

Southeastern Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends

Spiritual State of the Meeting Reports
2016

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Clearwater Monthly Meeting

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report 2016

Love is the greatest manifestation of Spirit, and we consider ourselves extremely blessed because we find it evident in nearly every aspect of our meeting. A genuine warmth exists among our members and attenders during our weekly meetings for worship, our monthly pot-luck luncheons, our personal contacts through the week and the welcome we offer visitors. Friends often express their feeling that the meeting truly is our extended family. Into this wonderful relationship, we were pleased to receive a new member, Sandra Schwartz, the fellowship of several seasoned Friends from other meetings, and new attenders.

This year offered many opportunities for us to minister to one another. Several of our members experienced extended illnesses, suffered the death of loved ones and generally needed the emotional and practical support of those within the meeting. When an elderly, longtime, occasional attender passed away in the fall, we were led to host a memorial service where approximately 50 of his close friends and neighbors were able to share stories of his amazing life.

Collectively and individually we are actively engaged in various social and environmental efforts. Many Friends volunteer to support a local daycare center serving low income families. Others are involved in efforts that range from climate change to dog rescue and everything in between. In addition, our Peace and Social Concerns Committee offers guidance in promoting political activism.

Even so, we have a great sense realize that there is still so much that we are not currently addressing. In the past, there has been a great deal of effort focused on the physical needs of others. In our current political climate, there is a growing sense that we will need to spend more time pursuing social justice issues.

We struggle to be good financial stewards. Our annual budget includes contributions to national Quaker organizations and local agencies serving the needs of the local poor and disenfranchised. We debate whether to accumulate funds towards the purchase of a building, or provide more support for the needs of socially responsible organizations. This debate is one that we expect to address in the coming year as we seek the way forward.

We strive to maintain a spirit of worship in our meetings for business. The temptation to lapse into dialogue is strong. Nonetheless, we recognize that intellect can obscure the guidance of Spirit and occasionally we must enter into silence in order to regain a worshipful attitude.

When dealing with issues where Friends have strong divergent opinions, we have learned to allow adequate time to seek a sense of unity. Permitting issues to season gives an opportunity for the Spirit to work and draw us together in a common understanding.

Fort Lauderdale Friends Meeting State of the Meeting Report for 2016

Fort Lauderdale Friends Meeting continues as a small meeting whose regular attenders know each other well. We continue to find that the life of our Meeting enriches our personal lives.

Some new attenders were welcome additions to our number. However, we said goodbye to Mary Jo Klingel and Herving Madruga.

Mary Jo Klingel moved to North Carolina. She is a longtime member who has contributed actively to Fort Lauderdale Friends Meeting, Southeastern Yearly Meeting, and Quaker Earthcare Witness. We are thankful for her time in our community.

Our treasured Friend, Herving Madruga, experienced a decline in health, accompanied by difficulties with attendance, during 2016; and he passed away on January 15, 2017. We appreciated his perspectives, based on his lifetime of service as a former professor of linguistics and his long experience among Quakers. He astutely observed the human condition, and shared his original insights with a good measure of humor.

We continue to find ways to contribute to the life of Southeastern Yearly Meeting. We have also been following the activities of Quaker Earthcare Witness and Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Additionally, we continue to organize an annual Tri County Quaker Picnic, attended by Friends from the Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami meetings. Events include a Meeting for Worship, picnic lunch, and an after-lunch discussion session. At our picnic on February 21, 2016, Herving Madruga shared stories of his recent trip to Cuba, and he fielded a number of questions.

Some of us have been participating in a local interfaith group called Jews, Muslims, and All Peoples. We find that we have many questions to ask; many questions to answer; and many common beliefs, feelings, and attitudes to share.

Fort Myers Monthly Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting

Approved 2nd Month 12, 2017

Members and attenders of Fort Myers Meeting met on 12th Month, 28th Day, 2016, to consider queries about the spiritual state of our meeting, as requested by Yearly Meeting. The meeting was conducted in a worship sharing format.

Those gathered were asked if they felt a sense of the Divine Presence in our worship and whether they leave worship filled with a feeling of peace and courage to carry on a Spirit-filled life. These queries drew many thoughtful responses.

Meeting for Worship was described as a spiritual home, where we are reminded to be kind and to care about others. Meeting was seen as an anchor, where we come to be grounded and transported beyond the daily and beyond ourselves.

“There is so much noise in life. It’s nice to focus on experiences, community, healing, and wellness.”

“People here are holding me in the Light. That is immeasurably important.”

Friends also mentioned that they miss having children and a wider distribution of ages in attendance in Meeting.

Friends felt strengthened and deepened by Spirit-led messages and in the presence of love and Light in our community. Friends are encouraged to share their experiences of the Divine and “not let shyness, fear of public speaking, or anxiousness about saying the right thing block the sharing of messages.”

It was noted by several that more time between ministries was needed to process what has been said. After a ministry is spoken, listeners need time to absorb, to make their own connections, to discern. In this state of openness, we are often seeking healing, sometimes from feeling bombarded by language from media, politics, work, and other aspects of life. We find such healing in our own waiting silence and in the reverent and simple ministries spoken. Giving time between ministries may encourage those who don’t speak readily to share a message that they have received and also allows time for discernment of whether the message is meant for the Meeting as a whole or for the individual.”

Another query focused on our Meeting’s witness in the wider community. One Friend opened this exploration by stating, “We often ask visitors, ‘How did you find us.’ We should ask, ‘How do we find you?’” Striving to make an impact on the community around us, we have recently formed an active Outreach Committee. We also impact the world around us by contributing two thirds of our annual income to the wider community. A number of our members and attenders donate untold hours in actively working within community organizations. As a Meeting, Friends have shown interest in working with the Pennies for Progress, a developing program to support and improve our schools, and we continue to support Lee Interfaith for Empowerment (LIFE), a commitment now of several years duration. We are indebted to our Peace and Social Concerns committee for their faithful, dedicated guidance and direction in these matters.

As one Friend stated, “For me and for many of us, it is no longer about activism or need to fix problems. It’s ‘how do we carry the message of love into the community?’” Lastly, we reflected on the current condition of the Meeting, places where one sees new life emerging, or loss or sadness. Friends acknowledge how difficult it is to see the suffering in the world, notably in Syria and other war torn countries, and to have so little ability to intervene directly, such as sponsoring and giving aid to refugees.

Concerns about what will happen under the new government administration have become prominent in recent weeks. How best do we support our Quaker values and lead a Spirit-led life? Discussion of these concerns leads us back to the realization that we are to stay centered in love that is eternal, wisdom that survives temporary situations, and in that which is so much larger than ourselves.

Gainesville Monthly Meeting

Spiritual State of the Meeting February 2017

It is easy to get pulled in many directions, especially during a tumultuous social, environmental and political era. Fortunately over the last few years Gainesville Monthly Meeting centered down and focused on maintaining and strengthening the spiritual depth of our meeting. Even as we dealt with the loss of several members either through death or increasing dementia, we stayed focused on our primary purpose.. a spiritual community of faith. Several small, but significant, results of this focus have occurred. We have had long term Quakers who were regular attenders transfer their membership from their original meeting to Gainesville Monthly Meeting. We have welcomed a young adult as a member and facilitated his participation in Friends General Conference in 2015 and 2016. We have others who are very close to requesting a clearness committee for membership. Our committees are being enriched and revitalized by the addition of new attenders and members. We were a test meeting for the Spiritual Deepening program and that group continues to meet. We will again have the Spiritual Deepening program in 2017.

By focusing on what is most important and keeping our roots deep, nourished, and well watered, we have been able to confidently increase our outreach. Trust in the members who are skillful in the electronic media and outreach has made it easier for those not so connected to accept the use of the Quaker Cloud, Facebook, our web site, and increased use of our building to individuals and organizations that reflect our Quaker testimonies and practices. Grow Gainesville holds their monthly meeting at our meetinghouse and was instrumental in bringing AmeriCorps youth to help with our fall cleanup day. In addition to yoga on Mondays, QiGong and tai chi classes are held twice weekly. People attending these meetings and classes have become more aware of our Quaker practices and interested in our literature and meetings for worship. We had our meeting well anchored and ready to respond in a Quakerly manner to the threat to our water supply from the Sabal Trail pipeline.

Yes, we still face challenges. We do not have a large, active First Day School, but we do have families that are coming to meeting seeking a spiritual home for their family. We are in the process of developing a four week rotating thematic First Day School program that can be staffed among several adults, each being responsible for one First Day each month.. We have lost occasional members and attenders because of changes in their lives or discomfort with us as we use Quaker process to deal with disruptive, or perhaps strong willed, individuals. It is not easy always be part of a community of faith and to work through the process and discernment needed to reach consensus on a complex or sensitive concern.

Gainesville Monthly Meeting has remained strong and vibrant because we deliberately chose to maintain the spiritual base of our community as the first priority. Quaker process and right order serves us well. With strong roots to anchor us, we are free to branch out individually, as a committee or committees, or as an entire meeting as we are led to live out our testimonies through decisions about the use of our time, talent, and material resources. As we move into a new era with immense political, social, and environmental challenges, we are continually seeking the Light and discerning our individual and corporate roles as to how we will let our lives speak.

Sandy Lyon, Clerk

Jacksonville Friends Spiritual State of the Meeting – 2016 Report

February 5, 2017

Attendees: Mike Shell, Wendy Clarissa Geiger, Amanda Nelson, Willie Hager, Al Geiger, Elaine Martin, Stacy (visitor)

The following paraphrases and compiles testimony of different Friends.

Worship, Experiencing God's Presence

- I enjoy the silence, even if there is a totally silent meeting with no vocal ministry. I can't answer query about experiencing God's presence: I don't feel a push to put into words what I experience in meeting but it seems to be a benefit for me.
- Sometimes it takes the whole worship hour for me to center down. I think that's because we are centering down together, communally. We may find ourselves waiting for those who have a harder time centering. I only feel I am letting others down if I don't come to meeting with heart and mind prepared.

Ideas come or are enhanced in meeting. Because we worship in stillness, it's hard to analyze how mystical we are, but sometimes several might be pondering the same thing, with one sometimes giving another's message. It would be useful for us to take some time after worship to share what we experienced during worship; that would help us to connect even more.

Worshipping together is not so much about getting to know and love each other. It's just about coming and accepting each other as we are. When I was a child and teenager sitting in meeting, I used to watch each face and fell in love with the faces. I love this world. It has a lot to do with forgiveness.

- Meeting is a place to center myself. The world is always swirling and spinning. Since I am energy-sensitive, sitting in silence helps me feel the collective energy of others, and this inspires me. I have experienced personal growth due to this.
- I am nourished and comforted by worship. I do feel a sense of the spirit with us.
- Sometimes just sitting in silence is a good release. This was my first meeting, and I found stillness hard to do. I kept checking my smart phone. But I want to learn.
- I enjoyed finding peace by walking in through the Florida Christian Center garden before this meeting.
- Despite 30 years of Quaker worship, I can do silence, but I have great difficulty with stillness. I stay too stuck in the verbal. I'm very grateful for what others have shared, their witness to the value of simple stillness as nourishment.

Spiritual Growth

- Meeting has grown exponentially in the Light this past year, despite our numbers not changing much. Light has gone out into the community, affecting others through our service, just as Jesus invited us to do.
- Meeting is small, but those who attend are very committed to meeting. We have an active newsletter and website, and we do various outreach activities, such as our peace and social concerns activism and the conscientious objector presentation Al and Willie did at Koinonia Farm <https://www.koinoniafarm.org/>.

We occasionally provide hospitality, and we are nourished by and have nourished Friends who visit.

Support for Each Other

- Meeting has been very small this past year, with several people unable to attend due to illness jobs, etc. We could do more to reach out to them. Even in worship, I feel I have "tentacles" out to them.
- We are a small group, but we are increasing in life, love, and concern for those who cannot be with us.
- I am concerned for isolated Friends who cannot join us for various reasons. I would like to see us make practical ministry to them a focus for this year. How can we carry meeting to them?

Meeting Business

- We are doing well with our business meetings despite our small size. We have committed people.

Witness in Community

- I feel such joy in watching Elaine and Willie indulge in social justice work as an outreach of meeting. Heidi is another who does outreach, taking her stepfather to his church. When I cannot attend, I sit in silence and join from afar.

A year ago, our SEYM secretary acknowledged not having time to connect with each other yearly meetings. I wrote to different Quaker organizations asking how to help this process. Until now, Friends General Conference has tended to be very top-down, communicating between headquarters in Philadelphia and yearly meetings. However, General Secretary Barry Crossno wrote me recently that fostering connections between yearly meetings is now on the FGC agenda to move forward in its work.

- Meeting is a great source in reconciliation, bringing the spiritual and activism together. Friends should take energy from meeting, knowing that we have an impact in the country through our actions, not just through marches and flags.
- Community involvement is very important for us. Meeting provides us the grounding for this. I feel very much supported in my own work. I feel the Light is with us.

Submitted by

Mike Shell, Meeting Clerk

2/20/2017

Quaker Meeting of Melbourne

Spiritual State of the Meeting 2016

Members and attenders of Quaker Meeting of Melbourne discussed the Spiritual State of our Meeting during our Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business on February 26th.

Friends perceived the following about our Spiritual state:

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

We continue to 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 has continued to participate with the Prison Visitation and Support organization by visiting monthly with individuals incarcerated at the federal penitentiary at Coleman, Florida.

Friend Jean and Friend Susan have led our Meeting in establishing a Community Forum to be held on First Day afternoon on February 19th at the main library in Melbourne. Everyone is welcome to share their thoughts and suggestions for the future forums with a mindfulness toward six aspirations: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship of Earth.

Friend Don and others attended the Annual Mosque open house at the Islamic Society of Brevard County (for good food and casual conversation) on Saturday afternoon, February 25th.

Other Friends and attenders of our Meeting are also lead to be active in various outreach efforts in our community.

We continue to welcome visitors from the Melbourne area and we cherish visits to our Meeting from Friends and others from across America and overseas.

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

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

Miami Friends Meeting Spiritual State of The Meeting 2016

Prologue

2016 was an active year in the spiritual life of this Meeting. We offer this report as a reflective document that seeks to state where we are at the present from a spiritual perspective. This reflection will include instances where we feel that we have done our best to further the creation of a Beloved community, and it will also highlight areas where we think we can do better in achieving the same.

We are a faith community that is led to frequently ask questions of itself. Therefore, this report will follow in the time-honored Quaker practice of presenting queries.

1. Is the vocal ministry in our meetings exercised under the leading of the Spirit?

Last year there was concern that our post-worship announcements were taking an excessive amount of time and were hindering the overall worship environment. In an effort to create a more spirit-led environment and to leave more time for fellowship, the Meeting was asked that announcements be channeled through a member of Worship and Ministry. We decided that requests for joys and sorrows and the closing of the Meeting for Worship would be handled each Sunday by a W&M committee member. We also asked that joys and sorrows be given while we were still within worship.

The implementation of the new format created conflict in the Meeting. It was a good idea but the implementation was confusing for many people. Membership, Care and Counsel committee brought this to the attention of W&M, and what was discussed at a joint meeting led to a retreat on communication, facilitated by Cece Yocum. The Meeting also decided to hold regular meetings for learning on Quaker faith and practice. In retrospect, the workshop opened us to a renewed respect for taking the time to share and to listen to each other before moving ahead, even with a good idea.

2. Are meetings for business held in the spirit of meetings for worship?

This is topic that our Meeting has wrestled with as of late. Business meetings sometimes feel like secular meetings instead of what they are: meetings for worship with a concern for business. Recently, we have discussed ways of making our meetings for business more like a meeting for worship, through encouraging all present to speak only once on a given matter, and to leave a space of silence after someone has spoken.

3. How do we foster a spirit of community among the meeting's members and attenders?

With home and hospital visits, phone calls, and cards, we have continued to do our best to attend to the needs of Friends who have mobility issues and other challenges. We also work with people who want clearness and/or or support around important decisions in their lives, such as a marriage or membership.

Each member of the Ministry, Care, and Counsel committee tries to stay in touch with his/her care list that includes a portion of the local and out-of-town members as well as frequent attenders. Committee members are then in a position to alert our full committee about situations where people need and have requested help.

To facilitate communication among members and attenders, we have updated information about the members and frequent attenders and about the changed committee membership. We initiated a revised updated edition of the Meeting Directory and distributed it to the members and attenders.

To help people care for each other, we have been posting (in the weekly email newsletter) the names of people who have asked to be held in the Light. A few interested members and attenders who cannot access email have requested hard copies of the newsletter be mailed to them.

We are grateful to the people in the wider Meeting who are supporting members and attenders. Some caregivers both in and out of our committee give so much of themselves that we are considering thinking through strategies for preventing burnout and supporting the caregivers.

Though the number of children present at each First Day School varies from week to week, there has been a focus towards creating community, cooperation and collaboration rather than competition amongst the youth. We have a good children's library and good spaces for indoor and outdoor sessions. We want to draw in more children and young adults. We also need other people in our Meeting to work with the children.

To create opportunities for building community, we provide refreshments at the rise of meeting. We also make a point of greeting newcomers and people who return to Meeting. We have continued with our monthly eating meeting.

4. *How do Friends meet our responsibilities to the community and world?*

To nurture our community and to reach out to others, we have been taking many different approaches.

In the spring the Outreach committee took over the Meeting's weekly newsletter. Every week we have been sending out an email newsletter with information and photos to members and attenders and other interested people in the community. We've had a positive response.

We worked with the Internet committee to start a new website hosted by FGC's Quaker Cloud. There are still some issues with the website, but we are working them out. We also used Facebook to outreach to the Meeting and to the outside world. We created Facebook events to advertise Meeting events, such as the FCNL workshops. We avoid sharing sensitive material on social media.

We did some networking with local organizations that we will grow in the future. One example was creating a connection with the Tropical Audubon Society around our mutual concern for the health of the earth.

Eduardo Diaz is co-clerk of MCCJ, an interfaith clergy organization. At his invitation, MCCJ has been holding its meetings at our Meeting House. This aligns with our values regarding working collaboratively and respectfully with people from different faith communities.

In connection with these values, an outgrowth of last year's Miami International Bookfair is a connection with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Miami. At the Muslim Community's invitation, women from our Meeting attended a couple of program at their mosque. We plan to reciprocate.

We are bringing forward our concern for having a habitable Earth for our children and grandchildren, and the generations after them, and of having this concern higher in our awareness as pressing, and as urgent and as in need of constant productive attention.

Increasingly, we feel called to hear and observe more, to reflect more in group worship, and to seek leadings, such as opposing the Sabal Trail pipeline project. Questions arise: What is our way forward? What actions do we discern as necessary and timely now? When do we see it as crucial to act? Who will provide the informed leadership? Why are so many in our larger culture somehow not as concerned? How do we share our leadings outside the Meeting House? In line with this concern, in recent weeks the Peace and Social Concerns has been holding Meetings for Learning on topics related to the care of the Earth. We created a Minute in support of the Protectors of the Water at Standing Rock. One of our members made two visits to Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

Several members of our meeting are active in social justice and earth care work at the Yearly Meeting and national levels. This exposure to the practices and concerns of Quakers elsewhere has enriched the

breadth and depth of our meeting's own faith and practice. We are learning how to be more effective lobbyists through our involvement with FCNL and are becoming more engaged with immigrant concerns through our relationship with AFSC.

Epilogue

Though our meeting has worked diligently to maintain and improve our overall spiritual state during the year through providing more of a structure to the tail end of the meeting for worship, the reaction that followed proved that we need to communicate better as a community. We are striving to make the business meetings more of a continuation of the worship meetings that they follow. Our members and attenders are clearly led by their faith and the convictions it creates to branch out into the wider world and put these beliefs into practice. As we step into a new year, it behooves us all to look at the following simple suggestion as we aim for a stronger sense of spirituality, more enriched daily lives with our loved ones, and ultimately a better world around us:

"The first step to peace is to stand still in the Light..."

George Fox, 1653

Orlando Monthly Meeting

State of the Meeting Report for 2016

Query #11: How does love manifest itself in our meeting, in our communities and in the world?

As the year opened, many members and attenders continued to meet in the Spiritual Formation Groups begun in 2015. They completed their reading of "Listening Spirituality" together and in some cases moved on to share and respond to additional texts. The existence of these groups has nurtured caring communication within our meeting and helped us get to know each other better. Our dedicated Hospitality committee makes this possible, too, through lively times of Fellowship together. Our carefully considered shift from Friday Night Friends gatherings to Fifth Sunday Intergenerational Potlucks has given us more extended time to converse and laugh freely with one another. We also consistently meet three times a month, after Fellowship time, for our "Conversations to Explore." These conversations are both gentle and lively and include a wide variety of topics. All of these times of coming together give us the opportunity to listen to each other and learn of each other's gifts and interests. This has made possible new openings such as the awarding of a meeting scholarship to attend Pendle Hill and the recognition of individual gifts and experience well-fitted to loving, enthusiastic service on a particular committee.

Early in the year our meeting renewed support of Friend Jerry Knutson's traveling ministry for the third year with the following minute approved 01/10/2016: "Orlando Monthly Meeting continues to take under its care Jerry Knutson's ministry in spirituality, discernment, Quakerism and Prisoner Visitation and Support." We gladly send him out from the heart of our meeting to the world beyond. He also continued to prepare his manuscript on discernment. This labor of seventeen years culminated in the publication of the manuscript as Pendle Hill Pamphlet #443 in February 2017.

In Sixth Month, our meeting responded rapidly with deep loving concern and practical help to uphold the many persons impacted directly and indirectly by the mass shootings at Pulse nightclub on 06/12/2016. We held a Meeting for Worship on 06/14/2016 in response to the event, which was attended by Friends and visitors alike. In addition, Friends in meetings throughout the United States and worldwide held worship concurrently in solidarity with Orlando. We opened Webster Cottage to Friend Jeremiah Gold-Hopton from Atlanta Meeting so he could serve multiple times peacefully protecting families from harassment during funeral and memorial services. In response to the Pulse shootings and our long held concerns with gun violence, our meeting also united in three minutes in Eighth Month 2016 to join the Florida Coalition Against Gun Violence, to co-sign the League of Women Voters action letter on gun violence originally dated 06/20/2016 and to encourage SEYM and its constituent monthly meetings to join Orlando Meeting in taking these steps.

Throughout the year, love has manifested itself in our meeting through our support of direct ministry to homeless neighbors through a Quaker Bible study group, participation in Worship and Fellowship, tangible help with practical needs, and guidance for life where it is mutually beneficial. Many in our meeting have worked patiently together on the details and dilemmas of this ministry and we continue to transform as we grow together.

During the summer and the fall of 2016, we reached out in love to those of other faiths in our community through active participation at events such as the Interfaith Council's series of talks on experiences of religious persecution held at the Holocaust Memorial Center and a community barbecue held at the Islamic Center of Orlando and attended by people of many faiths and backgrounds in solidarity with our Muslim neighbors. These outreach and interfaith efforts are ongoing and we continue to see new ways to support each other.

In Tenth Month 2016, members of meeting gathered with friends and family of Tom Ensign to remember him with love. Members of Care and Community visited with Tom and reached out to his family with loving concern for an extended period of time before his passing and this remembrance. The

members of our Care and Community Committee consistently remind us and inspire us to make ourselves more available to those among us and around us in need.

Tenth month was also the time when Young Friends participated in Trick or Treat for UNICEF raising funds for children experiencing the perilous journeys of refugees and migrants. Later in the year, Young Friends learned a number of ways to plant seeds of love, our youngest attender commenting on the “seed of good-heartedness” inside us.

In Eleventh Month, those in particular need of hope and a seed of good-heartedness found our doors open. We welcomed newcomers at that time and have seen some return for further worship and fellowship with us.

Over a number of years, culminating in 2016, the whole meeting has patiently and faithfully discerned way forward with our Incorporated Trustees on the meeting’s ownership and sale of the adjacent Cisney House property. Friends came together to seek clearness and unity in a loving and tender manner respectful of our human resources as well as with concern for our financial responsibilities both as fair and decent property owners and for future generations who may worship with Quakers of Orlando. The meeting feels deep gratitude for the many hours of work and careful examination of options provided by all who serve as our Incorporated Trustees.

Although committee meetings may seem unlikely venues for love, there has, in fact, been much love evident in much of our committee work whether in long-term committees such as Hospitality, Property and Worship and Ministry or in limited time committees such as Nominating and various clearness committees. Friends have sought to move past natural frustrations with each other as individuals and to listen more to the heart of each person’s concerns and contributions. Nominating Committee has been glad to listen to everyone willing to meet with the committee for wisdom and insight into how meeting might grow together. These insights have come from both experienced members of the meeting and persons more recently come to Orlando Meeting, one example being having a greeter at the door of our meeting house for a period of time before and just after the start of worship. Nominating Committee has also explored ways to simplify committee structure so the concerns of the meeting can be met without overburdening individual members. This is a work in progress.

The centrality of love in our meeting was, perhaps, best expressed in a message heard in worship recently on the importance of having a sense of belonging and the spiritual experience of community. The message concluded with the words:

“It is a community without edges and stretches to encompass the whole world.”

Query # 8 (modified): Are there places where the meeting is reaching for the Light?

As we lay down our concern for the care of Cisney House many of us in our meeting are aware of places within our meeting, our community and our world where we are reaching for the Light. We continue to grow in including, understanding, trusting and being tenderly present for each other.

- We seek this growth in active, Spirit-led committee work.
- We seek this growth in bridging the many inequalities and divergences present even in a loving Quaker community.
- We seek this growth in gathering the courage, energy and wisdom to bear witness to love and truth to our wider community and world.

We are aware of a need to center down, breathe and listen within for a time. It is important to us to avoid heedlessly scattering our energies and resources. Yet, we have some sense of urgency that our witness as Quakers is very timely and needed today. We hope to devote some time to a conversation on our vision for our meeting soon, but recognize that this needs some seasoning and new Light before we proceed.

-----With Love, Orlando Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Palm Beach Meeting

State of Meeting Report 2016

1. What nourishes us in our meeting? How can we better serve our spiritual needs and those of visitors? Have there been changes in the last year? Our being present nourishes each other, and some members feel a greater sense of spiritual depth in our meeting. In contrast to the past, there is less of a sense of inner/outer circles as numbers dwindle, and we depend on everyone to help. Our February retreat with Jennie Isbell was inspiring. The memorials of the last couple years have brought us together as a meeting and with the community, as we learned more of the person's life being celebrated. Our Spirit Matters table offers an opportunity for increased sharing. Quakerism 101 has become a way to keep grounded and learn more, good for everyone! We are considering a strategic planning session for 2017 in response to the loss of members. Others feel we need to stay in a place of positive thinking and proclaim: Our meeting is growing and we attract new people and donations! Despite our current size, one member reminded us that we do a lot and do keep open to how Spirit may lead us. We are interested in having more Meetings for Learning on the Testimonies and activities that bring us into community. We serve the needs of visitors by talking with them, being present, and sharing potluck, but are concerned about "pouncing on" in our zeal to grow the meeting. We are planning a Quaker Month in January, inviting the public, having topics of general interest in Meetings for Learning, and holding a forum on the last Sunday.

2. How does the spirit of worship extend into our committee work and into our Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business? Our trust of committees has increased, although with small numbers committees are usually somewhat informal. Adapting to circumstances, Property, Peace, and Outreach are now one committee and meet over lunch when it's possible for members to meet. We find that a liberal use of silence helps the business process, and over the years, we have become less accepting of rancor and disruption. Simple procedural changes have helped our business meetings, e.g., the clerk receiving written committee reports beforehand. All Friends present strive to have a clerking consciousness and remind ourselves that Business Meetings and Committee meetings include both us and Divine Presence.

3. Do we leave our meetings filled with a sense of love, peace, and courage to meet the challenges of Spirit-filled living? Some say if they miss Meeting for Worship, they don't feel centered during the week. Worship together makes us more peaceful as individuals and seems to work in our lives without our knowing it. In daily situations, we feel we can get centered more quickly and better respond to injustice or anger. Another said living a Quaker life is cumulative, a kind of alternative lifestyle. Someone asked if we also *come* to worship with a sense of love and peace. Belonging to a Quaker Meeting means we are responsible for our own spiritual lives, which can be a lot of work. We would like to be more involved in the community or world issues, finding a project to engage the entire meeting. Nancy Corindia's talk about FCNL inspired us to increase our advocacy work. We could improve our listening and better remember to speak up as we all age and our hearing isn't what it used to be. We have made several significant property improvements in the last few years, thanks to bequests from members, for which we are grateful, but we are conscious of seeking a balance between property and spiritual concerns.

St. Petersburg Monthly Meeting

State of the St. Petersburg Meeting of Religious Society of Friends,
History & Spiritual Reflection 2016

Celebrations

In 2016 our Meeting House rang with the laughter of toddlers and the remembrance of our long and faithful presence here in Florida. Throughout the winter and spring we housed the Waldorf play school for toddlers and their families run by a long-time attender. This attender then moved to the position of stateside assistant coordinator of ProNica in St. Petersburg and SEYM's development program in Nicaragua.

In April we celebrated our 75th Anniversary with a Playback Theater Storytelling Program to which we invited the wider Quaker network and all the neighbors around the Meeting House. The City Council of St. Petersburg issued a proclamation declaring April 24 to be Quaker History Day and over 100 people attended the party.

Sadly we also mourned with Jay Ortega Rand the death of his son Demetrius and celebrated his life in a beautiful memorial service. We also marked the passing of Sid Hudson, Becky Lippencott, and Jim Welch.

The Work of our committees has continued to sustain our sense of service to the Light and to the community.

- The Ministry and Worship Committee's Women's Group has continued to meet monthly with meaningful dialogue between women of color and white women in our Meeting. This has led to increased awareness of the institutionalized racism present in ourselves, our community, and our local schools and some members have started mentoring in predominately black schools and have become involved in a community task force focused on improving these failing schools. We desire to grow in our understanding of institutionalized racism and how white privilege influences the life of the Meeting. We discussed the book *Living our Testimony on Equality – A White Friend's Experience*. Worship and Ministry also initiated an ongoing monthly group to study SEYM Faith and Practice to deepen our understanding of Quaker testimonies and practices.
- The Finance Committee hired a new bookkeeper and changed the Meeting's fiscal year. Meeting agreed to begin funding the 146 Building Project and the Finance Committee opened a new checking account for that purpose. Signatories were changed on reserve and checking accounts. Committee members explored changing investment strategies for our money and reflected on the financial success of our first year without an on-site caretaker.

How we characterize our Meeting: We Are a Welcoming Meeting

- Over the last year our Meeting has welcomed 2 new members, Carol Strebige and Linda Morganstein, 8 new regular attenders, and has benefitted from their participation. We try to talk with each visitor, sit near them, invite them to introduce themselves, sign the guestbook, and join us in socializing after the rise of Meeting for Worship. We provide a snack buffet at the rise of the first two (and fifth if there is one) Meetings of the month, a lunch buffet on the Third First day before Meeting for Business and a Potluck on the 4th First Day.
- We ask our visitors to introduce themselves at the rise of Meeting and invite them to sign our guest book and leave an address, make an effort to speak with them after Meeting, and send them a handwritten note inviting them to return.
- Everyone is invited to the monthly Men's Group and Women's Group who share supper and then meet separately.

- Before Meeting for worship each First day we hold a 45 minute Adult First Day School. Participants discuss the queries, challenges in daily life, readings from Quaker history and thought and social issues such as politics, feminism and race relations.

We Embrace Diversity and Social Justice

- We have supported the LGBTQ community, HIV/AIDS awareness, and the St. Petersburg Pride Worship Service.
- During Interfaith week we hosted at our Meeting House a panel discussion with speakers from the Unitarian, Lutheran, Good Samaritan (Church of Christ/Presbyterian), and Ecumenical Catholic Churches. The focus was on how to make our faith communities more welcoming to the LGBTQ communities.
- We tabled with Peace materials at the Gay Pride Event Day.
- We have joined the Tampa Bay Interfaith Association.
- We continued our annual practice of participating in MLK Day Parade and supported the MLK Day Memorial service including leading a silent worship in the manner of Friends. We also partnered with MLK Day of Service Restocking Pantries Food Drive, facilitating a large donation of non-perishable food items by our Meeting.
- We hosted a fundraiser for the SOA Watch and Nogales AZ and Mexico border action.
- We wrote a letter of support to the Muslim community, and invited a local Imam to speak to us which was well attended. This is an ongoing effort.

We are building community among ourselves and with our neighbors

- We continued to be a polling place for elections and one of our members attended our local Old Southeast Neighborhood Association which held its meetings in our Meetinghouse.
- We participated in the neighborhood Garage Sale Day. We held a very successful garage sale which not only raised a lot of money but also brought us together as a community. We offered a bake sale and invited visitors to use our bathroom facilities and rest and visit on our porch.
- We continued our work with people without homes. Every Friday members of our Meeting join with the Unitarian Church to provide food, hygiene items and dry goods at the Friday night picnic for the Homeless. This year we bought canopies for the food tables.

We are working for peace and non-violence in the world

A hallmark of this year is our shift to a more outward facing focus, helping to coordinate community action and inviting community activists to organize in our Meetinghouse.

- In the beginning of the year we presented public videos: Michael Moore's film "Where to Invade Next" and participated in AVP Alternatives to Violence training. We continued to participate in weekly cornering for peace and justice and participated in peace actions sponsored by other groups.
- We gave donations to groups working for peace and justice.
- We collaborated with Mothers Demand Action for Common Sense Gun Reform, shared our table with them at the Gay Pride Event Day, and hosted a film advocating sensible gun laws at the Meeting House.
- We also joined other SEYM member meetings in minuting our support for the Florida Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence sponsored by the League of Women Voters.
- As the primaries and then the actual presidential campaign became more poisonous we came together to provide a sanctuary from the hate and bigotry being fomented and the attendant anxiety and fear it was generating. We were not always as successful as we would have wished.

- After the election many in Meeting were devastated. Several of us planned to protest in Washington at the Post Inauguration Women's March. Those of us who could not go were hoping for a parallel organizing effort in St. Petersburg from the local chapters of the major women's groups. When this did not materialize a winter attendee in a Meeting for Worship was led to speak of her commitment to initiate a Women's Solidarity March in St. Petersburg. Our Women's Group then supported her leading and some of us subsequently worked full time to organize the 25,000 who attended. Large organizational gatherings took place in our Meetinghouse where groups of volunteers made plans for the coming march. These groups continued to participate in actions that raised awareness and brought our Quaker perspective to the efforts.

We struggle to find Sense of the Meeting in our decision making

Over the past year we have had several ongoing projects that demanded weighty decisions and a great deal of seasoning to reach unity. In the following cases the conversation continues.

- Circus McGurkis: 2015 was our 44th Circus McGurkis. After careful discernment of a recommendation from the Circus McGurkis committee the Meeting agreed to lay down our annual People's Fair in its present form for 2016. The Meeting discussed the possibility of reviving the event in the future without commercial vendors and with expanded community participation in its leadership, in a new location on private land not subject to required police presence, and with more young people from Meeting planning and running it. We are now hoping that the way will open.
- 146 Building Project: According to building professionals our vacant caretaker cottage is full of mold and has deteriorated. The Meeting is in unity that the building has to be demolished. Over the past 5 years, after careful discernment and research, we have decided to replace the building and have approved plans by an architect. Many decisions related to construction costs, use of the building, and commitment of the Meeting to build are still pending.
- Nomination of members to the Care and Counsel Committee: In the last year we have closely examined the issues of the duties and membership requirements of this committee.

Trips and work within our Meeting and with other Friends groups (SEYM, FGC and ProNica)

- Several Friends went to Nicaragua and were pleased to report that the Worship Group in Managua is well attended and vital. The two NGOs, ProNica and Jubilee (partners), continue to meet for worship together monthly.
- The Meeting continues to be well represented at Pendle Hill with one of our members who sits on its board and frequently visits.
- A delegation represented the Meeting at an FCNL Friends Committee on National Legislation's Lobbying Weekend in Washington D.C. and attended advocacy training there.

Is there some action you would like the meeting to take?

- The Ministry and Worship committee would like to bring John Calvi back to the Meeting for a regional seminar on healing and possibly Vanessa Julye to present a regional Meeting workshop on Racial Justice.
- It has been suggested that the Meeting hold several fundraising events in addition to the annual garage sale: possibly a Golf tournament or more sales of chairs like those we created and sold at SEYM this year.
- We need to commit to having some type of community-building event once a year that brings a well-known Quaker like Arthur Larrabee to do a weekend workshop.

Is there some direction you would like the meeting to take?

- That the Meeting develop a realistic outreach plan to attract young families with children who will attend a revived Children's First Day School.
- That all members become responsible for keeping the budget on track building in fundraising components to cover the expense of programs wherever possible.
- That all members take responsibility for sharing in the tasks of providing hospitality and maintaining the Meeting House.

What are your questions or hopes for the coming year?

- That our Meeting continue to grow in understanding and compassion for one another.
- That our Meeting continue to open its doors to the activism of our times.
- That we be a source of inspiration, nurturing empowerment and model community building among those who are being threatened and are suffering persecution.

Personal experiences of our Meeting

"I have not been at Meeting much since my fall in June but I have been so thankful and amazed at the large number of F/friends from the Meeting who have stepped up, time and again, to help [my husband] and me sort through and move out of our house and into our apartment. It was an overwhelming task for us in the face of all that was going on that made the move necessary. Again, I am deeply appreciative of being held in the Light all these months while I have been recovering and we have both been dealing with long-term chronic illness. I think it could be summarized: We support each other mentally, emotionally and physically in times of need."

"I think that this meeting is desperate to be engaged. It struggles to be relevant around issues that affect today's world: racism, sexism, living wage, etc. This may not be what everyone calls spirituality but I call spirituality being God's hands in the world."

"I think this report is too placid. It should reflect some of the heat and light of our discussions. We should acknowledge our disagreements and guard against the development of cliques."

"Right now we have birthed the Women's Movement and you feel the high energy reflected in Meeting. Look at the camaraderie around here — new people, old people, visitors and children — everyone is engaged! If we keep going it will cause our meeting's membership to swell."

"When I come to meeting I feel the spirit of love and concern for each other and the world."

"I feel the spirit of a caring community. I have always found that if you need someone to lean on you can find it here. The election has created a toxic climate in the world. Sometimes the political messages can put people off. We have to make sure that we are not just accepting of Buddhists and Taoists, we are accepting of Christians as well."

The 2017 Clerk's Reflection: This meeting has been in transition from a small, aging, Spirit-led group with a largely care-taking tranquility to a more boisterous energetic group led outward by Spirit. We are now moving together as a more diverse community, trying to accept the ideas of new attenders while integrating them into the way of Friends. Our generosity, integrity, kindness and loving forthrightness are being tested as we share our testimonies on a wider scale. We are truly blessed to be living in these interesting times.

Submitted by Lynn Carol Henderson, Clerk of the Meeting, February 2017

Sarasota Friends Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report - 2016

The Spiritual State of Sarasota Monthly Meeting continues to grow and be enhanced by those who worship with us and by the varied activities within the Meeting.

SMM approved the formation of the Venice Worship Group to accommodate those find it difficult to make the trek to Sarasota.

The new Clerk of the Meeting initiated a mid-week Meeting for Healing. Since the demographics of Sarasota Monthly Meeting are getting older, there are several of our older members who need to be held in the Healing Light. Additionally, this mid-week meeting has also become somewhat of a mid-week Meeting for Worship for several of those in attendance. In fact, one of the attendees had a mystical experience during one such meeting and has become much more devout in his faith as a Quaker.

The deepening sense of connection that many feel with Sarasota Monthly Meeting is manifested by their sense of duty to the meeting—be it in volunteering to do the work that had been done by commercial enterprises; jumping in and being of assistance when and where necessary; or by simply being available for others.

After many years of talking about it, our Memorial/Serenity Garden is becoming a reality. F/friends have eagerly donated their time, energies, resources, and talents to make the garden a reality. It is really starting to take shape with the installation of a bench and beautiful plantings. We are continuing in our efforts to realize our dream of having it become a place for the interment of the ashes of departed, who wish to remain a part of

SMM forever. In addition to this garden we also have a butterfly garden that was formerly the Young Friends garden. Unfortunately, our former Young Friends are no longer “young”, although we have a charming 6-year old young man who fits that category.

We have also erected a Peace Pole nearby that had been topped by a small sculpture inspired by Edward Hicks’ “Peaceable Kingdom”. Some of the birds, however, took exception to the sculpture and damaged it so severely that it had to be replaced with some actual rocks.

SMM’s interest in climate change continues. Two of our members attended the FWCC Gathering and participated in drafting the Friends’ recommendation for action on climate change, sharing their experiences of the process with the Meeting.

Our teens continued their long term support of The Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Fair Food Campaign. As part of the SEYM delegation, they attended the Toxic Prison Convergence, a program with a focus on prisons being built atop toxic waste dumps, and also attended a conference in Washington, DC as part of their work on climate change.

We had an enjoyable sing-along, prior to our annual Christmas Eve Meeting for Worship, that was well attended. This has given rise to the possibility of having other such activities, either in conjunction with holidays or, possibly, preceding some of our weekly Meetings for Worship. This is a work in progress.

One of our off-season attenders lost her mother, who lived locally last year and she felt much love and support during that trying time. Sitting in Meetings for Worship has been a powerful experience for many members of our worship community. The silence of worship has been a powerful experience and that silence has allowed persons to listen for solutions to concerns outside their own egos.

We feel a sadness when considering our older members whom we see less and less of as the years roll by. Our oldest member, at age 102, is an occasional attender; our next oldest member, also 102, is no longer living in the area; and our third oldest member, approaching 100, is not expected to be with us

much longer. Unfortunately, we lost one of our longtime members, Don Cumming, in December. He was unable to attend Meeting for Worship for the past year or so, but his spirit has remained with us.

On the bright side, we welcomed into membership David Poston as well as Amy MacDougall and her six year old son, Trey (mentioned above), as a Child Member. Trey has been a particularly bright Light for everyone. He and Martin Werner are the mainstays of our Quaker Bakers and their presence brings great joy to everyone in the meeting.

Overall, 2016 was good to Sarasota Monthly Meeting. We had our challenges but we met them with the love and understanding that only Quakerism can give and overcame them in a loving manner. We look forward to the coming year with great optimism and trust in the love and faith that we have in each other will allow us to grow and have an even better year.

Savannah Friends Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting, 2016

Savannah Friends continue to meet on the third floor of Trinity United Methodist Church, the mother church of American Methodism, located on scenic Telfair Square. First Day meeting for worship is at 11:00 AM in the large Museum Room, filled with relics and portraits from local Methodist history plus comfortable seating. You are welcome to join us in this historic setting, as visitors to Savannah do regularly.

A few of us perhaps feel ready for the museum, but we were lucky in 2016 to continue to attract some younger attenders, including couples with children. Our children's program is in Room 317, just down the hallway from the Museum Room, and is equipped with games, art materials, children's books, and other items suitable for a Quaker curriculum. Both Room 317 and the Museum Room are convenient to the bathrooms and elevator.

The year 2016 began on a highly spiritual note with a study group focused on Thomas R. Kelly's *A Testament of Devotion*, which Amazon.com describes as follows:

Since its first publication in 1941, *A Testament of Devotion*, by the renowned Quaker teacher Thomas Kelly, has been universally embraced as a truly enduring spiritual classic. Plainspoken and deeply inspirational, it gathers together five compelling essays that urge us to center our lives on God's presence, to find quiet and stillness within modern life, and to discover the deeply satisfying and lasting peace of the inner spiritual journey.

The study group, organized by young attender Doug Johnson, read and discussed the five essays one at a time, the discussions led by various members of the group and ranging widely from the Bible to Brother Lawrence, the Metaphysical poets, Thomas Merton, and other religious writers, as well as personal experiences.

The spiritual state of our meeting was also enhanced by an active Worship and Ministry Committee, led by attender John Harris (who near the end of 2016 applied for membership) and Tracey Dolan (who has dual membership in our meeting and Valley Forge [Pa.] Meeting). During 2016 the committee facilitated such matters as the children's program, the start and rise of meeting, the greeting of visitors, refreshments after meeting, and religious education. Religious education, part of the first meeting for worship each month, included presentations on George Fox's journals, early Quaker history, and topics in FGC's Spiritual Deepening Program (e.g., "The Light, Seed, Christ Working in Us"). In addition, spinoffs of the committee were visioning sessions held in the homes of some members/attenders. The committee is already making plans into 2018.

These activities made up somewhat for a hiatus in the meeting's book group caused by medical problems and summer travel. The book group was revived at the end of the year by Sarah Schenkman and her husband Terry Moore, who hosted a potluck supper and discussion of Michael Perry's *Population 485: Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren at a Time*. The book group continued into 2017 with an assignment for individuals to read a short story by Flannery O'Connor and lead a discussion of it, again at the home of Sarah and Terry.

In other activities, members of our meeting recruited and organized the first FCNL advocacy team in Georgia. The Savannah-area advocacy team has an ecumenical makeup; besides Quakers, it includes a member of Trinity Church, a minister originally from Jamaica, and a retired parole officer (no known religious affiliation). The team received training face-to-face and by telephone from FCNL personnel, then in November made its first lobbying visit to Congressman Earl L. "Buddy" Carter (GA, 1st District) at his Savannah office to advocate for criminal justice reform, specifically three bipartisan bills in Congress. The team spent almost an hour with the congressman and his field representative, both of whom listened carefully. It's hard to know how effective the advocacy was, but the team got

experience and made some necessary political contacts. As 2016 ended, the team was trying to recruit more members, write letters to editors, and expand political contacts while it trained by phone for FCNL's 2017 focus: advocacy against military spending.

In 2016 Savannah Friends Meeting and individual members/attenders continued to be involved in the community and elsewhere. The meeting made financial donations to WRUU Savannah Soundings (a community radio with which Doug Johnson is involved), Trinity Church's Christmas breakfast for the homeless, SEGA School for vulnerable girls in Tanzania, and Savannah's Wesley Community Center. Some members/attenders also volunteered to serve at the Christmas breakfast. Mary Alpern and Doug Johnson published letters in *The Savannah Morning News*, and Mary Alpern planned Savannah's Women's March (a sister to the one in Washington). Meanwhile, Stacey and Christopher Lazurek were confirmed to succeed Sandy and Harold Branam as SEYM's representatives on the Corporation of American Friends Service Committee.

Finally, I thank the other officers of the meeting for being such a solid crew and for correcting me when necessary: Assistant Clerk Tracey Dolan, Treasurer Sarah Schenkman, and Recording Clerk Liz Dykes.

Compiled by Harold Branam, clerk, with input from others.

Tallahassee Friends Meeting Spiritual State of Meeting 2016

Community has been the most common thread for the meeting throughout 2016. This has been especially true since the unsettling, violent, and contentious events in the wider world during last summer and fall. Several new attenders, having felt the need for a nurturing environment, see the meeting as a place where the discouraged can find community. Our witness in the local community appears to seekers to offer this “refuge,” a place of sanctuary.

Other Friends expressed the importance of feeling connected in a community in the face of aging. Getting together for activities in addition to worship is even more meaningful since the national election. It has crystallized a longing for deeper (and more regular) connections like a mid-week meeting for worship. “Even though I don’t have spiritual experiences,” a Friend stated, “I find community and deep connection here. This is my spiritual home.” Feelings were also expressed that we all can grow in our own ways here and are glad this meeting is here for us. There is an openness in the meeting to different ways of being in the world, it is a framework of strong loving arms of support.

Many Friends are personally enriched by the testimonies and others enjoy participating in outdoor work and balancing nature with human work on the meetinghouse grounds. The clean-up of yard debris after hurricane Hermine led to a fulfilling gathering that included lunch together and a cordial meeting with neighbors. We discussed the future of the many large older trees on the meeting grounds and the need to consider safety as well as sustainability of our hillside gardens.

Others appreciate the tolerance and openness of theology expressed in meeting, as well as the belief that the individual is in a state of spiritual evolution. They appreciate the discipline and traditions of Quakerism that support spiritual growth and compassion for others. In the spring, we had a 6-week book study-group focused on *A Sustainable Life: Quaker Faith and Practice in the Renewal of Creation*. This was followed by a well-attended mini-retreat with the author of the book, Doug Gwyn, who helped us expand on what we were studying about the past and future of Quakerism.

We are remembering two elder attenders and one member who passed away this year. We want to continue to hold in the Light the gifts they brought to meeting and miss their Light as well as their presence among us.

We have welcomed two new members this past year as well as one transfer from Savannah Monthly Meeting. Our transfer member remarks that he appreciated his warm welcome and felt he “fit in like a puzzle piece.”

Others Friends have felt supported in social activism by members and strengthened through worship. We have two young adult members who are part of the FCNL Advocacy Corps to learn about and experience lobbying. They regularly keep the meeting informed on high priority issues and help us understand their complexities. We have also had a representative to the local homeless services organization. Our clerk was a guest panelist last spring at a FSU student-sponsored interfaith forum on human sexuality. We are happy to be involved and have more local visibility. There has also been renewed interest in reestablishing the Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP) training that was sparked by two members attending the training at Jacksonville Meeting.

Our prison visitation volunteers at Marianna Federal Correctional Institute had been inactive in the past year due of changes in administrative procedures but now are restarting. Our meeting was also enriched by the presentation and information brought back by members who traveled last December 2015 to Nicaragua. They were part of a “witness tour” offered by the ProNica organization that partners with Nicaraguan social support groups like Casa Materna and services for children and women. As a result of the tour, the members made presentations to our meeting and to SEYM Friends.

Our only regret is that meeting currently has no regularly attending young children for the first time in many years. We have a concern that we find ways to welcome and support young families.

Tampa Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

2016 Spiritual State of the Meeting Report

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?

Beginning committee meetings with worship and returning to worship to center down or hold concerns are good practices. Clerk begins Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business with quotes that reflect the purpose of the Meeting, that center and guide us, and remind us of our beliefs; this serves us well. We are of like mind and it shows in our approach to decisions. We consistently listen for God and to each other which helps us reach the sense of the Meeting. Intense listening and thoughtful sharing works for our Quaker process. We have faith in our practice. We are intentional about how we enter into the process which enables us to be open to the Spirit working in the Meeting community. We are grateful that we learn this process and adhere to it. The process helps us to be open to our "position" on a topic being changed and not hold on to our personal agenda, which allows for listening and for God's Truth to be revealed. Our best efforts are being made to trust in the wisdom of a group / committee regardless of the outcome.

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?

The new building seems to call a deeper Spirit of worship out of us; the Spirit is alive and tangible. Friends look forward to coming to Meeting for Worship. The arrangement of the seating in the room engenders a deeper recognition of the Divine Presence, is conducive to the sense of community, and has brought forth feelings of peace and serenity. The sense of the Meeting is a reminder to treat those with whom we live and work with love. The Meeting and beliefs shared here help in difficult work, especially challenges of the week in a secular environment. Being at Meeting gives strength to do what needs to be done in order to "answer that of God in everyone" in daily life. The perspective of Quaker witness / testimony helps in the wider world. There is the knowledge in our community that a spirit of competition or animosity does not exist among us. The open house celebration brought forth a tangible witness to who we are and a more concrete understanding of our Meeting community. The Spirit is with us in Tampa and with Quakers in general, evident in seeing and hearing Friends who came to the open house.

How has our Meeting given witness to love within our Meeting, in our communities, and in our world?

Our work extends beyond the job description through the Quaker values we espouse. This is at work within the Quaker world as well as without. In all that we do, we witness to the Quaker testimonies. Our community, beliefs, and worship help us extend love as witness. Pastoral care in Meeting happens organically in addition to the committee responsible for it. Collectively, as a Meeting, we witness to the local and global community by the building of the new Meeting house, but the hope is that we would grow in community involvement now that the building is finished. Many Tampa Friends are involved in the wider Quaker world through their work in FCNL, RSWR, Friends Peace Teams, and as Earthcare Field Secretary. Tampa Friends contribute their gifts to work within Yearly Meeting as well as through ministries such as teaching, end-of-life care for animals and assisting the family with that transition, and ministering to the broken hearts and minds of clients. The Spiritual Formation Groups still continue to influence and deepen connection and spiritual practice / awareness. The value of community is enriching when we hear about the involvement of others and events; even if we cannot always attend or join in, we feel a part of that joy. There has been community outreach and in-reach

through Friendly Dinners, different performances of the various talents in the Meeting, and inviting people to share our space (ie. AA).

What other reflections do we have on the current condition of the Meeting: new life, joys, concerns, sorrows?

There is a desire for more Adult First Day School on a regular basis. Friends have the sense of needing more spiritual grounding to get through the current climate of hate, anger, and sorrow and to be prepared for challenging times. We need to be strong for us and strong for others. We need to learn how to deal with the idea of welcoming all to the table even those we'd rather not sit near, and work out how we can bring love to those situations. We seek to build a foundation for our efforts to face the fears and difficulties by standing in the shoes of Jesus as our model in "caring for the least of these" as well as relying on the inspiration of early Friends as the cloud of witnesses among us. We must dig into the ground of our Quaker Worship and testimonies rather than give in to despair. Our desire is to work toward love of our neighbor even when they hate and hurt ourselves or others. We find joy as new people come to our Meeting and grow more involved in the life of the Meeting.

Winter Park Monthly Meeting State of the Meeting 2016

WPMM continues to shrink but we have a core of caring people who believe strongly in the meeting and care and nurture each other. Our meeting had to leave our place of worship and find a new home. We have found a wonderful library at Winter Park Christian Church. We have a sitting room area with a large conference table for potlucks. It is quiet, peaceful and lovely. We hope that friends will come join us for worship.