

A Short History of Broadmead Friends Meeting

The story of Broadmead Friends is a weaving together of the stories of the work and leadings of Friends across northwest Ohio, particularly in Toledo, Findlay, and Bluffton.

The Early Years of Toledo Friends

Records show that Toledo Friends met regularly at the YWCA in downtown Toledo from 1941-1949. The membership of this group at one point numbered 57. In these years, Toledo Friends were concerned with a number of social justice issues including race relations, overseas missions and forced military training.

From 1953-1962, Toledo Friends continued to meet at the YWCA. Records show that they participated in work camps and peace education initiatives and were concerned about race relations and nuclear issues. By this time, Toledo Friends were a worship group in the Lake Erie Association, operating under the care of Ann Arbor Monthly Meeting. At the time, membership numbered around twenty-nine.

In the 1970s, Toledo Friends moved from the YWCA to the Ark (Newman House) on The University of Toledo campus. They later moved to the Common Space in Toledo, holding summer meetings at Toledo Botanical Gardens and meeting periodically in the homes of various Friends.

The Early Years of Findlay Friends

In 1966, Helen Monce moved to Findlay from Cincinnati, where she had been a member of Community Friends Meeting. Helen brought with her a large collection of Friends literature. Whenever she could, Helen attended Toledo Friends, which was then a preparative meeting under Ann Arbor Meeting's care. In late 1969, a group of interested persons started meeting Sunday afternoons in Findlay to explore where they were being led spiritually. They studied "Quakers by Convincement" and other books. After meeting for several months, some of the group decided they wanted to worship in the manner of Friends, and those so led started holding meetings for worship on a weekly basis. Claire Davis said, "Since only Helen was a Friend, we made our commitment to each other rather than having clearness committees [for those who wished to become members of the meeting.]"

On Dec. 23, 1971, Mike Hover, then a senior at Ohio University, died of cancer. Suffering through this loss was an affirming time as others in the meeting grieved with the Hover family. Paul and Esther Goulding of Friends General

Conference came to visit, encouraged the newly-formed group, and supplied names of other persons in northwest Ohio who were interested in Friends. They suggested that the group ask North Columbus Friends to take them under their care. The group grew and began worshipping back and forth between Findlay, Bowling Green, and Bluffton. In Bowling Green, they met first at the Presbyterian Church, then at the campus Episcopal Church.

The Beginnings of Broadmead Friends

In 1973, Findlay Friends explored the possibility of becoming a Monthly Meeting within Lake Erie Yearly Meeting (LEYM). Because attenders were spread over a large area dominated by flat farm fields, the name of Broadmead, as in "broad meadow", was chosen. Only later did Broadmead Friends realize that their chosen name had deep Quaker roots. George Fox mentions the name Broadmead several times in his journal, "...and Alexander Parker went into the meeting at Broadmead before me..." (in Bristol) and again in relation to his marriage to Margaret Fell, "...there was a large meeting appointed of purpose in the meeting house at Broad Mead in Bristol, the Lord joining us together..."

The newly-formed group set up committees, adopted an annual budget of \$620, and met with the Advancement Committee of LEYM and with Friends from North Columbus Meeting.

On June 15, 1974, Broadmead Monthly Meeting was welcomed as part of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting. The meeting held a celebration on September 15, with many delegates and visitors coming from all parts of LEYM. Broadmead at that time had nineteen adult members and eleven children.

Growth and the beginning of Bluffton Worship Group

In the late 1970s, several Friends from Bluffton became involved in Broadmead, attending meetings in Findlay. In 1979, Toledo Worship Group, which had been an Allowed Meeting under Ann Arbor Monthly Meeting, became part of Broadmead. In August 1983, Bluffton Friends began meeting in Bluffton as a separate worship group. Broadmead was thus made up of four worship groups: Toledo, Findlay, Bluffton and Defiance.

In 1987, the Toledo Worship Group changed its status to a Preparative Meeting which allowed the Toledo group to maintain its own budget and to hold its own monthly meetings for business while still a part of Broadmead Monthly Meeting.

At first, monthly gatherings of Broadmead Friends rotated between Findlay and Bowling Green. Eventually, the group settled into regular monthly meetings at St John's Episcopal Church in Bowling Green. In 1995, hoping to increase attendance at Monthly Meetings and to allow attenders of the worship groups to become better

acquainted with each other, Broadmead Meeting began again to rotate its monthly gatherings among the worship groups in Findlay, Bluffton, and Toledo.

In 1997, a worship group meeting in the Dorothy Love Retirement Community in Sidney was warmly welcomed into Broadmead Meeting and added to the rotation of Monthly Meetings.

From the inception of Broadmead Monthly Meeting, members were involved in yearly meeting activities and were soon named to various yearly meeting committees. Four Broadmead Friends have served as clerk of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting: Rilma Buckman (Toledo, 1972-1975); Claire Davis (Findlay, 1982-1984); Janet Smith (Toledo, 1999-2001); and Sally Weaver Sommer (Bluffton, 2003-2005 and 2014-2016).

Trials and Change for Toledo Friends

In the years that Toledo Friends met at Common Space they had 30+ members and attenders. In the 1980s, several attenders became involved in the Toledo Area Committee on Sanctuary (for Nicaraguans.) Pressure for the meeting to be involved in this effort caused a split in the meeting. Personal conflicts among some members exacerbated the rift. Eventually, only a few members remained and they worshipped together at the 577 Foundation cottage in Perrysburg. After a while, new people began attending and the meeting began to grow again.

In the 1990s Toledo Friends continued to meet weekly in Perrysburg, also holding mid-week meetings for worship with housebound Friends and at The University of Toledo. They held their own annual retreats and met regularly to sing and play recorders. They had (and continue to have) a small but robust multi-age children's program.

In January of 2002, Toledo Friends reconsidered their decision to become a Preparative Meeting and again became a worship group. This opened the way to merge the finances of the various worship groups. The Toledo group struggled with this decision and it was not until 2005 that finances for the Toledo group were finally merged with Broadmead Monthly Meeting.

Through trials and changes, Toledo Friends have continued to nurture each other and their community. They remain a spiritually rich meeting and the bedrock of the wider Broadmead Friends community.

More about the Peace Work of Bluffton Friends

For many years, Broadmead supported Bluffton Friend James Satterwhite in his resistance to paying war taxes. The meeting also wrote minutes of support for his trips with Christian Peacemaker Teams to Hebron, Chechnya and Bosnia.

Broadmead Friends Today (2020)

Friends from all worship groups gather every third Sunday of the month in Toledo or Bluffton for worship, a potluck, and either a program or a business meeting. Since 1985, Broadmead Friends have also gathered for an annual fall weekend retreat, held for many years at Camp Woodhaven Girl Scout Camp in Lima, but now held at the Franciscan Spirituality Center in Tiffin. Another program of Broadmead Friends that is remarkable for its longevity is its Spiritual Formation Groups. Begun in the 1990s, these groups meet monthly throughout the year.

With the deaths of Marie and Wendell Cotton who organized the Sidney Worship Group, the Sidney group ceased meeting in 2014. The Findlay Worship Group is also currently inactive. Though individual worship groups wax and wane over time, Broadmead Friends keep faith that Way will open for new seekers to arrive. The Bluffton and Toledo groups remain strong, though the Bluffton group has recently faced a loss of members. Bluffton Friends meet in Bluffton most Sundays, joining Broadmead Friends wherever they are gathering for third Sunday monthly meetings. Toledo Friends continue to meet weekly for meeting for worship and children's programming, now gathering at the Victory Center, a support center for cancer survivors. Their long tradition of involvement in social issues continues, particularly in the areas of racial justice and earth care witness.

This document is based on information from Findlay Friend Claire Davis, Toledo Friend Janet Smith, the history printed in the front of old Broadmead Directories, meeting minutes, and other sources. The present version of this document is an adaptation of a history originally written by Bluffton Friend Mathilda Navias with additional materials provided by Toledo Friend Mary Igoe Myers.