

PROVIDENCE FRIENDS MEETING DRAFT STATE OF SOCIETY REPORT FOR 2025 approved by M&C 4/1/26

Providence Friends Meeting is currently experiencing a time of vibrant growth and continued searching as to how best to serve its members and follow our sense of the Divine in these times. In the last year, attendance has increased with newcomers of all ages, including families with small children, and following the rhythms of the academic calendar, undergraduates from local universities. We feel that Meeting has a central role in our lives, and we experience both comfort and challenge in worshiping in our community. We note the consistent participation of members and attenders in bringing food contributions to our gathering time after meeting and to cleaning up. There is a warm sense of community at these events, and this helps to build friendships and collaboration on numerous projects. Meeting for worship and the gathering time are the center of our life as a meeting.

In 2025 we hired nursery staff, allowing parents of young ones the freedom to attend meeting without child care concerns. We celebrated several weddings this year, and we anticipate the arrival of several new babies! Our first day school is currently relatively small but is led by a faithful group of committed volunteers. Quietly, individuals have been supported by numerous clearness committees. Pastoral care committee learns about and helps individuals in need, and lets us know when a meal or visit might be helpful. In addition, this committee offers an “after-thoughts table” after meeting which is well attended and is an especially good landing place for newcomers. A monthly pizza party at the Meetinghouse builds friendships and allows for more extended conversations, especially for those who are in pain due to the current political environment. We make an effort to welcome newcomers to meeting, though we could be more attentive to be sure that everyone receives an individual welcome at rise of meeting. Other new initiatives in 2025 include the installation and successful use of the new assisted hearing system that helps those amongst us with hearing impairment to participate and the establishment of a new "Holding in the Light" zoom meeting on Tuesday mornings.

The quality of worship is generally experienced as deep, with a good mix of silent and spoken ministry. We hear spoken messages from a wide variety of attenders. Every week, first day school participants join the facing bench at the rise of meeting for worship and report to the adults on their own gathering. Our “Elements of Quakerism” course allows us all to learn more about Quaker faith and practice. We are continually learning about discernment related to spoken ministry at meeting. We are working on the perennial question of large numbers of late arrivals.

In the area of spiritual growth, we have been blessed by the opportunity to develop several corporate ministries in the last year. We have decided to support the

ministry of one individual in meeting who feels called to a public witness following initial discernment in 2024. The work of supporting this individual as well as the many others who also follow deep leadings has been the occasion of a number of deep discussions. We held a series of four discussions on supporting individual ministries, with visitors from NEYM staff, New York Yearly Meeting, and two visitors from other meetings who are working on the topic of individual ministry. This work continues in 2026, while at the same time we provide a committee of care and accountability to the individual who rose up in 2024.

Other corporate decisions that helped us to grow spiritually in 2025 included deep discernment on whether to offer the Providence meetinghouse as a warming center to unhoused people on cold winter nights. We tabled that decision for the present, but we have offered a “shower ministry” for those who are staying at a nearby church. This corporate decision demonstrates a commitment to share our resources with others. A number of members and attenders have participated, and report that the informal time spent relaxing with unhoused people in our space in the evening has been spiritually opening to them as well as to our guests. In addition, our meeting signed a minute of concern for the people of Gaza, and we continued to develop our relationship with a Quaker sister meeting in Cuba,

We have considered elements that have been the occasion of tension at Providence Friends Meeting in 2025 as well. One area that has required our listening skills is the management of the online meeting for worship attended by members and attenders which started during COVID and continues weekly. Some among us would prefer to separate the online and in-person worship services, while others would prefer to include those worshiping remotely in our meeting for worship. This has required prayerful attention by all to endeavor to set up a system that works for everyone. A second area that has been challenging is the degree to which we are a congregation focused on social justice, and the related issue of corporate action in the political sphere. Consideration of political action is a challenge for our meeting, but it is a good one.

Although we are a community that is increasingly diverse from a racial and socioeconomic perspective, we note that our location, our financial resources and our overall demographic put us in a place of privilege. This creates a necessary tension that we are working on. Many of us recognize that we are a subculture with norms not shared by people from different backgrounds.

Providence Friends Meeting is well grounded in its community, collaborating with other groups, both Quaker and non-Quaker. A number of us serve on the Moses Brown School board of trustees, helping to steer the school gently in a Quakerly direction. One topic that came up recently was the new sound system that the school uses for sports

events. We have worked with the school to prevent these boisterous events from disrupting our events at meeting.

We have two worship groups under our care, Saylesville and Conanicut. We work to accommodate the needs of these smaller Friends gatherings, and our community is enhanced by their presence. In addition, we have an active quarter, the Southeast Quarter, that shares information and activities including committee membership. We are building a stronger connection to Yearly Meeting programs including Youth Programs and Living Faith gatherings.

In recent months, we have worked more closely with the Rhode Island State Council of Churches and other area interfaith groups on social activism projects, including immigration and shelter issues. Many of us have a regular connection with Matthewson Street Church, a local Methodist church with a mission of including unhoused people. In addition, many have connections with Quaker organizations beyond Providence, including Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP). Individuals in our meeting are deeply rooted in community action projects, and we are reaching out to them to offer the support they might need in their ministries, as they enrich the ongoing work of our meeting.

In short, it has been a year of challenge and growth, as well as a year of celebrating friendships and working together to choose our best path, individually and as a community.