

State of the Meeting Report

DRAFT – February 2020

As the Texas Spring rears her tender head, our Meeting – like our garden – is suffused with Light and life.

Every First Day, our property bustles with activity. Members join attenders, long-standing and new, in worship and fellowship. Of late, Friends have no shortage of hands to shake at the rise of Meeting: we are frequently gathered three or four to a bench! Adult attendance averages thirty-eight (38), an increase of ten over last year. Not only do we have more young adults, but we now have more children. This is welcome. Their noisy feet and peals of laughter brighten the space between silences as only youth can. To the grown-ups, their frank innocence is a lesson in Light. We learn from them as we are able.

But as a tree grows, so too are its fruits sometimes carried away to lay roots anew. Several members and attenders have moved away this past year.

In November, attenders Colin Malone and Debbie Passey left San Antonio for their new home in Salt Lake City. We miss Debbie's serenity and kindness, as well as delicious confections which for so long enriched our fellowship. We miss Colin for his thoughtful testimonies and F/friendly disposition, and also for his meticulous care of our library and his wealth of historical knowledge. They took with them the Meeting's warmest wishes and now attend Salt Lake Meeting. Their lemon tree, Auggie, which they left in the care of attender Oliver Gerken, is coming into bloom.

In December, the Randles family left for their next adventure in North Carolina. Member Jillian is missed for her warmth and welcoming spirit, which she demonstrated monthly by conducting birthday celebrations for Friends, complete with homemade cakes. Attender Joshua's absence leaves us short his measure of wit and wry humor. Son Liam, who served as the youth representative to the Religious Education committee, is missed for his thoughtful contributions and ample empathy. His younger brothers, Brendan and Whitman, are missed for their playfulness, exuberance, and kindness. We wish the entire family the best that Light and life have to offer as they live the testimonies of simplicity and stewardship in their new Tiny Home.

Member Suzanne Wright-Crain also left for Kentucky with her husband Glynn. She has been a pillar of Meeting, both in ministry and service. We are promised visits as she is able.

On a happier note, this year the Meeting took under its care the marriage of attenders Katherine Fitzgerald and Ben Hernandez. They wed on May 25, 2019, in a beautiful ceremony on the Meeting House grounds.

This year we also welcomed into membership Greg Koehler and Jillian Randles (before she departed for North Carolina). Julie Crum also transferred her existing membership to our Meeting from her meeting in Virginia.

We came together as a community this past month to reflect on the year gone by. Blessings were counted, gratitude offered, and concerns were raised. The spirit of the Meeting was discussed, with Friends providing in their own brief words what they noticed most about our shared experience. Among their phrases were: “Joy in the morning,” “warm silence,” “creative, happy kids,” “lots of support... if we ask,” “a spiritual home,” “enjoy fellowship,” “warm welcoming,” “home,” “nurturing,” “full of Light,” “connected,” and “a safe, welcoming place where each is welcomed for their gifts.” These signal a growing sense of wholeness in our Meeting. They are evidence that together we continue to coax new vigor into the flame burning in our hearth. It falls now to us to keep tending that fire by appreciating our blessings and attending to our concerns.

Here are some of our other blessings. We have more opportunities for interaction and fellowship. These include spiritual discussions, “meetings for weeding”, and two monthly evening mid-week worships, one preceded by potluck and conversation. We put on events in our neighborhood. This year we held a free movie night, our annual Quaker Fair, and a neighborhood yard sale.

We continued our tradition of silent retreats at Lebh Shomea near the Texas coast. New attenders were able to join us this year. And we continue to host other organizations, mostly religious and spiritual, which enjoy our meetinghouse and grounds.

We are thrilled to have many more children now, so we are working on enriching our children’s program. Friends renovated the playroom this past year to aid our newly implemented Faith and Play curriculum. It is now a serene, organized, and simple place. Friends also renovated our Community Room, giving it a much more welcoming feel.

Now, to our concerns. One grows out of a blessing: our increase in new attenders, particularly those who are entirely new to Quakerism. We are so fortunate to have among us fresh new faces with new experiences and perspectives to share, but these newcomers admit to being somewhat baffled by Quakers practices and traditions. To this end, the Religious Education Community led a six-week Quaker orientation last fall. It was well-attended and positively received. We will repeat the course this coming spring. Through such orientations, plus regular Sunday forums, we hope to help people learn about Quaker ways – and make their own contributions to them.

A second concern is the demographic homogeneity of our current leadership. Most of our experienced Friends are over sixty and many are over seventy. We need to help younger people learn how to clerk in the Quaker tradition. We have had one successful workshop on clerking and will have more. We are also encouraging those who are able to shadow more experienced Friends. At the same time, we recognize that people are differently called at different stages of

life. We do not wish to burden either members or attenders, but to encourage them to take up tasks for which they feel a true call.

This is not to say that Friends are not eager to participate in our many activities. There is no shortage of gregarious individuals who step up to do the needful when needs arise. The willingness of even some of our newest attenders to weave themselves into the Meeting's latticework of support has strengthened our communal bonds and enriched our worship. This time of freshness and growth provides an opportunity for long-time members and attenders to help strengthen, support, and train newer people in Quaker ways.

A third concern is an ongoing one for our Meeting: just how we are to express Quaker witness in the wider world. San Antonio has seldom directed its collective energy towards any single cause, as some meetings do. We have long supported individuals' leadings, and continue to do collective work to aid refugees, but we have not taken up a collective cause. There is some wish among us to do so.

That said, we have reached out to our community in several ways. We participated in the Martin Luther King Dream Week by sponsoring a film on civil rights open to the public. We marched, as usual, along with tens of thousands of other San Antonians. We continue to support refugees through participation in the Interfaith Welcome Coalition. We support organizations that aid LGBTQ youth, both financially and through individual work. We put on twice-monthly yoga classes, using the money raised for social causes.

A fourth concern is our financial resources. As present, our contributions are barely sufficient to meet the Meeting's intentions for the care and stewardship of our immediate community, let alone of our wider world. The bulk of donations come from a small number of families. Yet not everyone can contribute financially, and many contribute to the life of the Meeting in other ways. As we move forward through this year, we will explore ways to demystify the process of donation for our newcomers, and to modernize and simplify the process of donating.

The Meeting took some other steps into modernity this year. We finally installed Wi-Fi at the meetinghouse, in the context of simplifying our telephone system. For Friends living in a digital age, this new Internet access comes as a much-needed improvement to our already beautiful property. We purchased off-site solar generation, mainly to reduce our city's fossil fuel use but also to cover most of the cost of our electricity. We continue improve our use of social media (Facebook and Instagram) and our website to make ourselves known to our surrounding community and plan to do more. Publicizing our work, witness, and warmth across various platforms also provides Friends, both near and far, the opportunity to learn about our Meeting's activities.

The last technological gap noted by Friends is perhaps the most urgent one, as until it is remedied, there will be Friends who cannot participate fully in our worship. Several members and attenders are hard of hearing. As such, they frequently are unable to absorb the messages offered by Friends during worship or hear announcements and introductions. We last explored this technology ten years ago and found it wanting. We hope to see if things have improved.

No concern, however, is insurmountable for a community as rich in Light and life as ours. Previous generations of Friends sowed the seeds of what is now a ripe and splendid orchard. Their efforts have borne fruit and the newcomers among us can only express our gratitude by eagerly offering our own gifts to continue the cycle of care. Our Meeting faces challenges, both spiritual and practical, but we approach them with all the optimism that a new year can bring. If Light is the bread of all things, not one among us will go hungry.

Faithfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Spickard', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jim Spickard
Meeting Clerk