

# Southeastern Yearly Meeting

*of the Religious Society of Friends*

## Spiritual State of the Meeting Reports

for the calendar year

# 2020

“The Quaker Meeting is meant to be a blessed community---a living testimony to a social order that embodies God’s peace, justice, love, compassion, and joy, and is an example and invitation to a better way of life. Like our other testimonies, community can be a prophetic call to the rest of society.

*SEYM Faith & Practice, p. 76*

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# Clearwater Monthly Meeting

## 2020 Spiritual State of the Meeting

During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've been unable to gather in person since early March 2020. Needless to say, this has been a real challenge to our physical, mental and spiritual lives in ways that we've perhaps not experienced before. We are grateful for video conferencing, specifically Zoom, that we have been using since March . . . and very grateful for those members who have made it their ministry to host the Zoom meetings. Via Zoom, we are able to safely have meetings for worship, meetings for worship with attention to business, committee meetings, worship sharings, meetings for learning and other gatherings.

This platform addresses our safety, yet leaves so much to be desired. Our physical disconnection has had an effect on our spiritual connection. We gather, we open ourselves to the Spirit, yet the difficulties with this distanced form of worship are profound and challenge our comprehension of the effect of this new medium.

The difficulties are not entirely disheartening. We keep gathering, we keep maintaining our connections. A member of meeting sends out our QuakerNews electronically every Saturday to a large list of members, attenders and other friends. The members and attenders of meeting have been placed 'in the care of' one of the five Ministry and Counsel committee members. Phone and email contact is regularly made to check in with one another. Our Clearwater Friends Meeting directory is electronically distributed, so Friends can stay in contact. We are delighted to see who may pop up on the screen each week; those from nearby, from afar, youngsters, newer friends. We miss those who are discomforted by or experiencing the weariness of Zoom.

Rather than one or more Zoom meetings, we offered via email and electronic newsletter three queries to Clearwater Friends. These queries and their few responses follow. *The change in font represents a different contributor:*

Has a personal revelation come forward during this past year that has been of particular importance to your spiritual grounding during the chaos and dis-ease of the past year?

I have very much taken on the slogan of "Building Back Better" as it has to do with the physical and perhaps political structure of our country once the pandemic is behind us. I like to think of Friend's slogan for 2021 as "Growing Stronger in the Light" as we recover individually and collectively from the pandemic caused by Covid19.

Yes, powerfully so, thanks to a year of study that includes the writings of Howard Thurman, John Woolman, and the contemporary writer Resmaa Menakem as well as courses from the Center for Action & Contemplation relating to St. Francis of Assisi and Mary Magdalene. I work with the sense of needing to stand "two levels down" from surface, wanting to bring honesty, empathy and intelligent understanding to my own and our culture's deeply embedded sexism, racism and the denial and angers associated with those seemingly intractable conditions.

I've learned to move towards grief rather than anxiety. I have something to work with and through in the feelings of grief. There is no there there with anxiousness. I can't work with it or through it. It's a generalized feeling that doesn't offer resolution. Grief offers compassion, understanding and healing. This personal revelation has been especially important to me during this past year of chaos.

How have you connected and broadened relationships with Quakers near and far this past year?

I was struck by the query about connecting near and far. In this past year of pandemic and mayhem, I closed my business and uprooted myself to a new location. I was led to seek out Friends even though I had not really been involved with Meeting for a number of years. I was thrilled to find a meeting that had physically been meeting a mile from my new home. I was able to make contact via zoom before my move and felt such an authentic welcome. It was so comforting to think I already had Friends waiting in my new home.

I believe that we have seen a closeness of spirit among Friends across the country and the world that has grown from the inability to meet in person. Many Clearwater Friends Members and Attenders are involved in the greater Quaker community as they seek out and participate in workshops, meetings for worship, worship sharing, Social Quaker gatherings, yes even business meeting opportunities as practiced by and with not just other Friends and Quaker organizations but other organizations and friends of faith who share our values wherever they may be on the globe.

We began 2020 with and the last big gathering many of us attended in the last 12 months sponsoring a presentation on human trafficking which we coordinated with Faith United Church of Christ in Dunedin. It was heartwarming to know that FaithUCC has again turned to us to cosponsor another program this year in support of the Immokalee Workers. Other Friends are building these relationships in our community as they remain active in non-quaker non-faith based organizations with values consistent with ours.

We experienced the largest number of Clearwater Friends (and totally) participating in the Friends Committee on National Legislation Annual Meeting in November which would not have happened if not for the technology that has been able to allow us to not just hear but see one another. Many are enjoying the daily worship with Pendle Hill for example. For me personally, one of the joys of 2020 is being able to participate in Experiment with Light as first introduced to me and practiced with dear Friends at Lexington KY Friends Meeting. I look forward to the time once a month and know that other Clearwater Friends are happy for this opportunity.

Connections made by way of the Southeastern Yearly Meeting Spring gathering and the Friends General Conference summer gathering have brought me to weekly worship sharing with the FGC White Friends Confronting Racism and the group from Pacific Yearly Meeting.

What would you like to see the meeting embrace this year?

With this thought of "Growing Stronger in the Light" I would like to see us continue with our work on racial issues both inside and outside the Meeting, have continuing Meetings for Learning midweek as well as once a month, and a continued sharing among ourselves of issues that are important to us and the sharing of information to enlighten and bring messages of peace throughout our community. I believe the work we started with racial injustice is very important and that we follow this leading however long it takes so that CFM will be able to make a clear statement on our position of racial injustice and steps we feel will help us and our community come to greater understanding.

We need to continue our exploration of racism within ourselves and in the culture.



- **Migrant Farm Workers and the Immokalee Community.** The P&SCC has continued to keep informed and respond to the needs of the Immokalee community of migrant farm workers through four organizations: **Misión Peniel:** Due to the pandemic Misión Peniel has discontinued their collection and distribution of clothing and other essentials. We have given additional funds to support their increased need to distribute food. **Cultivate Abundance:** This group has had success getting fresh produce to the Immokalee farm worker community. They have also organized a community garden that encourages farm worker families to grow the foods that they prefer. **Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW):** We have responded to updates and requests for action from the CIW by signing their petitions and writing letters to state officials asking for additional testing, PPE and space where migrant farm workers with COVID-19 can isolate. **Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance (IFHA):** The IFHA has succeeded in purchasing property in Immokalee and is moving on to the next stage of preparing the property for the construction of a cooperative affordable housing community.
- **Responding to Police Violence:** After much research and many Zoom meetings, the P&SCC wrote a statement approved by the FMMM that they have shared with other Monthly Meetings, Quaker organizations, and other local congregations. They are currently working on how to put the statement into action.
- **And** lastly, we continue to support the work of Lee Interfaith for Empowerment (L.I.F.E.) with a financial investment, representation on their Board of Directors, and participation in their work to bring more affordable housing to Fort Myers.

At this point Fort Myers Monthly Meeting does not know what the future holds for us in terms of a meeting place. Leaving Iona House at the Calusa Nature Center, our “home” for over 30 years, was required due to the Corona virus. We are discerning whether to return to Iona House when it is safe, or to pursue our long-held hopes to discover or construct a healthy, sustainable, and earth friendly meeting space. To that end we are actively engaged in discussions and an exploratory capital campaign to enhance our long-established meetinghouse construction reserves. However, we do know and are grateful that no matter where we worship and do our work, by Zoom, or in small groups, or alone in our own homes, the faithful will be faithful, the silence will speak, and Spirit will be present.

# Gainesville Friends Meeting

## 2020 Spiritual State of the Meeting

Gainesville Friends meeting continues to weather the paradoxes of a world pandemic as we seek together to be the best community we can be.

As we learned to use technology to substitute for in person meetings, we found that Friends at a distance could attend regularly—from those in Jacksonville Worship group and members who must drive 45-60 minutes to the meeting house, to those who have moved to Washington state and Minnesota and Texas. At the same time, we missed Friends who feel technology removes important spiritual elements from worship, and those who don't feel they have the skills to use the technology.

As humans we feel the need to belong (for human connection), to be safe, to be heard, and to be well regarded. We need to feel trusted and to trust those in our community. Fulfilling these needs is part of our vision for the Beloved Community.

In navigating these needs during the pandemic, we discovered that members of our meeting have different levels of need for connection and safety.

Some Friends have felt drawn to worship together, informally, outdoors (masked and socially distanced), and some, at times, were prepared to meet in limited numbers indoors, tolerating the risk of COVID-19. Other Friends, more vulnerable, or risk averse, felt the need to ensure the physical safety of themselves, their families, friends, and communities by avoiding gatherings, tolerating the loss of personal contact.

In this pandemic, with so many unknowns, and in which at least half is spread by those with no symptoms . . . it is difficult to know how to stay safe. Many meeting members worked hard to research what was recommended to open the meetinghouse, to implement those measures, and to set up a protocol for this use of the meetinghouse. While awaiting for someone to step forward to be responsible for monitoring adherence to the protocol, the pandemic intensified, plans to meet inside were laid aside, and we started thinking about ways to have a hybrid meeting with Zoom and in-person worship combined.

We found during this difficult period, our ability to speak our truth, listen, hear, and be heard has been challenged by the unique circumstances of the pandemic, the needs it creates, including being apart from one another. Understandably, misunderstandings, friction, and conflict have occurred. Feelings were hurt — some individuals felt unheard, unappreciated, disregarded, or felt their concerns were discounted. We seek to see what Quaker process, deep listening, and love can do to strengthen our bonds in Beloved Community.

We have lost Friends to death: David Chalmers, Phil Haisley, Betty Odum, Tim Ray, and Hap Taylor, as well as family members and friends of Friends. We are saddened by these losses and feel gratitude for the efforts of those who have cared for the sick, and sympathy and concern for those who have carried their grief alone.

We feel gratitude to Connie Ray who has now moved to Pennsylvania for her contributions over the years to our community. We feel gratitude to Bonnie Zimmer who has just stood down from her clerkship for her contributions and for all the work she had done since joining our community.

We have sometimes been able to reach out to those in our community. We sometimes just feel tired and discouraged. Our Newsletter was revived with a focus on earth care and social justice, and provided an avenue for connection, a wide range of resources, and meeting updates. Ellie Clayton created a blog where she helps us share news, ideas, and feelings during this difficult time. A year ago, we decided that instead of supporting a family at Christmas, we would provide year round support to a struggling school, Williams Elementary. We agreed that in addition to providing funds for unmet needs, some Friends would volunteer at the school, seeking to have a relationship with the community we were supporting. At Christmas time we researched and provided for the School Pantry program at the school, but the school declined to participate in the program and we supported other minority dominated schools in our county with this program. We have missed opportunities to connect with the children, since volunteers have not been and are not currently allowed in the schools.

We have expanded our monthly Tuesday lunch to a weekly gathering and continue to explore ways to have Spiritual nurture online. We have missed the community building fellowship of post-worship lunches, bible study, forums, and themed dinners that we had been holding in the meetinghouse.

Our Building and Grounds Committee reached out so others were able to safely share the tasks usually handled on twice yearly workdays. The Pastoral Care Committee has worked diligently to keep in touch with Friends. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee, now combined with our Earthcare Committee, has met regularly with renewed focus on racism. The meeting as a whole has not been able to really tackle issues like racism and allyship of transpeople. Don Smith continues outreach by facilitating book discussions on racism and on interfaith relations. The first COVID-19 vaccination of a member in December brightened the end of our year.

# Miami Friends Meeting

## 2020 Spiritual State of the Meeting

Our meeting continues to be spiritually strong while facing worldly challenges. As of 12 April our meetinghouse has been closed for all gatherings of F/friends and also for eleven community groups. Since then all of our meetings have been virtual by teleconferencing. We do not yet have a detailed plan for reopening. We review the situation at each business meeting.

While the virtual Meetings for Worship are not the same as in person meetings, they support seeking Truth in silence, and they provide opportunities for spoken messages. Some non-resident members are regular participants, and we have had visits from former members now living at a distance. We have also had a few new visitors interested in learning about Quakerism. During Meetings for Worship, one of our members has been physically in the Meeting Room providing its view for the remote participants.

For 30 minutes before Meetings for Worship, we have informal discussions among Friends. Following Meetings for Worship, friends are invited, in turn, to briefly share news about their lives. Both sessions are helping Friends keep in touch with each other and provide support when needed.

We miss the shared hospitality and the opportunities to easily talk among smaller groups or one-to-one that happened before in person. Making connections, identifying with the culture of the Meeting, and coming to see oneself as a full participant are important. We get to be who we are in that cauldron of unstructured talk. In addition, we miss our members and attenders who have not participated in the virtual gatherings.

Our committees have switched to online meetings. This has enabled a few Friends who live out of the city and even out of the country, to serve on committees. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee has held meetings for learning about racism, farm workers, voting and covid vaccines. Because these sessions were online, Friends and others who live at a distance were able to participate. Our monthly Quaker Bible Reading meetings have continued online. We have developed a closer relationship with the AFSC through a new Meeting member, and the AFSC has expressed interest in expanding their office space in our Bartram House property. The Bilingual Cooperative Preschool has continued to operate in Bartram House.

We are also challenged by the departure of many of our active experienced elders to different parts of the country. More than half of our recorded members are now non-resident. While this hasn't directly disturbed the spiritual state of the remaining members who attend the virtual sessions it, combined with the effect of members and attenders who do not participate in the virtual sessions, and the lack of families with young children leaves us concerned about the future.

# Orlando Monthly Meeting

## 2020 Spiritual State of the Meeting Report

It is hard to recall the beginning of 2020 in many ways. Early in the year, our plans for “Visioning” were set aside as the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and we lived through experiences we had not envisioned. Yet we have held together the communal heart of our Meeting as a place where Friends and seekers can be and a place to which they can return, even though we have not met for Worship in our Meeting House since mid-March 2020.

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

Despite the physical distance between us for so much of this year, Spirit has moved powerfully among us in many ways.

For worshippers in Orlando Monthly Meeting and in the Worship Groups in Deland and St. Augustine our rapid establishment of online Worship and Fellowship each First Day since early April 2020 has been a very important opportunity for connection, challenge, and encouragement. Friends have been able to join Worship from nursing home rooms, from the parking lot of their workplace, and from several other states. It is easy to attribute this to present day technology, but it is Spirit that draws us to battle with the technology, set aside the time, and come to wait together in silence week after week.

Several of us were able to attend the FWCC World Quaker Day activities in Tenth Month 2020. Here we heard our Traveling Minister Jerry Knutson deliver a valuable explanation of unprogrammed worship to Friends around the globe who were only familiar with programmed worship led by a Quaker minister. Orlando Monthly Meeting continues to support Jerry’s traveling ministry as affirmed in the following minute.

**2020.12-07** Worship and Ministry serving as the anchor committee for Jerry Knutson's Traveling Ministry considered Jerry's report with gratitude and affirmation for how much faithful work he has been able to do, in new ways, under challenging circumstances. The report is a testament to the movement of Spirit in this time.

Concerns with racial equity and justice, governmental politics at the local, state, and federal level challenged many of us to greater witness this year, even while it was much harder to see a path to action during surges in Coronavirus cases and deaths. We were thankful for Friends who joined with other interfaith and humanitarian organizations in Central Florida to march in support of Black Lives Matter and against police brutality. We were thankful, too, for Friends who dedicated countless hours to ensuring a fair election with an outcome based on truth and integrity. Even while our Meeting could not host the LGBTQ+ groups and others who had enjoyed use of the Meeting House in 2019, Friends continued to learn and lead in connection to LGBTQ+ concerns, immigration concerns, fair and affordable housing issues, and other areas related to racial and economic equity and justice.

In the absence of in-person gatherings, our Recording Clerk and Communications Committee have played a vital role in sharing the life of the Meeting through our website and through our weekly Quaker Notes newsletter. Spirit is often evident in an inspiring “Reflection” in Quaker Notes. We are moved to journey beyond our own Zoom platform to the wider Quaker world by the opportunities and events shared each week in the newsletter. We have maintained an average

weekly attendance of 20 – 25 at Worship and a monthly attendance of 11 – 16 at our Worship with Attention to Business. When Friends cannot attend the Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, our Recording Clerk and Clerk of Communications have the Minutes posted to the website within 48 hours for all to follow the business of the Meeting.

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

During both the dramatic crises and the less obvious anxieties of this year, all of us have come to recognize our need for sharing sorrows and concerns. We have sustained each other through being held in the light and through emails, texts, calls, and more. Both long time members and newer attenders have felt the benefit of this care, whether it be prayers during a family member's hospitalization or a social media connection to "Valiant Together," the Quaker Religious Education Collaborative Facebook Group. It has been more important than ever to be listeners for each other, perhaps, to the grief of not meeting in person, or not feeling the presence of God via a screen, perhaps, to concerns shared in the OMM Men's Group, or perhaps, to fears and frustrations related to the political and social situations of our day. Through listening openly and deeply we have sometimes been able to see ways to offer practical economic help, connections to groups working on a shared political concern, or ways we need to continue to change and grow internally both as individuals and as a meeting.

We have also experienced shared joys and celebrated the new memberships of Linda Gurney, Jared Silvia, and Guillaume and Pierre Ivory. We have been thrilled that Zoom and our Meeting website have brought us new attenders, that young adults have taken on new roles in Meeting, and that we could enjoy porch and park visits where possible.

### **How have we used funds for the well-being of others?**

Our place of gathering, worship, and blessed community would not be possible without the wisdom and stewardship of those who walked this land before us, long before brick streets, sewer lines, and air-conditioning systems. We are grateful and humble in remembering the Timucua who made their homes here in Central Florida. In remembering them, we are growing in our awareness of the need to have an entirely different spiritual and practical relationship with both past and present indigenous people in all parts of the world.

We also acknowledge our debt of gratitude to the many Friends who established, nurtured and maintained Orlando Monthly Meeting for the many decades before our current members and attenders arrived to enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Today, thanks in part to the dedicated and skilled work of our Treasurer, our Trustees, and our Property Committee, Orlando Monthly Meeting finds it is in a position to support the well-being of others as well as continuing the physical presence in the Meeting House, which has now served Friends for nearly sixty-five years. While events and regular community group meetings ceased early in 2020, the Property Committee has continued work, replacing the roof, repairing leaks and replacing pipes so the Meeting House can be ready to open as soon as possible and serve Friends and the wider community again.

We were able to ensure no loss of business earnings for those who have cared for the Meeting Grounds, Meeting cleanliness and upkeep, and our First Day School children. We have been able

to provide help to Friends struggling with the economic effects of the pandemic. We restructured our Grants Committee to become the Social and Community Giving Committee with a more flexible program of guidelines and increased our Grants budget from \$20,000 to \$30,000 in 2020 with a budget line item for \$50,000 in 2021.

### **Where do we see new life emerging in our meeting or losses that we want to honor?**

Several young adults have started regular attendance at Worship and Fellowship via Zoom. They have expressed appreciation of the flexibility of the Zoom platform, been able to worship even with preschoolers nearby or while waiting to enter their workplace. It will be important to keep this option available even after we can return to full in person worship and to prepare for a new generation of First Day Schoolers. We have also seen a considerable strengthening of relationships between Friends in Orlando Monthly Meeting and Friends in Deland and St. Augustine as Zoom overcomes the mileage barrier.

We see more and more opportunities for constructive action through FCNL, and with the local Roundtable of the Florida Poor People's Campaign, and other local interfaith and humanist groups and institutions. While we may not yet see large obvious activism in our Meeting on issues such as race, gender, economic inequality, and environmental care, we do see a willingness to grow spiritually so that our witness comes from a change within, not from guilt, anxiety, or a desire to look good.

Although we have been able to reach out to almost all the seventy or so members and attenders in our meeting, there are some who are not served by a digital community and who do not find meaning in Zoom worship. We miss them and suspect that some of them miss Meeting. We continue to reach out and to hold them in the Light.

For many older, yet still fit Friends this has been a time of deep frustration at the conflicting responsibilities both to follow physical distancing and to pursue volunteerism and activism, both so urgently needed during 2020. We honor the loss of a year of face-to-face, people-to-people volunteering for many of us. We also honor the loss of the little sidebar conversations and the full Fellowship that can take place so easily among Friends as they come and go at the Meeting House. We eagerly await a return to that possibility.

## Palm Beach Monthly Meeting

### 2020 State of the Meeting Report

Palm Beach Meeting continues to be a presence of quiet worship and peaceful social action in South Florida. In the beginning of the year, we did much planning to hold a “How We Win” workshop with George Lakey, but the event was cancelled because of COVID 19. Our Meetinghouse has been closed through the year. We began holding weekly Zoom meetings for Worship, Learning and socializing, and have continued to do so. We have endeavored to keep our Community together by communicating through Zoom, email, phone and occasional limited physical contact with each other. We send out a weekly newsletter to over 200 people to inform them of virtual activities from a number of Quaker organizations, as well as local groups and events. We also maintain our website and Facebook page.

We have experienced some property issues, dealing with raccoons, who tore holes in our roof vents causing water damage to some ceiling tiles in the Worship Room and the Library; and some vandalism to our landscaping, apparently by teenagers. We have maintained our landscaping service for the front of our property once a month. We also formed an ad-hoc committee looking into the renovation of our kitchen space.

Our Meetings for Learning have continued weekly on Zoom. We are going page by page through the *SEYM Faith and Practice* discussing how the topics work in our personal lives, as well as in the life of the Meeting.

In our ministry to the Meeting and the community, we have been hampered by the Pandemic, but we support as best we can by aiding those in need on an individual basis. We have acquired new neighbors to the north and south, and have endeavored to create friendly relationships with them when we occasionally see them when we stop by the Meetinghouse to pick up the mail or do landscape work

We are looking forward to the end of isolation, when we can once again enjoy our Spiritual Community in person.

Submitted by Ellie Caldwell, Suzanne Stout, Eve Bailey, Sandra Heys, Jack McGregor, Barbara Letsch, Ministry Committee and John Palozzi, Interim Clerk of the Meeting

# St. Augustine Friends Worship Group

## 2020 Spiritual State of the Meeting

St. Augustine Friends Worship Group began meeting in January 2019, under the care of Orlando Monthly Meeting. For over a year, before we began social isolation due to the COVID pandemic, we met every Wednesday evening at 7:00 pm at The United Church (UCC-DOC) on U.S. 1 in Saint Augustine. Beginning in March 2020, our in-person weekly meetings moved to virtual Meetings for Worship on Zoom. We are still meeting via Zoom with no specific plans for restarting in-person meetings at this date.

Our Wednesday evening Meetings for Worship on Zoom have an average of 14 to 16 attendees, with a core group of around 11 who attend regularly and others who come less frequently but still on a regular basis. We continue to have a steady stream of “fellow seekers” who inquire about our meetings for worship.

Our Quaker discussion group, which takes place every other Sunday on Zoom, has contributed significantly to strengthening the sense of Community among Friends participating. We spent most of the first year reading and discussing one book, but have recently expanded to include discussions of articles and films.

**People find out about the St. Augustine Worship Group** in a variety of ways including our website at [staugustinequakers.org](http://staugustinequakers.org), our sign on the road at The United Church, our listing among Quaker meetings in Florida in *Friends Journal*, weekly email reminders to interested people, and word of mouth.

We have received considerable support from Orlando Monthly Meeting, with several Orlando members visiting regularly.

**On 25 February 2021, 15 regular attendees participated in our second annual “Year and A Day” celebration**, a special meeting for worship to review our second-year journey and plan for the future, and to consider the spiritual state of the meeting. We addressed three topics, listed below.

(1) What have we done well in this past year? What are our achievements? We continue to be pleased with the numbers attending our meetings for worship and at how our core group has both expanded and maintained its positive energy. Many people said that holding Meeting for Worship via Zoom was (unexpectedly) a positive experience. People joined us who otherwise would not have been able to. We attracted new attendees from both in and outside of the Saint Augustine area. Even with the inability to meet in person, there was a strong consensus that we grew closer and deeper as a community. Even once we are able to meet again in person, we may want to keep this venue open for those who are unable to physically attend meeting.

(2) Where have we fallen short, as individuals or as a group (relative to our own expectations)? One participant said that they did not feel fed by Meeting for Worship via Zoom; this individual and others said they look forward to meeting in person.

(3) What is the spiritual state of our meeting (guided by queries on this topic)? Here are representative responses from participants. The warmth and love emanating from our Worship Group draws people in to a deep spiritual experience. People experienced more hope here than from any other part of their life. This Worship Group is a safe place to be tender and that creates opportunity for deeper and stronger silent worship.

In summary, the Saint Augustine Friends Worship Group has continued its growth for a second year and maintained focus and enthusiasm in its core group. As we look forward to a relaxation of pandemic-induced social isolation, we hope to restart meeting in person. We will also explore in what ways we can continue to use Zoom (or similar technology) to support participants who are more comfortable with that way of connecting. We want to continue warmly welcoming those who seek us out and nurturing the closeness and trust among us that leads to a deepening experience of worship together.

Submitted February 28, 2021  
by Christine Stinson, on behalf of  
St. Augustine Friends Worship Group

# St. Petersburg Monthly Meeting

## 2020 Spiritual State of the Meeting

This has been a remarkable year of giving support and nurturance to those within our Meeting and beyond. This came in several forms: inviting people to partake in meaningful options via Zoom; reaching out, individually, to those in our community who have not been able to be on Zoom, and to those who are isolated and/or dealing with illness or family/friends with Covid.

The meeting worked tirelessly and patiently with those who weren't up to speed with the technology required to gather virtually and have grown closer as a community as well as spiritually because of it. As we move into 2021, we are keenly aware of the necessity that we continue to reach out to each other with intention, patience, and compassion. We are also aware that some folks joined us *because* we were on zoom. They were a distance away; the zoom meeting allowed us to get to know each other.

Certainly we have deeply missed meeting for worship and committee meetings in person and informal fellowship time; we miss physically connecting with hugs, and eating together. Yet, in meeting online for the last 9 ½ months of 2020, we have become more appreciative of each other and our community, and found ways to be more supportive of each other in growing spiritually. We have occasion before and after worship for 'check-in' time. Our Adult First Day School is a time of open sharing, not unlike worship sharing, with one week each month devoted to Quaker history. When we started meeting online, we added a mid-week zoom, which alternates between worship sharing and discussion. We also have a Men's Group that meets weekly, and the Women's Group meets twice monthly. Some of us participated in cornering groups for the Black Lives Matter movement. Our Clerk sent out a weekly message. Our Assistant Clerk, representing our Meeting on the Faith Leaders of Pinellas County Committee, met monthly with the police chief and participated in the monthly prayer vigil at our police station.

We know we need to do more meaningful outreach into the community, not because we need more, younger members (which we do), but because the Quaker faith is an amazing gift -- one that people need and one that we need to share!

It feels very much as if, instead of being fear-driven this year, we ended up being love-drawn. We created a new committee on giving, and are reaching further into the community with funds for homeless services and food banks.

And we certainly found hope with each other in many ways: by reaching out, by carefully meeting in person and social distancing, in worshipping with Friends via Zoom, by spending time together in new ways which made us feel less isolated, in music and the written word, in Quaker history lessons and worship sharing, by walking and being in nature. We found hope "in our ignorance" and bringing truth into the Light. And all of this helped us in getting back to the basics of our Quaker beliefs.

# Tallahassee Monthly Meeting

## 2020 Spiritual State of the Meeting

Tallahassee Monthly Meeting held a well-attended Zoom worship sharing on the Spiritual State of our Meeting in response to the queries at the bottom of this report. A summary of our rich sharing follows:

In general, during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic with physical separation from each other, we have felt God's movement among us, bringing us to center with a sense of Beloved Community becoming whole through transformation in a number of ways. We have been given time to go spiritually inward and follow through with what arises.

Almost all of our gatherings have been by Zoom and we have felt the surprise of Zoom meeting for worship being "especially nurturing" for some of us with the deeper silence and "resonance with the stream of messages, especially as they awaken deeper trust in the Divine." It has "felt like a 'field' is set up around us and around the Meeting; we are a center group of a vortex and with all others." There was a sense of dryness at the beginning of the pandemic when we did not meet, followed by delight after we came back together. A few of us have felt dissatisfied with the quality of meeting for worship and vocal ministry prior to, and during, the pandemic.

We have felt the connection of seeing Friends' faces on the screen or a voice over the phone. It has been a gift having Friends from afar worship with us, along with new and former young adult seekers and other Friends who had been unable to worship with us in person. Some of us have enjoyed looking more deeply into the experience of vocal ministry and want to learn more. We have "very much missed in our meetings the subtle and important input of body language in communicating messages and ministry." It has been more difficult to resolve conflicts without being physically present with each other.

Meetings for worship with attention to business have felt harder with Zoom. Sometimes there has been a sense of beloved community, and without that, the meetings have been "arid." They lacked that same sense of a spiritual force field that rises so powerfully in meeting for worship. It has been more trying for the recording clerk with lack of instant feedback on the accuracy of recording.

Our consciousness of being in community has been raised, and spiritual growth deepened, in part, through our deep, collaborative committee work. At other times, we have experienced creative tension during committee meetings, including sadly at times, hurt feelings. We have sought to improve communication with one another. An attender expressed appreciation for the Meeting's openness to recognizing the realities of racism and "the unique blend of internal spiritual seeking and action in the community." Another remarked on his experience over the years "of what a rich spiritual life is like." Someone else expressed the power of our touching in briefly with everyone after worship and the sense of intimacy that brings. She expressed the hope that that continue in some way when we meet in person.

We have had, and continue to have, strong differences of opinion over some Meeting actions. We began exploration of, and felt the creative tension of, the relationship between Spiritual leadings and political action. People are welcome to attend our Meeting, regardless of their political views. A Friend expressed gratitude "for the more challenging part of building community where there is

difference in perspective, dealing with people who act in love and determination to do God's work and make mistakes and recover in love." We joyfully welcomed in attendance a seasoned Quaker couple from Miami Meeting upon their recent move to Tallahassee.

Zoom has diminished our community as well: We mourn the presence of Friends who no longer attend because Zoom meetings do not speak to their condition, though enjoy maintaining contact with them in other ways. We miss the natural discussions before and after meeting. There is a limitation for those who don't have visual connections.

Sadly, a deeply loved Black young adult Friend who grew up in our mainly White Meeting stopped attending because of his experience of White supremacy culture within our Meeting. We sorely miss him. We thank him deeply for sharing his experience with us. Listening to him, in addition to our awareness of the continual dehumanization of Black, Indigenous and other People of Color in the United States, stunned us into fuller knowledge of the continuing need to look, without blame, within ourselves and within our Meeting for implicit biases and other unexamined barriers that contribute to our complicity with White culture. We are open to where Spirit leads us in doing away with White supremacy. Our BLACK LIVES MATTER sign in front of our meetinghouse is not enough. We have put up two signs, the second one large and sturdy, constructed by two meeting members. Both signs have been removed, the second one, very recently, by someone in the wider Tallahassee community. We prayerfully sit with our response. Friends in our Ad Hoc Antiracism Committee created a well-attended five week, interactive Zoom course, "Study-Pray-Act," and they will continue to provide leadership for our antiracism learning and action in the coming months. Participation in this offering has been central, life-changing and community-building. We are mindful of the intersectionality with racism of homophobia, transphobia, sexism, (dis)ablism, ageism, gender identity discrimination, classism, patriarchy and others and are seeking to find ways to be more visibly welcoming and embracing of all seekers.

Our Climate Action Group has energized our community and brought us together for planet healing through tree planting and further attention to our grounds, planning environmentally friendly changes to our meetinghouse, and ongoing learning. We rejoiced that a contractor repaired our hurricane damaged back building. A Meeting member has faithfully represented us through his attendance at the Tallahassee Green Faith Alliance.

We have struggled with our outreach as a body beyond our Meeting, which has concerned some Friends. We participated in our annual Christmas gift support to residents of Hilltop, a residential mental health facility in Madison. We have also continued with our Meeting representation on the Tallahassee Community Remembrance Project in association with the Equal Justice Initiative.

We have prayerfully supported individual Friends in their faithful, caring outreach: as a nurse on a COVID-19 unit at a local hospital, as one who set up a maskmaking effort- finding and coordinating mask makers and providing supplies; as a mask maker, as a poll watcher and as a deputy during the November election, as a Guardian-ad-Litem volunteer, as a volunteer to our neighborhood public school, as an officer in Moms Demand Action for Gun Safety, as a neighborhood gardener in Frenchtown (a mainly minority community) and pancake breakfast helper at a community center, and a young adult attender with the Quaker Voluntary Service program in Portland, Oregon. We aspire to "revolutionarily loving outreach" as a body in the future.

We value what we have learned and would like to incorporate those things, including virtual connecting, after we return to meeting in person, moving forward in new ways. We have held each other and the rest of the world in prayer, or the Light. We have felt fear and horror over Covid 19 and had an openness to the fear in a world of turmoil. We are grateful for awareness of the sustaining “bedrock we stand on” and for Friends.

Trusting in the Spirit, with love,

Susan Taylor, clerk, Worship and Ministry, Care and Counsel Committee for the Committee  
With many thanks to all TMM Friends and faithful notetakers: Mia Shargel and Neil Andersen

### Queries

1. In what ways has meeting for worship nurtured my spiritual growth? What has been a challenge for me in meeting for worship?
2. What am I seeking when I enter into the life of Tallahassee Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (TMM)? What have I found so far? What else do I want to know or experience?
3. In what ways have meeting for worship with attention to business, committee participation, and other meeting activities both nurtured and challenged my spiritual growth?
4. In what ways has the pandemic affected my Spiritual life? In what ways, if any, have I responded to that? What has been the result?
5. In what ways have I experienced TMM as a beloved community? What have I found missing? Where have I felt the Spirit moving?
  - In what ways do I see that we could deepen our support for one another?
  - In what ways have we supported our Youth in the life of our Meeting?
  - In what ways might we deepen our support for our Youth within our community?
6. What was our meeting’s witness to the wider community in the last year?
7. Other?

Submitted January 17, 2021