

State of the Meeting Report

Approved February 19, 2017

This has been a difficult year, though not unremittingly. On the one hand, we continue to have trouble staffing our committees, have had several break-ins and acts of vandalism at our Meeting-house, and have experienced some interpersonal tensions that we have not figured out how to resolve. On the other hand, Friends have stepped forward to help, we have new attenders who have quickly become valued members of our community, and our Meetings for Worship seem to many to be deeper at year's end than they were at its beginning. We cherish our experienced Friends, celebrate our newcomers, and strive to follow the testimony to spread love to all.

For committees, this year was a particularly difficult one. During the first half of the year, Ministry and Oversight lost key personnel to illness and to distant work and family responsibilities, attending mainly to needs of members and attenders, membership applications and monthly queries and Forums. It revived during the second half, but is again short-staffed for the new year as those work and family responsibilities have returned. Peace and Social Concerns was reduced to two active members, both of whom travel, so most meetings took place by phone and email. A resignation reduced the Property Committee to two members and by year's end, problems with vandalism made their task overwhelming added to the care they had taken over the grounds during the year. Religious Education and Outreach remained clerkless, though individuals took over specific tasks and kept us functioning. The Nominating Committee strove to fill these gaps. As one member noted, however, we have a demographic problem: too few members and attenders at a stage of life when they have time and energy to devote to Meeting's collective well-being. We have depended for too long on a small circle of Friends. We need to broaden this circle so that we do not overburden anyone.

Vandalism and break-ins have been a continuing problem, though they seem to come in waves. This fall, Property Committee asked for assistance finding solutions, and several have been explored. We have repaired doors, installed better locks, and painted over graffiti. We have reached out to local homeless people, and are now considering installing more prominent signs indicating that we are a religious organization. We have not, however, had the time to consider all of the suggested solutions in the depth they deserve.

In part, this is because we have also had to deal with interpersonal tensions. There have, however, been some differences over procedures. We sometimes forget that each of us is given a piece of wisdom, which is why we are called to listen to all voices before moving forward. Some of us need to be more ready to discuss these differences and have at times been short with each other, causing hurt, to the concern of others. This fall, several such instances led our Clerk of four years to step back from Meeting. After some discernment, two experienced Friends agreed to take up a joint Clerkship for the rest of the year and for the year to come. We need to learn how to better cope lovingly with conflict and disillusionment.

Fortunately, we have also had happier times. We hold regular potlucks at which we get a chance to know each other as people and build our community. We had a very successful Fair in the spring, which raised money to aid immigrant families fleeing Central American violence. This also built community. We have taken to celebrating Friends' significant birthdays (those ending in '0' and '5'); this included a celebration of Ruth Lofgren's 100th birthday at an after-meeting potluck. It proved a wonderful time for people to enjoy each other's company. Individuals continue to step forward to nourish our collective spiritual life. Members have taken positions in Yearly Meeting and a Friend who moved here two years ago brings us a new contact with Friends General Conference.

As was true last year, Friends have opened their homes for Quaker study groups, and one couple has sponsored monthly mid-week Meeting for Worship in theirs. Silent retreats held in Spring and Fall, nurtured the depth of Meeting. A Friend continues to faithfully produce an 8-page monthly newsletter. Friends have stepped forward to develop a small, but regular children's program using materials from FGC. We have maintained our twice-a-month Forums, either discussing social and spiritual issues among ourselves or inviting members of the wider community to speak with us about their work for social betterment. Many of these have involved topics that address the issues raised above – from a spiritual perspective and not just from a practical one. We have seen a growth in our support for RAICES and the Interfaith Welcome Committee in their work with refugee families. This has become a very meaningful part of several Friends' lives and a significant Quaker contribution to this work.

As noted above, we have been pleased to welcome new attenders to Meeting, and we already feel their positive contribution. We mourn the passing of Janet Wenholtz, a member who moved to Mexico a year ago to be near family. We are sad to have to say farewell to Fabian Juarez, who has moved back to Albuquerque to take a new job and be closer to his family. He continues to be a member of our Meeting as he explores spiritual homes there.

As we did last year, we held a special forum to begin preparing this report. At it, we posted large sheets of paper in the Meetinghouse and asked Friends to write on them their sense of Meeting's strengths and challenges, and also any adjectives that they thought described aspects of our life together. The 'strengths' poster included comments like "diverse views", "deep worship", "our mature Friends", "happy to be among a group of seekers", "people step up", "welcoming community", and some positive comments about our first First-Day children's program, which has several attenders. Our 'challenges' included "making our Quaker voice known in the community", "developing and maintaining a children's program", "dealing with problems between/among us", "[lack of] spirit-led business process", "fear to be honest", and "[lack of] open sharing of needs and weaknesses". The adjectives ranged from "welcoming", "peaceful", "nurturing", and "mutually supporting" to "tight-lipped", "burdened", and "prideful".

This range of responses captures our situation, albeit inarticulately. We are still seeking how to proceed and how we can build on our strengths while addressing our challenges. We are trying mightily to manifest the loving spiritual community that we are capable of being. We continue to celebrate our spiritual life together.