

Friends Meeting of San Antonio State of the Meeting, 2024

Early this year members of Friends Meeting of San Antonio gathered to reflect on 2024, a year of growth, challenges, and complexities brought about by unhoused people using the meetinghouse grounds.

During 2024 the Meeting saw a growing number of unhoused individuals on the property. We tried initially to be a friendly presence to that community; however, as time went on the number of people grew significantly. The behaviors of some individuals began to create issues of safety as well as legal and insurance concerns. The Meeting formed an ad-hoc committee to address the situation. We sought input from other Quakers with experience with unhoused people and invited a local organization with that focus to speak to the Meeting about the realities of engaging with people from this population. Eventually, the Meeting discerned that it did not have the resources to serve the unhoused and made the decision to not allow them to sleep or loiter on the property—including contacting law enforcement, if necessary—and instead point them to other organizations more able to support them. One Friend stood aside from this decision. This was an incredibly difficult decision that was met with mixed reactions. Some members were supportive, believing that the safety of everyone, including the unhoused people, was paramount. Others, however, were deeply upset, feeling that this choice contradicted our collective sense of love and compassion for all. While the Meeting no longer seems to attract many unhoused people to the property, we continue to struggle with how to reconcile our actions with our beliefs.

The growing number of a small but steady stream of visitors and new attenders was a welcome development. We have continued to experience deep and focused worship, with ever more robust vocal ministry. As our numbers increased, our children's program grew and thrived. The children enjoyed learning and living Quaker values while cooking, gardening, reading, making art, and doing creative writing.

We continued to experience what seems to be a universal problem among meetings: the work of maintaining the smooth function of the organization falls on the shoulders of a small number of (mostly aging) friends. Perhaps relatedly, we suspended the Peace & Social Concerns committee when it became apparent that Friends were not led to the work. Friends may now bring individual leadings to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business for action by the body as a whole; we will re-examine this arrangement in time.

Friends who traveled to South Africa for the Friends World Committee for Consultation and to Cuba for work with the Alternatives to Violence Project gave reports on their experiences, helping to connect us to Quaker work and to Quakers around the world. We held additional forums on LGBTQ+ allyship, membership in the Society of Friends, Friends Committee on National Legislation, and where we are as a meeting. In the wider community, friends participated in the MLK march in San Antonio and held a community yard sale.

We mourned the loss of three dear longtime friends: James Mize, Michelle DiGiacomo, and Ken Southwood. Kara McGinnis, David Bristol and Lee Teran, and the Anderson-Merrill family moved from the area and will be missed. We welcomed Roberta Russell into membership, and joyfully celebrated the marriage of Rachael Cundey and McPherson Newell.

Our community looks ahead to a year of strengthening and nourishing the connections that keep us together in the Light, and nurturing the collective spiritual health of the Meeting and the wider world.