

Southeastern Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

Spiritual State of the Meeting Reports

2015

“All Friends, mind that which is eternal, which gathers your hearts together up to the Lord, and lets you see that ye are written in one another’s heart. Meet together everywhere, growing up in the spirit to the Lord, the Fountain of Life, the head of all things....”

George Fox, Epistle 24, 1653

“The life of a religious society consists in something more than the body of principles it professes and the outer garments of organization which it wears. These things have their own importance: they embody the society to the world, and protect it from the chance and change of circumstance; but the springs of life lie deeper, and often escape recognition. They are to be found in the vital union of the members of the society with God and with one another, a union which allows the free flowing through the society of the spiritual life which is its strength. ...”

William Charles Braithwaite, 1905

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Clearwater Friends Meeting *of the Religious Society of Friends*

Spiritual State of the Meeting 2015

Over several weeks, members and attenders of Clearwater Friends Meeting were asked to share the four or five SEYM queries that they were led to consider. In January 2016, a dozen or so members and attenders of our beloved community met in discernment of the following queries:

- How do we support each other as members of this beloved community?
- What was our meeting's witness in the wider community in the last year?
- Where do you find hope in the meeting and in our spiritual life?
- How does the spirit of worship extend into our committee work and into meeting for worship with a concern for business?
- How does love manifest itself in our meeting, in our communities and in the world?

As a community, we do feel blessed with love, care, and respect for one another. We are like family and welcomed new member, Debra McMaster, and several attenders this year. We continue to stay in touch with members and attenders who are unable to be with us on First Day. We are committed to nurturing a Spirit-led welcome to the seekers who join us. We desire to be mindful of the initial welcome and to how we continue to offer welcome to those who chose to attend meeting for worship or not.

We really enjoy monthly potluck luncheons, which are "not half-hearted" events here at CFM! Important conversations and connections take place that often open the way forward to our witness in the wider community. On occasion, we have a Seventh Day Fellowship Gathering hosted by a Friend in their home. Again, we enjoy a meal together followed by sharings on particular queries or topics. Friend, Michael Flanery keeps Friends and others informed with a weekly e-newsletter, the Qnews. We are grateful for the spiritual, emotional, and physical support and hope offered and received within our beloved community.

Loving spirit is moving through Friends in witness to the wider community this year in the following ways:

- Collected food and personal care items and financially supported Religious Community Services and The Shepherd Center of Tarpon Springs
- Adopted a family through The Shepherd Center for Christmas
- Hosted Eduardo Diaz in presenting his SEYM-sponsored workshop entitled "Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement" at our Fall Retreat
- Supportive relationship with ABC preschool which serves the under-privileged neighborhood in which its located; and care for those following leadings to serve and assist ABC preschool
- Hosted well-attended 'Conversation on Moral Injury' facilitated by Lynn and Steve Newsom, Directors of Quaker House in Fayetteville, NC
- Supported Friends, Debra and Rick, who each led workshops at SEYM Gathering 2015
- Friends attended Friends General Conference Gathering 2015 in Cullowhee, NC
- Supported Friend, Eileen Zingaro, Florida Representative to Friends Committee on National Legislation
- Growing relationships with Opus Peace in Pinellas County, FL and Peace4Tarpon in Tarpon Springs, FL
- Hosting our CFM website on FGC Quaker Cloud

While there may be some satisfaction in bearing the witness that we have, we know that there is still much to do. Remaining open to the concerns and leadings of the Spirit is a gift of our Quaker faith. What is ours to do, individually and corporately, will be revealed. As a Friend said, "We may finish the report, but we are not done."

Fort Myers Monthly Meeting

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report • Approved: Second month, 14, 2016

Friends discern a sense of continuing growth of spirituality and community within the Meeting. In the past year, Friends expressed a desire for more opportunities for spiritual development. In response, our original Spiritual Companion Group program was expanded from one group to three. Ministry and Counsel Committee is in the process of evaluating the experiences and discerning how to continue to provide such opportunities to our family. We have also increased the number of educational opportunities, sponsoring post-worship gatherings about facets of Quakerism and Quaker responses to national and international issues.

Music has grown in importance to us as a Meeting. While we cherish silent worship, many of us like the worship to be preceded by music. This year we expanded from a monthly to a weekly (except in summer) pre-worship hymn singing program, led alternately by two talented musicians. Occasionally, someone may feel led to share their message during worship in a sung format. Friends recently enjoyed a full day retreat entitled "In the Spirit of Music and Quakerism."

Our local outreach requires some extra effort, since our location for worship, while a beautiful setting, is not in a neighborhood that would facilitate some more immediate forms of outreach and connection. To address the peace and justice issues of the wider local community, we have become involved in a local interfaith effort called Lee Interfaith for Empowerment. Several of our Meeting family became actively involved in both the research and the action parts of LIFE's selected "effort" for 2015 (eliminate the "prior arrests/convictions" box in local government job application forms). But it also presented a challenge to our Quaker community. While we were in total agreement with the goal, some Friends found that some of the methods used in the push were not completely aligned with Quaker values. Nevertheless, we have discerned that we should continue with the group, hoping to influence future processes.

Our Meeting felt a dual sense of pain relating to the terrorist attacks both in this country and worldwide. We loathed the heinous terrorist acts, but we also were saddened by the resulting expressed hatred of all Muslims. We discerned a need to reach out to the local Muslim community, to explain who we are and to improve our connection. In a letter to two local Muslim faith institutions, we wrote: "We wanted to reach out to you and your faith community to offer friendship and support. Perhaps you might suggest to us or guide us in some way that we could be useful to you during these troubling times." We remain open to their suggestions and to the guidance of Spirit.

Fort Myers Friends has for many years utilized an aging building on the grounds of a nature center for our worship, a building we do not own. We have had concerns about the stability of the host organization, the physical state of the facility, and the advisability of finding new arrangements. We made significant progress in 2015 by underwriting the cost of replacing the roof and by entering into a new multi-year agreement with our hosts. In recognition, however, that our continued shared occupancy depends in great part on the continued viability of our host, we have initiated a discernment process on the question of a meetinghouse. In the meantime, we reactivated a meetinghouse Fund, encouraging Friends to contribute to this fund. We feel we have protected our meeting location for the immediate future but are continuing to plan financially for the ability to change when that becomes a clear goal and/or necessity for the Meeting. In this process, however, we realize the importance of continuing to partner with the Nature Center for the benefit of their organization and its clients, contributing to their important work as part of our own wider community outreach.

Along with our moments of growth and progress, the Meeting has had some challenges this year. Our Meeting experienced several losses with the untimely death of one Friend and with two older Friends moving out-of-state to live closer to family. All were active and beloved members of this community, and their absence is deeply felt. Additionally, a number of our family face serious physical or mental health burdens, and our Meeting will need to be alert to these needs and be prepared to provide support.

One further area of challenge, as well as opportunity, is the relationship of our demographic makeup and facility limitations in providing for the occasional and potential needs of children and parents. Our demographic makeup is not much different than that of many other area Meetings: we are mostly older and less able to provide regular First Day School. Additionally, we have very limited space. Currently, we have occasional attendance by a toddler and a few school-age children, and are working to care for them and integrate them in appropriate ways.

Overall, Friends believe that there is a prevailing sense of trust in the community. People seem able to share needs and burdens and have belief that we will accept each other as family and will work together to ease the burden. That sense of mutual trust carries into meeting for worship. Some feel that the quality of our vocal ministry has improved in the past year, with many finding that shared words often spoke to their condition. That spirit-filled worship often seems to carry forth into our committee meetings and monthly business meetings. We are much blessed.

Fort Lauderdale Friends Meeting State of the Meeting Report for 2015

Fort Lauderdale Friends Meeting continues as a small meeting whose regular attenders know each other well. Especially during the winter months, we are often visited by travellers.

Among Friends, members of our meeting continue to be active on Southeastern Yearly Meeting committees, and in Quaker Earthcare Witness. We continue to organize an annual Tri County Quaker Picnic, attended by Friends from the Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami meetings.

Occasional "Movie Nights" in a member's home have been enjoyable opportunities to view and discuss movies of interest to us.

We find hope in the stability and functionality of our small meeting. We are thankful for our spiritual community and for our opportunities for growth.

Quaker Meeting of Melbourne

Members and attenders of Quaker Meeting of Melbourne held our Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business on February 21st. During our Meeting we discussed the Spiritual State of our Meeting. Friends perceived the following about our Spiritual state:

The commitment to support one another has continued to grow during this past year.

We have Meeting for Enrichment (discussion and potluck) and Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business on a monthly basis.

During the past year Friend Don began participating with the Prisoner Visitation and Support organization located in Philadelphia, PA. This national organization's goal is to visit with individuals at Federal prisons throughout America.

Individual members and attenders of our Meeting are also led to be active in various outreach efforts in our community.

We continue to believe that our Meeting for Worship and our other activities nurtured our Spiritual growth and that there has been a deepening and strengthening of the Divine Presence among us.

We continue to welcome attenders from the Melbourne area and we rejoice in welcoming Friends from across America.

During the next year, we need to continue to grow and have greater outreach in our community.

Gainesville Monthly Meeting

Spiritual State of the Meeting 2015

In the 2014 Spiritual State of the Meeting report, we talked about our meeting being in a state of transition. I am pleased to report that we are moving forward with grace and spirit led action. Yes, this continues to be a time of deep joys and overwhelming sorrows, but grounded in Quaker faith and process, we are thriving.

We welcomed the participation in the life of our meeting of a young adult, Joshua Killingsworth, who has brought the energy of youth, a rich faith background, a ready smile, twinkling eyes, and valuable skills to help us navigate the digital age. We have a few frequent attenders who are engaging us in a dialogue about joining the meeting.

Several Friends recently attended the Arthur Larrabee workshop on Clerking and came back with enhanced clerking skills. Other Friends attended workshops at Pendle Hill. A combination of eight members and attenders traveled to the FGC Gathering in June and returned to Gainesville with renewed enthusiasm and a deeper understanding of Quaker Action regarding Earthcare. This has built upon our experience in 2014 with the EQAT action targeted at PNC Bank.

These experiences helped our members speak their truth and concerns in the discernment process related to the development of the Field Secretary for the Earthcare position, funding, and qualifications. While we had several challenging committee meetings, discussions, and business meetings in this process, we have been able to reach a sense of the meeting. The recognition that our meeting can work our way through difficult decisions with many hours of worship, listening, discernment and Quaker process has affirmed for many of us, that our meeting is spiritually anchored and able to weather storms.

Eight Friends participated in the Friends General Conference Pilot Program on Spiritual Deepening. As we explored the materials, we also explored various spiritual practices as well as some aspects of Spirit-led Quaker Action. Some of the participants have continued to meet, share a meal, and talk about different aspects of their spiritual lives.

We have lost some dear Friends. In early summer, one of the founding members of the Meeting, Morrie Trimmer, died after a lengthy illness. His presence in worship and good sense in business meeting is sorely missed. His Memorial Service was an opportunity for his extended family and numerous Friends, friends, and colleagues to worship together and celebrate his life.

Another member of the meeting, Ted Jones, died suddenly in September, only three weeks after being diagnosed with cancer. Ted, a lifelong Quaker, along with his wife, Bonnie Zimmer, moved to Gainesville after losing their home in New Jersey to Hurricane Sandy. Ted was active in the life of the Meeting until shortly before his death. The Meeting provided significant spiritual support for Bonnie as she cared for him at home during the final days of his life.

John and Jean Burton, long time attenders, moved back to Bucks County, Pennsylvania where his family had originally established one of the oldest meetings in the area. While they occasionally return to visit meetings for worship in Gainesville, we miss their steady presence.

Several Meeting families continue to struggle with the onset of age related dementia affecting one of their loved ones. The Meeting has been responsive to the physical and spiritual needs by making some accommodations within the Meeting, as well as helping to access and utilize their family strengths and community resources.

As we have done for the past three years, we ended the year with a Meeting for Remembrance and shared supper late in the afternoon on New Years Eve. Our spiritual community remains strong and well grounded in the Light.

Jacksonville Friends

Spiritual State of the Meeting – 2015 Statement

2/7/2016

Attendees: Bonnie Hall, Ken Hall, Mike Shell, Wendy Clarissa Geiger, Al Geiger, Elaine Martin, Thandekile Mvufsi

Worship Sharing

Out of a very settled silence, Friends were each felt led to speak primarily to how they interact individually with Meeting. Though we have not yet reflected on what these testimonies mean for us as a community, what was shared informs us deeply about what is presently at work among us.

Here are some summary quotations and paraphrases.

- "I bring my sorrows and my city's sorrows and the world's sorrows into meeting for worship and wait to see what I'm led to work on."
- I have felt "spiritually absent from Meeting" this year as I have dealt with my family's challenges. I also feel that the activist work I am doing is mostly outside of Meeting, and I sometimes feel I have not been fully present or fulfilling my role within Meeting.
- Spoken on behalf of the previous Friend: "Go forth." You are representing Meeting in those outside works.
- I have been "wrestling with God" and haven't "felt connection with Meeting." It is extremely difficult for us to deal with our geographical distances and with the lack of interaction between First Day gatherings. We really need to reach out to each other across these "disconnects."

Our practice is so hard. We start "backwards" as Friends, not with an idea but with experience in the world. We often don't realize why we are doing what we are doing. We need to trust the truth, to trust connecting with each other to deal with the truth.

I care so much for Meeting and can feel hurt so much.

- I hit bottom emotionally during the summer and fall, and I came to Meeting wanting rescue and not finding it. However, coming out of that depth, I am becoming stronger by being rather than doing.

It is clearer to me now that the connections in Meeting are much stronger for me when I "come to Meeting for expectant worship but without bringing expectations with me."

- There are hundreds of varieties of churches in Jacksonville. For me, the value of Quakerism is in being able to get along with a great many cultural differences, philosophies, etc., without being wishy-washy.

Meeting has gained in the last year, though I'm not able to say exactly how.

I was somewhat amused at seeing 18 queries on Spiritual State of the Meeting. In the old days we had a retired professor from the University of New Mexico who spoke out of the silence each First Day to give us a history lesson. It was "interesting" but not "spiritual." Other people spoke freely too, regardless of how "spiritual" what they said was.

I never felt such speech was a waste of time, though I do see a reason for a Spiritual State of the Meeting conversation.

- We need to give ourselves more formal instruction in how to prepare for meeting for worship, so that meeting for worship prepares us, in turn, for the rest of the week's life. Our individual presences in the larger community represent Meeting. We need to claim the responsibilities of being Quakers.

- We are all one people. We have strengths and weaknesses. Because we are a mix of theists, non-theists, etc., we need to be careful how we listen to each other. All of us are from the light. It is easy because of the past for us to put up barriers. Instead, we need to listen past those barriers and become a community of love.

Review of the year

As our 2014 Statement acknowledged, we "did not see a clear path forward" and needed to accept the challenges of "being still and working as a meeting to create that place where God can work through us to find peace for all."

2015 was not a year for conflict, yet it was full of changes, uncertainties and disruptions. We welcomed several Friends who contributed much to Meeting life but then went their separate ways after having shared our "Quaker waystation" for an extended period. We did our best to care for the members of a family which was breaking apart. We made several interrupted efforts to start adult study of Quaker Faith and Practice, and we have determined to revisit this study during potlucks this year with the help of Rex Ambler's *The Quaker Way: A Rediscovery* <https://www.quakerbooks.org/book/quaker-way> (1998).

Meanwhile, Meeting's engagement in the larger community did become increasingly fruitful. Our hosting of March 25th and June 25th Moral Injury presentations by Lynn and Steve Newsom, Directors of Quaker House, has led to productive networks with other local groups, including local mental health activists and the Jacksonville chapter of Veterans for Peace <http://www.veteransforpeace.org/>. We also continued our connection with ICARE, especially its Youth Crime Committee <http://icarejax.org/youth-crime/>, and with Florida Coalition for Peace & Justice and Wage Peace.

Finally we began a local Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) <http://avpusa.org/> with a September training facilitated by Tampa Bay AVP, with Friends Cece Yocum and Beverly Ward, of the Tampa Meeting, and Ned and Christina Bellamy. This has led to Jacksonville Friends joining with Ft. Myers, Miami, St. Petersburg, Tampa, and Tallahassee Meetings to sponsor the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) within Southeastern Yearly Meeting.

We begin 2016 with the reminder that this will be the final year of our current clerk's second 3-year term. We need to plan ahead for a change of clerk (and perhaps other officers), and we need to consider setting a three-year term for clerk. We also hope to expand our committee work to include Hospitality and Inreach/ Outreach. We continue to learn how to be whole despite the challenges of being a very small meeting.

Mike Shell
Recording Clerk
2/21/2016

Miami Monthly Meeting **Spiritual State of the Meeting 2015**

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” – John 4:11

The Miami Friends Monthly meeting is a place where these words, found in the book of the Bible where the Religious Society of Friends got its name, are evident on days when we gather and worship with one another, and in how we interact with the wider community around us. We are a diverse community, comprising members and attenders who are of different age groups, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and sexual orientations. When we shake hands and greet each other at the rise of worship each First Day, we do so with a genuine care for one another, one that is a reflection of God’s love, and one that compels us to reach out into the greater world around us. This meeting is an active meeting indeed, and we have much to reflect upon as we end 2015 and look towards the future.

The 18 queries offered up by SEYM gave us a great deal of reflective material to think about; indeed they helped to spark a healthy conversation about who we are, what we think we’re doing well, and what we think we could improve upon. The following queries especially provide an appropriate blueprint to do just that.

Where do you find hope in the meeting and in our spiritual life?

Hope is something that binds us together as a community. We gather together as people deeply committed towards making the world that we live in a better place, even as the daily news of events from across the globe seems glum all too often. While that may seem discouraging, being in the presence of others who share your hopes is inspiring. Here you know you’re not alone. This feeling also applies on an interpersonal level. We often share accounts of loved ones who are not well or have passed away; knowing that a whole community is actively holding you in the Light is extremely comforting.

How do we support each other as members of this beloved community?

As stated above, the members and attenders of the Miami Friends Monthly Meeting reach out to one another when people are undergoing personal difficulties. There are ongoing clearness committees that exist to support those that have asked for spiritual and emotional assistance on a variety of matters.

We have held Meetings for Learning and workshops with the dual goals of expanding the knowledge of Quakerism of all who attend our meeting, as well as keeping them informed about temporal issues in the wider world. Examples of these include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Paul Buckley’s lecture on the life of Elias Hicks.
- Emily Wirzba’s report on recent actions of FCNL.
- There is an ongoing monthly Bible Study session/ discussion.

What was our meeting’s witness in the wider community in the last year?

There is a sense of pride amongst the people that comprise this meeting of what we have done this year to spread our belief of a better world into our local community and beyond. The meetinghouse itself has served as a gathering site for the Interfaith Clergy Dialogue group of the Miami Coalition of Christians and Jews (MCCJ), which aims to work together to seek common ground between Miamians of all religious backgrounds, including Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. This group banded together at a press conference held at our meeting house in December to publicly support the Muslim members of our wider community after disturbing remarks were made by certain presidential candidates. Soon after that, the meeting house hosted another press conference, this time in support of a campaign spearheaded by AFSC to bring awareness to the plight of undocumented children being held in prison-like federal detention centers. The words from the Book of John that begin this report most certainly were put into action during events like these.

Similarly, there is a strong leading towards outreach within this meeting. Evidence of this includes:

- We had a booth at the Miami International Book Fair, one of the largest events of its kind in North America.
- We developed a new website in order to become more accessible to the wider world.
- We have allowed both South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice and the local branch of AFSC to utilise space in Bertram House, a building that is adjacent to the meeting house and is owned by the Monthly Meeting.
- We opened space within the meeting house itself to a diverse collection of usergroups that might normally have difficulty finding a place to meet. Some of the groups that meet here include Alcoholics Anonymous and Overeaters Anonymous.

Members and attenders of this meeting put their beliefs into action consistently. They regularly provide hospitality to out of town guests who serve in Quaker organizations. Many members of the Miami Friends Meeting are actively involved within SEYM. Others are board members of ProNica or donate financially to it. Additionally, because so many members of our community are concerned about climate change, there was a great degree of support behind the meeting's decision to donate funds to support the creation of a Quaker Earth Care Witness Field Secretary.

What do I need to say about our meeting?

There are several challenges that face this meeting. We have a First Day School comprised of children of different age groups, and this creates difficulties planning activities that meet their differentiated needs.

There are many people with a variety of gifts within our fold, and we need to do a better job of engaging them, as well as ensuring that a few members/attenders do not carry more committee weight that they can handle.

Though we are a community, we often struggle in the search for leadings on how to live our testimonies.

There is a concern that there is some confusion on the part of some members and attenders as to what is Spirit-led sharing during meeting for worship and afterwards. The Committee for Ministry and Worship did sponsor a Meeting for Learning regarding this concern, but there is a strong feeling that we should have more of such meetings.

Orlando Monthly Meeting

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report 2015

The last year has seen our fellowship grow and deepen. Some Friends have felt led to deepen their commitment to Meeting by seeking clearness to become Members and others were led to greater service to our community. Friends Stephanie Preston, Liz Jenkins, and Ed Lesnick were led to take on the roles of Clerk, Assistant Clerk, and Recording Clerk respectively. Other Friends have taken on substantial work in our increasingly active Meeting Committees. Major property improvements were completed, a ministry was supported, our finances were reorganized, our corporate structure was revised, our grants work was expanded, and all in a sense of unity and good fellowship.

We answer the queries recommended to our discernment by SEYM as follows:

How has the Spirit been moving among us this past year?

Many new attenders and visitors have been drawn to Meeting, and a deeper sense of Blessed Community has grown. This quote from Faith & Practice describes it well:

“God guides us to a place of empathy, care, and joy in each other’s company. Fellowship in the Spirit has a distinctive liveliness, openness, mutuality and ease.”

----SEYM Faith & Practice, p. 81.

Friends who visit our Meeting, or who have visited other Meetings, comment on the sense of love they find here.

How has our meeting for worship or other meeting activities nurtured our spiritual growth?

Worship has been much deeper this year. The growing sense of Blessed Community, faithful attendance and caring of f/Friends, and changes to our Worship space have helped the work of the spirit.

Our experience of connectedness as a community has been greatly helped by having a weekly e-newsletter ‘Quaker Notes,’ which was instituted this year.

We have started Spiritual Formation groups, which is helping us deepen our spiritual growth and connection with each other.

Friday Night Friends, a monthly potluck, draws a crowd of 15-20 f/Friends for fellowship and good food.

Especially in this time of economic uncertainty, are we taking stock of the meeting’s financial health and planning for ways to help those in need?

Orlando Friends, the ad hoc Finance Committee, and the trustees have been at work to get our financial affairs in good order. Careful attention has been paid to details and Quaker process. Decisions have been reached in unity, with tenderness. As we establish a long-range view, we can better understand what funds can be used to help others and how we can grow our Grants program. Good stewardship involves seeing that funds are put to good use.

What was our meeting’s witness in the wider community in the last year?

In 2015, we did not have a standing Peace & Social Concerns Committee, due to lack of volunteer time. But as we grow and get our regular business in order, we are both feeling the need and feeling strong enough to do more in the wider community.

We have had a few homeless men attend Meeting on a regular basis. Two in particular have been weekly attenders at Worship & Bible Study. Our Care & Community Committee provides appropriate assistance,

paying for nights at shelters, and working with community organizations to find more permanent housing and other programs for these men.

In 2015, we provided grants to Orlando Day Nursery, Winter Park Day Nursery, ProNica, the SEYM Field Secretary for Earthcare Fund, the AFSC Miami's American Friends Immigrants Services (ERA Program for immigrant youth), SpeakUp Florida (a local chapter of the Movement to End the New Jim Crow), & Faine House (for aged-out foster youth). In addition to the Grants, several donations were made to Quaker organizations local community non-profits.

We have an ongoing food drive for the food bank at Winter Park Day Nursery, a pre-school that cares for children of low-income families.

In 2015, we took Jerry Knutson's ministry under our care, writing a travelling minute and establishing an Anchor Committee. Jerry's ministry is working with Prisoner Visitation and Support (PVS) and offering workshops on Quakerism, spirituality, and prisoner visitation. This is another kind of commitment to the wider community and the wider Quaker community.

Milestones:

In 2015, we welcomed 4 Friends into Membership: Bil Meeler, Ray Jenkins, Ingrid Swenson, John Margerum. We also sadly note the passing of John Wetherill.

Winter Park Monthly Meeting

State of the Meeting 2016

WPMM continues to have a strong base of worshipers. We end meeting with the following; "Thank you for a place to meet and friends to meet with. Hold in the light those friends who are present and those friends who are with us in spirit. Hold in the light those friends that are having struggles in their lives." a moment of silence.

Founding member of WPMM, Betty Howe passed away last year. Although she was no longer able to attend meeting, her spirit was with us until the end. She had been clerk of the meeting, taught the first day class and published the newsletter "Out of the Silence". She left us many memories and some of her Quaker Library.

We also lost Vivian Bird who was also with us in spirit long after she was able to attend meeting in person. She had been the heart of the meeting for many years as well as being a hostess for many events, clerk for many years, active on the council of churches and an integral attender of the Wednesday morning worship group at Orlando Meeting.

First Sunday of the month we have Meeting for Worship followed by Meeting for Worship with attention to business. That is followed by a potluck and social time. It is the high light of the month for our little group.

We will be addressing where we will be meeting after June of 2016 since the "Y" will be in a state of construction for 18 months. We hope to find a good solution because our group feels deeply that we want to remain a meeting.

Jan Hansen

St. Petersburg Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Spiritual State of the Meeting For Calendar year: 2015
March 6, 2016
Greg Stemm, clerk

On the second First Day of the second Month, (14th) 2016 several members and attenders of the St. Petersburg Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) gathered for a called Meeting for Worship with a Concern for the Spiritual State of the Meeting. The following report is a gathering of the information collected in that Meeting and reflects Spirit as it was expressed by those in attendance.

Overview:

Despite a number of deaths in 2015 both within our ranks and among spouses, as well as some other substantial challenges, the spiritual state of the St. Petersburg Meeting is strong. Many of us have found that by facing the obstacles with which we have been confronted together (and are in some cases continuing to face) it has made us much more resilient as a Meeting and our optimism, hope and commitment to the future has been deepened and strengthened as a result. As our Meeting prepares to celebrate 75 years in our current building we are mindful of the many dedicated St. Petersburg Friends that have come before us and remain steadfast in our resolve to care deeply for one another while taking the Quaker vision and message to our wider community and to the world. We remain aware of our Meeting's reputation as a Meeting focused on social action and change and despite declining numbers and an aging group we have recommitted ourselves to an outward focus in the coming year ahead.

Some Major Projects

Circus McGurkis, our annual peace education celebration marked its 44th year and was enormously successful. With nearly 200 vendors, music, food, workshops, a peace labyrinth and an attendance of about 5-8,000 it was truly a day of celebrating all of the Quakers testimonies with our beloved St. Petersburg community. The event had a revenue surplus of \$2300.

We are however finding it increasingly difficult to produce this event with the manpower and resources we currently have available. We are in the difficult discernment process on how to best move ahead with this event, honoring its long traditions but more clearly aligned with what we can realistically continue to do as a Meeting. Circus is extraordinarily labor intensive and it seems each year there is more work to do and less hands to do it. The City of St. Petersburg has also placed increasing demands on us in permitting and labor fees. There is much concern that the City requires us to have an armed police presence at the event. We have had one called meeting to discuss the future of the event and an ad hoc committee has been charged with making difficult recommendations back to the Meeting.

A major undertaking of St. Pete Meeting is the demolition and reconstruction of what was known as the "caretaker cottage" (now commonly referred to as the "146 Building".) The current structure has been evaluated by professionals and is not fit for human habitation primarily because of mold. Our long time full time caretaker retired this past year and our current plans do not include replacing her. Our current plans are to build a two story structure with a two bedroom apartment upstairs and room for an office and much needed additional storage space downstairs. We are drawing upon some earmarked investments and a \$50,000 loan from Friends Building Fund to finance the construction. Once complete it is Meeting's intention to rent the apartment and use this income to retire our debt. It is our belief that once this debt is retired we will have a valuable resource for the future. There is strong feeling among the Meeting that our commitment to this construction project demonstrates to us and to the rest of the community that we see our future as bright, successful and growing.

On April 24, 2016 we are planning a celebration of our 75th year in our current Meetinghouse. Our structure was built entirely by Quaker hands and was one of the first Quaker meetinghouses in Florida. We have asked the City of St. Petersburg to issue an official proclamation naming April 24 as Quaker History Day in the city. The Playback Theatre group from Tampa Meeting will be performing and we plan a presentation from a renowned historian who has done extensive research on Quakers in Florida. We hope to invite other Meetings in SEYM to come join us for a potluck and a day of celebrating with Friends. There is a wonderful historical photo taken in front of the newly dedicated St. Pete Meetinghouse 75 years ago. In it are Quakers who come from around the state. We hope to recreate that photo for historical archives.

Many Bright Points In Our Light

- Our social outreach to the homeless community continues as we work together with Unitarians to provide a picnic meal every Friday afternoon. We also help provide basic toiletry items and clothing to homeless people.
- For near 15 years there have been representatives from Meeting standing on a street corner at least once a week protesting various U.S. military operations
- Our First Day for adults is very well attended and the topics in the discussion group are lively and relevant. We have also added a Worship Sharing group which meets at the same time as the discussion group, giving Friends an option on which educational group to attend. This has been well received by Meeting. Meeting is grateful that Spirit has allowed us to create safe spaces in these two groups where truth spoken by individuals can be well received.
- When our Meeting decided not to replace a full time caretaker we took a leap of faith that our Hospitality Committee could provide these functions. The response has been extraordinary. In fact, by sharing set up, clean up and other hospitality functions our Meeting has grown closer to each other.
- We participate in the life of our neighborhood by holding a yard sale during the neighborhood wide yard sale. We open the Meeting's restrooms for use by the public during this event. We also host a number of groups including yoga and are a polling place during elections.
- For over ten years St. Petersburg Meeting has partnered with Buddhist groups to sponsor a "First Light" celebration service at 7 am on New Year's morning. We join together with groups in every time zone around the globe praying for peace as the sun dawns on a new year.
- We continue to find opportunities to gather and meet both for education and for fun. We have had spiritual companion groups, groups studying faith and practice, a group focused on discussing articles in the Friend Journal, Friendly Eight Dinners. women's and men's groups and lively social gatherings which have included food, libations and apparently our group very much enjoys singing together. It may surprise some Friends but we do know how to make a joyful noise unto the Lord!
- Meeting has participated in the First Night activities in downtown St. Petersburg by sponsoring a peace labyrinth.

Some Challenges

- While our shrinking numbers and aging population can be attributed somewhat to factors outside of our control we acknowledge that we could do more to help attract new members and to retain our current size
- While there is a strong desire for us to remain at the forefront of social action there is caution expressed that we also need to care for ourselves and not get so focused on others that we lose sight of the health of our own Meeting
- We need to show up and support each other in our dealings with other public groups and activities
- We need to continue to find ways to maintain our Quaker faith and traditions without telling people how to worship.
- We need to show more concern and follow up with people who stop attending Meeting after a time of regular attendance.

- There is a yearning for us to genuinely get to know each other better.
- Meeting needs to continue to be mindful of our limited financial resources. We must continue to find the most cost effective and efficient use of our money.
- As our current properties continue to age we will need to allocate more resources for property management and upkeep. This is particularly important as we weigh the finances of new construction.

Some quotes from Members:

“When people in our Meeting come together to salvage something or to make it happen there always just seems to be enough.”

“Every person in Meeting makes contributions in their own way. We should all respect that.”

“I think Meeting should acknowledge the contributions of our clerk”

“I just want to express again my deepest gratitude to this Meeting for being so welcoming to the LGBT community. Many gay people are sorely in need of strong spiritual support. I feel blessed to have found that here.”

“Even though it seems we have been through a long stint of unusual circumstances it seems to me that we’ve turned some sort of corner and things are really starting to get better. Meeting certainly has grown spiritually. Is there still work to be done? Of course, but there is a real awareness of what we are and what we can continue to become”

“I really like that Greg has put up that empty chair reserved for ‘Spirit’ next to him while he is clerking the business meeting. It helps to remind me of who is really in charge.”

“I get up on First Day with joy and enthusiasm that I get to go be with people I love and where I feel such love and comfort.”

“We should remember that this Meeting has a long and proud tradition. It is our experience that will give us such extraordinary opportunities for the future.”

“Today a child of our Meeting returned to town and brought his child to Meeting. That gives me hope and optimism for the future. The absolute strength of this meeting is that we genuinely value each individual person.”

Sarasota Monthly Meeting

The Spiritual State of the Sarasota Monthly Meeting in 2015:

“He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands”

Our Meeting is blessed with the richness of experience and the joy of newcomers, young turks and weighty Friends! Our challenges this year seem far outweighed by our love and the Light we have shared in so many, varied ways. And the Worship Sharing we participated in in preparation for this report, that Light, that love, shone brightly! As one Friend put it so beautifully, the nurturing of Spirit seems to have started with the physical reconfiguration of our Meeting room seating into concentric circles, literally bringing us closer together, or as he said, he said, feeling “the auras of Love!” And he isn’t a former hippie!

Another Friend put her finger on it: “The air in this room is different from any place in this world!” And it is! We have come together, worked in many different areas, struggled, too, but, overall, felt growth, compassion and joy!

A perfect example of this richness and complexity came from a member of Peace and Social Concerns Committee, that group of varied, passionate, new and older activists, struggling mightily to bring our Meeting into much more outreach and much more social consciousness. We all praise our youth for their participation, leadership, deep commitment and success with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Mountain Top Removal(MTR) Justice - issues they championed locally AND nationally, especially the triumph when PNC stopped financing MTR as a result of the quiet, but national pressure, started by our Quakers! These youth are our role models and our future, and we are in awe!

Moreover, the SEYM call to Climate Change Awareness has prompted our own Carbon Footprint Initiative, singularly driven by one Friend who has helped and embarrassed so many of us into more conscious living, with even greater possibilities for the way we go forward as a Meeting! This Friend then spoke of the of Quaker Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business practices, having a real, positive influence in resolving a neighborhood issue. Talk about outreach!

This Friend spoke, too of the way our Meeting has been literally confronted with the reality of homelessness, citing the folks who are actively engaged and trying to make a difference.

And as this same Friend said, especially citing the cross-influence of one member, many folks participate in more than one committee, and bring their wisdom and experience to our great benefit, particularly our beloved, overworked, detail-oriented, Treasurer and First Husband! Role models abound!

So, when we think of Love manifesting itself in our Meeting, we recognize both the First Day School folks and the Serenity/Memorial Garden visionaries. What a joy to see to see growth and progress in all its forms!

Finally, just as we drew even closer together in an even tighter circle to close our sweet Worship Sharing, we draw close the end of our calendar year, filled with a sense of support, hope and love!

Savannah Friends: Spiritual State of the Meeting, 2015

Our meeting's spiritual state was suggested recently by a young attender who described her experience of worship: Sitting quietly, she feels herself gradually withdraw from the world racked by news of conflict and confusion as she enters into a universe of peace, order, and understanding. The Quaker ideal could hardly be better described. Others in worship seem to have similar feelings; one can almost hear them relax and center. This sense of worship continues to draw members, attenders, and visitors to Savannah Friends Meeting, which gathers for First Day in Room 317 of historic Trinity United Methodist Church on Telfair Square. The worship experience also informs and energizes the meeting's other activities.

Our happiest activity during 2015 was starting a First Day Program for children ages two through eight. Trinity Church was very helpful in setting up the program, providing another room for free and arranging background checks of supervisors (required by law). So that two supervisors could be available at all times, four members/attenders volunteered: Christen Clougherty, who has a Ph.D. in Quaker Studies; Sarah Werner, who has a Ph.D. in religion and the environment; Mary Alpern, who has a doctorate in library science; and Sandy Branam, an artist with Montessori Internationale teaching certification and decades of experience. Other members/attenders volunteered to help if needed. Drawing on materials from Friends General Conference, the program has served between one and four children on various First Days. It is always a happy moment when the children join the adults for the last ten minutes of worship.

Another happy event was the Meeting for Worship for the marriage of Liz (Perch) and Mike Dykes, the first wedding in our meeting. Barry Scott of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (Philadelphia YM) clerked the meeting at Skidaway Island State Park in a rustic banquet hall under the trees beside the salt marsh. Among the approximately one hundred guests were Friends from Iowa YM (Conservative), Illinois YM, New York YM, SAYMA, and South Central YM. During worship, numerous speakers offered their experiences of marriage and their blessings. Then everyone joined in a sumptuous feast ending with cutting and sharing a big wedding cake. Savannah Quakers assisted with setup and cleanup, and Sandy Branam created the special marriage certificate (with hand-lettering and drawings of marsh creatures) that everyone signed.

Savannah Friends Meeting was also one of the meetings across North America that volunteered to pilot FGC's Spiritual Deepening Program, which is coordinated by Christen Clougherty. Tracey Dolan arranged the pilot sessions to meet on Saturdays under the live oaks of Forsyth Park. With four to eight other adults and two to four children attending, Harold and Sandy Branam facilitated sessions on four topics: "The Light, Seed, Christ Working in Us," "Silence and Expectant Waiting," "Friendly Practices," and "Becoming Patterns and Examples." Later Christen, Harold, and Sandy joined others in reporting on the pilot program to an audience of approximately one hundred at Friends General Conference Gathering in Cullowhee, N.C.

Meanwhile, as individuals and as a meeting, Savannah Friends continue to reach out to the wider community. Again this year Savannah Friends joined with Trinity United Methodist Church to feed several hundred homeless people Christmas breakfast. Throughout the year individual members/attenders contribute to Quaker organizations, contact politicians, and publish letters in local newspapers. As an SEYM representative on the Corporation of American Friends Service Committee, Harold Branam wrote a column titled "The Unbearable Costs of Mass Incarceration" (one of AFSC's focuses) that appeared in at least two Georgia newspapers and was picked up by websites around the nation.

The meeting continues to follow the development of and provide support for Nurturing Minds/SEGA Girls School for vulnerable girls in Tanzania. Three individuals from our meeting join to fund a SEGA student and correspond with her. In spring 2015 our meeting helped support a fundraiser concert, thanks to our member Sarah Schenkman, cellist, and her husband Terry Moore, violinist—both with the Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra—who performed for this event. Tracey Dolan, also a meeting member and cofounder of Nurturing Minds/SEGA, had a full display on SEGA Girls School for participants to learn about the school's impact. There was a diverse group of attendees, resulting in a positive ecumenical experience for all.

Outside our meetings for worship and business, Savannah Friends communicate and socialize with each other. Some lunch together after meeting, the book group and potlucks thrive, the newsletter comes out roughly every two months, and someone leads religious education the first First Day of each month. Doug Johnson recently invited other members/attenders to join him in a study group to read Thomas Kelly's *A Testament of Devotion* in early 2016. Clerk Doug Hahn keeps people informed in e-mails that sometimes run to several pages and keeps the recipient list up-to-date. The caring attitude in our meeting was memorably demonstrated in September when Sandy Branam was in the hospital for seven days: Members/attenders visited her with offers of help, food, and a warm quilt (created ad hoc by Liz Dykes), and one former attender expressed her concern all the way from Scotland.

Tampa Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Spiritual State of the Meeting 2015

This report faithfully records our current understanding of our continuing journey as a community of seekers.

The following queries were considered in our discernment:

- How does the spirit of worship extend into our committee work and into Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business? How well do our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business lead to a corporate search for and revelation of God's truth?
- Has there been a deepening and strengthening of the sense of the Divine Presence in our midst during the past year? Do we leave our Meetings filled with a sense of love and peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit filled living?
- What was our Meeting's witness in the wider community in the last year?
- Do you have other reflections on the current condition of the Meeting – places where you see new life emerging, loss or sadness that you want to share?
- What do I need to say about our Meeting?

Our community appreciates the unity we feel in most things we do as a Meeting. We feel this is not a way to avoid conflict but a sign that we are unified in our spiritual understanding. We truly try to listen to the wisdom of the Spirit in the words expressed in committee meetings and Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business. We see trust and flexibility as signs of God's work. The unity we have in our process, especially as regards the new meetinghouse, shows the connections we have in our spiritual standing. Friends also shared that being a small community we know each other individually. We have developed respect, trust and faith in one another because we share each First Day with each other. We appreciate the clerk bringing readings to Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business to remind us of God's presence. While some Friends have mystical experiences, some do not. And while our articulation may differ in description of this experience, our common understanding, Spirit of worship and faith that "all will be ok" reflect that our corporate search is Spirit led. Because we trust we aren't alone in this decision making, we feel led to be inclusive and to help others in the community. We view our moving forward and follow through as signs of God leading us.

Friends answered yes to a deepening and strengthening of the sense of the Divine Presence in our midst during the past year because they answered yes to leaving our Meetings filled with a sense of love, peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit filled living. Meeting for Worship is a deeper experience of the Spirit working in the depths of our lives. Friends shared that seeing others in the Meeting living in a Spirit-filled manner and truly seeking to be led by the Spirit in their daily lives brings hope and a depth of community. Another Friend shared "I feel the Divine Spirit moving in me and want to show it. The feeling can be overwhelming or I may not have the drive to attend to it. I have attended Sunday school at other churches that have discussions on Scripture on the most important teachings of Jesus. They are talking but not filled with the Spirit. We want this meeting as our home as we feel the Spirit moving in us when we leave here." The support that we give one another encourages Friends in our Meeting to be more aware of God's work in us. It gives us strength to move into the week to face the challenges that come before us as we carry our faith and actions with us into the community. Another Friend shared the markers of deepening and strengthening of Spirit in our midst: being present in the world; paying attention to those building the peaceable kingdom; and digging deeper and looking to each other for strength. Difficult challenges move us to turn more and more toward each other. We bring our Quaker mindset into our individual lives and jobs, either consciously or unconsciously, to mend the world one person at a time. Our ability to do this comes from our worship together.

Friends also shared that our recently formed Spiritual Formation groups will add spiritual nurture and depth to our community. More than one Friend shared that having companions on a spiritual journey was

something they had wanted for a long time. These groups will also add to our ability to respond as Friends to the situations in the world that we encounter each day, thereby strengthening our witness and discernment of God's will. The more often we participate in this practice, the stronger our Quaker community will be in everything we do as we are more in the Spirit. The support that we give one another through the Spiritual Formation groups encourages Friends in our Meeting to be more aware of God's work in us. It is a gift that will only serve to gather us in the Spirit as a Meeting.

Tampa Meeting is a small community but active in wider Quaker witness which brings a richness to us and we to it. Our Meeting's witness in the wider community involved Friends working with FCNL, Friends Peace Teams, RSWR, FGC, SEYM, and AVP. Continuing work with the Immokalee Workers Fair Food Campaign, Earthcare and the Moral Injury of Veterans project reflects our ongoing concern for social justice. Friends also carry their witness in how we represent our lives in the world around us. The Meeting again participated in a book drive for summer reading books for children as well as adopting a family in need for Christmas and continuing the Meeting food pantry. The Meeting also provides space for an AA group to gather at the meetinghouse. This year our Meeting joyously celebrated a wedding that brought in new people, reflecting both witness and outreach. We have also had many new visitors in the past year. One Friend shared that the new meetinghouse may bring in more visitors and be a way to get our thoughts out in the community, yielding direct and indirect impacts. Another Friend shared that the Meeting community has grown in a deeper witness to Quakerism, witnessing more with Spirit, being who we are as a deeper meaning of witness – listening deeply to each person in each situation, living with integrity, and taking on responsibilities. One Friend shared that when trying to offer a peaceful solution in a difficult situation, being Quaker brings the whole community of Friends to each encounter. Another Friend shared using AVP in individual interactions in daily life.

Friends have seen new life in the Meeting emerge with the new meetinghouse, as the community joined together in the entire process to develop and build it. The marriage and new visitors are other signs of new life for the Meeting. One Friend experiences the period of worship after Meeting for Worship for the sharing of joys, sorrows and prayer requests, as a powerful corporate witness to the channeling of God's Love by the Meeting community as we hold each in the Light. Another Friend shared, "I look forward to coming to Meeting each First Day to refill with Spirit and to experience the joy of seeing new people as well as returning Friends."

Our Meeting did experience a deep sorrow this year over the loss of one of our members, Jill Floerke. Jill was an active, beloved member who will be most remembered for her passion for peace and social justice issues and sports.

As final reflections, one Friend asked members and attenders to think about what it means to be part of the Religious Society of Friends and what that commitment calls us to do. Additional questions shared were how the Meeting encourages attenders to commit to membership and how can attenders come to understand this community and its spiritual aspects as well as its broader connection to the wider Quaker world. As Friends, we have the expectation that we can connect with Friends anywhere in the world. We also hold space for seekers and those who didn't know they were Quakers. One Friend shared how grateful they are for Meeting and whatever it was that brought each of us here and that we listened to what brought us together. Friends hold in the Light those who can't attend Meeting for a time as they are a part of Meeting regardless. One Friend felt led to share about our Meeting "I have most deeply experienced God's love and presence during those times I have shared my brokenness at Meeting and been held in the Light of God's Love by Friends, who are present with me in my pain and help guide my discernment – true markers of a community filled with the Spirit."

Respectfully submitted,

Tampa Monthly Meeting

Tallahassee Monthly Meeting

Spiritual State of Tallahassee Friends Meeting December 2015

(Fourteen Friends attended the worship sharing Second Hour during which reflections were shared on the spiritual state of our meeting. The queries that prompted our sharing are at the end of this report. The Worship, Ministry and Oversight Committee added their discernment to the communal sharing.)

In the past year, Tallahassee Friends Meeting has experienced both the joy of the deep moving of the Spirit and the low energy of spiritual dryness. We seek to stay open to God's guidance in dealing with our challenges, which will further strengthen our community and witness to the wider world.

This year has brought the sorrow of the death of one Friend and the joy of a young friend being received into adult membership. We had the delight of hosting a reception for the wedding of a younger Friend who had been in Peace Corps and welcoming a number of foreign guests, some of them in the United States for the first time—a warm and wonderful experience for us all.

Meeting for worship is our core. One Friend reflected that it is the practice of community in meeting for worship that keeps her focus on where she needs to be. Another added that we all come together to practice being in touch with the reality of the Spirit. Meeting teaches us to make room for those different from ourselves, to listen to and sit with challenging statements, yet continue to experience the inclusion of us all.

We acknowledged the importance of the discipline of punctuality for meeting for worship. Though we want profoundly to be welcoming whenever people arrive, intermittent arrivals can scatter the focus of worship for others. However we notice improvement in punctuality as we raise our awareness about this.

Meeting for worship has offered space for stillness and messages from the Source. Some of us frequently feel the presence of the Christ-Spirit gathering our worship, especially as they have grown and increased in their own spiritual practices. Others struggle with the quality of worship in meeting.

Friends acknowledge a deep sense of support that comes with being part of our community. Many of us who travel or have a wide range of life responsibilities must periodically miss Meeting for Worship, sometimes for several weeks, but find experience of meeting an anchor as we seek times of quiet when we are away. Yet we are exploring what, beyond such commitments as these, is contributing to a period of lowered attendance at meeting for worship. Similarly, why are only two of our committees—Worship, Ministry and Oversight and Peace and Social Concerns—meeting actively? Even those meetings are often sparsely attended.

The deep practice of Meeting for Business has been a model of the Quaker way of being and doing in this world. It has helped some to listen and be with people in a new way, taught others to act by sitting without speaking. There have been challenges. One rises from items put on the agenda before being seasoned by a committee; Friends are called to make better use of our committees. It would be helpful to have the agenda distributed before we meet. We wonder: What are the barriers to Friends contributing their financial gifts so that our budget can be met? What needs to happen so that our meeting as a whole is led to be actively involved in the life of Southeastern Yearly Meeting?

We continue to seek ways to care for one another tenderly within the community of Meeting. As part of that, we were deeply moved to be able to provide support for a beloved, frequent attender and his family during his stay at Hospice House. We value being heard when we share our experiences. Though we hold in the Light Friends who have experienced illness, physical injury, or other concerns, and tended to some of their needs, we seek to do more of this. One Friend has felt spiritual enlivening from editing our newsletter. We continue to work on nonviolent conflict resolution among ourselves.

Hymn singing before Meeting for Worship joyfully connects some of us to each other and God, but fewer of us have participated this year, and sometimes it hasn't happened. Our Second Hours on a wide variety of topics, often taking the form of worship sharing, have aided our spiritual deepening. A Friend finds joy in communing with nature while working on the meetinghouse landscape that another Friend may have planted the seed for. Others have planted and tended our vegetable garden. We wonder: What support is needed to involve more Friends in the ongoing care of our property beyond our quarterly workdays?

Likewise we continue discernment on the challenge of how best to share the gifts of Quakerism and spirituality in general with our beloved children and youth, who range in age from 3 to 13. We value their attendance for up to half an hour at the start of Meeting for Worship. Regular attendance at First Day School has been erratic. We regularly provided financial assistance to families, youth and young adult Friends to attend various Quaker events.

Friends' ministry to the needs of the wider community and world has primarily occurred individually rather than as a corporate body. It's been a boost for our meeting to have one young adult Friend serving as an intern for FCNL for a year. We have learned about and shared Quaker values on climate change during her arranged visits to a state legislator and members of congress. We are grateful to have had the opportunity as part of an interfaith community to meet and serve meals to guests experiencing homelessness or hunger. We have the opportunity to learn more about meeting the needs of people experiencing homeless through our membership in a broad-based local organization, Big Bend Continuum of Care. We continued our support of Hilltop House, a residence for the mentally impaired.

We were reminded to dare to ask Friends to experience the powerful love of asking someone to join in an activity or ministry they are perceived to have a gift for. For one Friend this resulted in involvement with other Tallahassee Friends in an ongoing long-term prison ministry at the Marianna, FL Federal Correctional Institute.

Our inspirational book group series on Douglas Gwyn's, **A Sustainable Life, Quaker Faith and Practice in the Renewal of Creation** moved us to plan a 2016 Spring retreat on this topic and opened us more widely to ways in which the power of our spiritual life can lead us organically to actions that help heal the Earth.

We are grateful for each other and the opportunity to experience and learn more about the power of opening to and trusting in the Spirit to direct us.



Spiritual State of the Meeting Queries

1) In what ways has Meeting for Worship nurtured my spiritual growth?

2) In what ways have Meeting for Business and other meeting activities both nurtured and challenged my spiritual growth?

3) In what ways have we supported each other over the past year as members of our beloved community? In what ways, if any, could we increase our support for one another?

- **In what ways have we supported our youth in the life of our Meeting?**
- **In what ways, if any, might we deepen the support of our youth within our community?**

4) What was our Meeting's witness to the wider community in the last year?

5. Other comments

Marianna Worship Group *under the care of Tallahassee Meeting*

Out of 56 weeks covered herein, there were 11 when no meeting for worship was possible due to lack of staff to open the building and supervise activities. One week was not noted in our Minutes, leaving 44 when Meeting for Worship did occur. Attendance varied from a low of two to a high of seven, with a general core of four fairly consistent in attendance.

Tor Bejnar joined us on nine occasions, Alice Bejnar on four, and Paula Seaman of five, which was much appreciated by our participants. On most of these occasions there were active discussions on Quakerism and various personal topics, drawing in most, if not all, of our participants. We cannot say enough on our thanks for their dedication to this service and to those in attendance.

This year, in order to maintain interest among our attenders when we meet without our visitors, we have watched a variety of videos after our silent meditation. Initially these were selected at random from among the chapel's fairly extensive collection. These included:

- "Amazing Grace," basically William Wilburforce's anti-slavery campaign in Britain;
- "Amish Grace," about the Amish forgiveness after the school shootings in Lancaster County, PA;
- two audio discs of the Quaker folk singing group "Faith and Practice;"
- two films on Buddhism – noting remarkable similarities with Quakerism;
- "An Irish Christmas" of carols, plus an evening of our singing carols from the Friends Hymnal with the Bejnars;
- "Saints and Strangers," on religion and its impact in early colonial America, with a fair amount on Pennsylvania Quakers and Quakerism;
- and biographies of Aleksander Solzhenitsyn and Hildegard von Bingen.

Thereafter, starting in February, we concentrated on specific themes. We spent two months with "Holocaust," and 8-hour TV series. In April we listened to NPR's "A Living Silence," on Quakerism, and PRI's "Beyond War." Then came "Friendly Persuasion," "Gandhi," the "Martin Luther King, Jr." biography emphasizing non-violence, and the Nelson Mandela story, "Long Walk to Freedom." (We were disappointed that this did not include anything on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.)

In August we received a shipment of Quaker books and commercial films with significant Quaker characters (paid from the chapel's budget). We delayed watching these in order to view our planned series on forgiveness. This included a repeat viewing of "Amish Grace," an excellent presentation "The Power of Forgiveness," and concluding with "Uganda – Ready to Forgive" on the reconciliation out reach to the violent rebel LRA.

In our own outreach, in July we sent to Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC, a letter of our condolence and admiration for their forgiveness of the shooter there (copy enclosed).

Submitted by Thomas Pendleton, elder, Marianna FCI Worship Group 10/3/15

see their letter to Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston on next page...

***Letter to Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC
From Marianna FCI Worship Group***

Dear Friends,

We, of the Quaker Worship Group at Marianna Federal Correctional Institution, extend our condolences, our expression of sorrow and compassion, to all of you over the recent tragic shootings and deaths within your congregation.

As Quakers, we believe that all people are created by God of equal value, with an equal amount of the light of God within all. We retain that value in the eyes of God, no matter what we do. No one is worthless. No individual consumed by hate has the right – or ability – to extinguish the light which God has lit. So while grieving, we must forgive.

The forgiveness extended by your grieving survivors to this perpetrator of senseless violence, hate, and evil has been a light to us all. Jesus called us to forgive one another, as our common creator forgives us. The true spirit of God's forgiveness which you have displayed in the face of this unbearable tragedy is an inspiration to everyone.

Our thoughts and prayers – and our admiration for your examples of true Christianity – are with you all.

Sincerely,

Thomas Pendleton, Elder, Quaker Worship Group