

Friends Meeting of San Antonio
State of the Meeting Report
February 2015

For this year's report, we choose to accept SCYM Ministry and Care's invitation to address the query, "How is the Spirit moving in your Meeting?" We held a special Forum to address this query, sitting first in silence, then breaking into two smaller groups for worship-sharing. A goodly number of people attended: members, long-time attenders, and first-time attenders. We found the conversations to be valuable and to reflect our sense of how our Meeting is at this point in our history.

Here is the context in which we met:

- 1) We have an aging membership and several members have struggled with health issues. Despite the physical challenges, the Meeting has been very supportive. These elders have been active in leadership capacities and remain active. Our elders are dear to us and are a precious resource
- 2) Due to declining active membership, last year we found it difficult to fill positions on committees and other roles and tasks of the Meeting. This year, our Nominating Committee worked extra hard to recruit and encourage more participation. Also some Friends have returned to Meeting and we have gained some new members from far and wide. We are still short-handed and feel this lack.
- 3) This was our third year of scheduling Silent Retreats for members, attenders, and friends. They have been at an external retreat center and at our Meeting House. These retreats have been well attended and have proved to be an enriching experience for all.
- 4) In the second half of 2014, our Meeting created an ad-hoc committee to respond to the immigration crisis at our borders. We have aligned with other faith-based groups and organizations to give support and legal assistance to the refugees, and to lobby for fair and humane treatment for families being unlawfully detained. This involvement has energized our Meeting.
- 5) Our Meeting House space is now being used by 3-4 other non-Quaker groups, whose activities our Meeting supports. We feel that we are making a contribution to the wider community.

Our two worship-sharing groups reflected both the joys of this situation as well as its trials. One group was clear that the Spirit is indeed moving among us, at times calmly and at times shaking like a storm. The other group was more cautious, more painful and deliberate over concerns of how our Meeting might have failed or at least done better in bringing in or keeping those who may have only experienced us for a meeting and others who had been among us for years. The question arose how might the Spirit be more cohesive among us?

Both groups regretted and missed the Spirit that our young people, toddlers to teenagers, once brought among us.

Here are some of the comments that the two groups recorded:

- “I feel the vitality now that I didn’t feel 14 years ago. We have gathered friends from other places, and I feel their vitality.”
- “Our meeting allows some members/attenders to practice the presence of God in our silence in the manner of Brother Lawrence.”
- “Difficulty in knowing when and how to provide support for those who need it. Obviously, some have not felt that support and have left us.”
- “A nice rallying and energy around immigration issues seems to have lifted the Meeting.”
- “We spent a lot of time, money and energy on our new meeting house. The nice architecture of our building has brought us more exposure and a lot of complements. Indeed, it is a wonderful space for silent worship, but we still have not increased our numbers of regular attenders and members. We need to be very aware of our focus and how we spend our capital.”
- “The relationships I form in serving on committees are important to my wellbeing. Though we have lost numbers, the cohesiveness of committee work feels supportive again.”
- “No growth is indicative that the Spirit is not moving in that way.”
- “Not a steady sense of the Spirit – sputtering – what’s the action that comes from it?”
- “The heart of shared silence is powerful even in midweek meeting.”
- “A neighborhood meeting, a place to come and be restored.”
- “Sense of Grace in the Meeting.”
- “Nourished by the Meeting.”
- “People come and people leave. Meeting spiritually alive.”
- “Appreciation for galvanizing on immigration issues/Karnes Detention Center.”
- “How can we understand early on when people are in need, even just in need of hope?”
- “Individual spiritual strength seems stronger than communal strength.”
- “Ambiguity can lead to clearness.”
- “Our biggest asset is our people. Our elders do mentor.”
- “People coming back to meeting. New people taking roots in the Meeting.”
- “We’re an aging community and do not see the young people coming behind us.”
- “Choose to be compassionate defined by being completely open to God/Spirit. We feel this in this meeting. Personal responsibility.”
- “The sense of open doors mentioned a lot.”
- “A sense of freedom; I’m not going to be excluded because I can’t pay. I trust this ethic. No door closed.”
- “Quaker ministry and testimonies take years to integrate and this is very rich. Feeling how this has grown over time.”
- “Maturity...Presence of Spirit continues to move and inform facilitated by silence.”

Regardless of perspectives and concerns, out of the closing silence one Friend simply stated, “I feel a lot of love.” For Friends, love has often been the way forward. William Penn seemed to believe it was sufficient when he said, “Let us see what love can do.”