

Connected in the Light Wherever We Are

*Friends Meeting of San Antonio State of the Meeting Report
Draft – February 2022*

Friends Meeting of San Antonio spent much of 2021 finding a way to live deeply and meaningfully in the Light, strengthening and nurturing our connections with each other and the Spirit, and meeting the challenges of the times. While we have experienced a continued decline in participation in the life of the meeting, and while we acknowledge the toll that the continuing strain has taken on Friends, we are grateful that at the end of the year we are finding our way back.

Many Friends found a meaningful worship experience by Zoom, while some had difficulties feeling the connection with others through a screen. We experimented with porch worship as the weather warmed, and then with hybrid online/in-person worship when, with many precautions, it became safe to gather in the worship room. We continued to be grateful for the opportunity to worship with distant Friends, both former members and attenders who had moved away and newcomers who found us. We enjoyed seeing new faces on the Zoom screen, and we welcomed new attenders in person as well.

We made an effort to keep in touch with people who were not coming to Zoom meeting, and visited and cared for two older Friends. Those of us who experienced health challenges found joy and spiritual deepening through the care and outreach from meeting.

We mourned the deaths of long-time Friends Janet Southwood and Mark Hickman.

In the fall we began to hold two meetings for worship: an early traditional technology-free hour, and a later hybrid hour. Worship both in the room and online has become deep and centered for most Friends, although vocal ministry is increasingly rare. At the same time, there is a decline in the sense of community spirit with Friends split between the early screen-free worship and the later hybrid hour.

A new integrated audio-visual system will be installed soon which will give us permanently mounted and unobtrusive equipment, a system which will no longer require set-up and take-down for each use. It will also enable Friends with hearing difficulties to hear people in the room and online much more easily. We are hopeful that the less intrusive arrangement will help nurture the sharing of vocal ministry.

Meeting has been able to maintain our connections to the wider world. We have shared online worship and forums with other meetings in Cielo Grande Quarter. Our website, our newsletter, and our Facebook page continue to foster community and further outreach. In May we held our annual Spring Fair, visited by a number of neighbors and friends despite the uncooperative weather. We continue to support a wide variety of causes, especially those pertaining to justice and to refugees and asylum seekers. Outside groups have resumed using the meetinghouse, helping us to strengthen bonds with the community.

We continued to hold deep and substantive forums on spiritual and faith concerns; sessions on discernment and community support were particularly meaningful to newcomers, helping them connect with Quakerism and San Antonio Friends. "Meeting for Weeding" provided an opportunity to gather safely outside to tend to the meetinghouse and grounds. One Friend hosted a weekly study of "A Course in Miracles". We held monthly tailgate picnics in our parking lot, and in general strove to get together as much as possible given the pandemic restrictions.

The suspension of the children's program was perhaps the most difficult challenge of this time. Toward the end of the year, we developed a plan to re-start the children's program. It has been thrilling to welcome a new (small) group of young ones, and the joy in the meetinghouse in their presence is palpable.

A perpetual issue that has been exacerbated by the pandemic is that a disproportionate share of the work of the meeting has fallen on a few Friends. We are hopeful that as we return to more in-person activities we can focus on helping everyone find their own ways to support the life of the meeting.

Looking back over the past year, we feel strongly that we are part of a community where we care for one another, where we strive to help everyone be the person they want to be, and above all, a place where we can thrive centered in the Spirit.

