense of community" that comes from watching young Friends grow up in the Meeting. Committed Friends are often away for lengthy periods of time for work and social concern commitments. Also many Friends find spiritual growth or outlets for living our testimonies in a variety of non-Quaker organizations. This brings an appreciated diversity to the Meeting, but also reduces the time and energy to address concerns specifically as a coherent Friends' community.

It is amazing how life itself, and

that of the Meeting, has changed in a few short decades within this "newly globalizing world." We struggle to understand what "Quaker community" *means*, and how to maintain or re-invent it amidst such drastically changing circumstances. How do these changes affect the spiritual life of the Meeting?

Meeting for Worship

There is a certain kind of "richness of ministry" that is lost with reduced numbers of experienced Friends' and long-term attenders. However, there is another kind of richness that comes from the growing diversity of spiritual approaches, and the expanding list of social concerns and new testimonies from those who return home from service elsewhere. Perhaps our ministry does not challenge us as directly as in the past, but certainly it has more diversity. Meeting for Worship remains a very significant spiritual core experience for those of us attending, even if irregularly.

Outside Meeting for Worship

Gradually, over the last decade or so, we have lost many of the ways that deepen our connection with each other, and build awareness of Quaker history and

ideals (although Arnold Ranneris faithfully continues to provide some). Between illness, distance, and other commitments, it is harder to get people out for special events such as potlucks and Island Friends Gatherings. But attempts are being made to revive these ways of building community. We continue to work towards having an appropriate percentage of younger members involved in our M & C Committee, and encourage the new perspectives they may offer on the evolving spiritual life of the Meeting. Victoria (Fern Street) Friends are definitely more active in CYM in a variety of ways, but as our membership ages and life-demands grow (as well as concerns about the ecological impact of travel) it becomes more challenging for us to contribute as fully as before.

Finally, it is not clear to us how our Meeting will survive beyond the next couple of decades. However we firmly believe that Quakerism, via its own evolution, will continue to have a deep and significant contribution to make as we find new ways to keep our beloved Meeting "alive."

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