

Southeastern Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

Spiritual State of the Meeting Reports

for the calendar year

2021

“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 Friends Meeting

2021 Spiritual State of the Meeting

Our conversation regarding the spiritual state of the meeting focused on the following queries offered by Southeastern Yearly Meeting:

1. How do we support each other as members of this beloved community?
14. What has already and would nourish you in our meeting?
17. What would we like meeting to be to meet our needs and needs of those who would attend Meeting?

The COVID-19 pandemic has not allowed us to meet regularly for worship in person and has also greatly restricted our visiting each other's homes. Our emailed weekly Quaker News bulletin has been of great service as a source of information on events, dates, times, who is in need, other organizations Quaker and non-Quaker, pertinent videos and sometimes just some whimsy to keep us having fun. Although virtual meetings lack the intimacy, and opportunities for interaction that physical meetings provide, they have kept us together, introduced new faces, and allowed us to remain in touch with each other. Without Zoom many of us would have been unable to meet during the past year. The informal exchanges that occur before meeting begins and after rise of meeting, provide an important means of exchanging information and ideas and in revealing who needs help and support.

For isolated Friends, our virtual meetings and exchanges can be a highlight of their week. Our committees have also met virtually and the convenience and saving in travel means this will likely continue once the pandemic has subsided. Even with Zoom, some Friends are unable, or unwilling, to join in, either because they lack the equipment, or use it daily in their work. We miss them and the contributions they can make to our community.

Our ability to attend virtual gatherings elsewhere, such as SEYM, FGC, FCNL, and daily worship at Pendle Hill, has enlarged our opportunities to be nurtured by the greater Quaker community. We can actively participate in lobbying with Friends from other meetings, take part in plenary sessions and much smaller discussions in breakout rooms.

A new meeting space that we found during the last year may provide a base for our meeting to grow in strength and size. Hybrid meetings, where some Friends gather in person and others participate virtually, have helped. We've also enjoyed a couple of meetings in county parks, one when we hosted the SEYM Field Secretary for Earthcare, Beverly Ward, and the introduction of "The Friendlies," CFM's newly created musical ensemble who have kindly performed for us since. We have worked to renew and strengthen our contacts with neighboring faith communities through the Walk for Peace and helping to place a Peace Pole in Weaver Park, Dunedin.

We want to assemble physically each First Day, confident that the pandemic is no longer a threat. We miss the warmth and welcome of being together. We recognize and honor the differences in

each other even through Zoom, but wish we could have more opportunities for all to demonstrate these talents. We want to build on each other's strengths and share the joy of spirit and are looking for ways to do this in the future.

In looking at our challenges going forward, we are concerned at how we can speak truth to power and not be political in this current environment of so much cynicism expressed towards things we believe to be true. We are reminded that many of us came to Quakerism because we recognized that strength among these "people called Friends" who loudly and persistently called out against those who stood in the way of justice, while staying true to their testimonies. We recognize the need to speak truth to one another and hold each other in the Light in our daily living but look for more guidance "walking the walk and talking the talk."

We value the tenderness we show each other and share with others outside our community. This tenderness has manifested in ways that may often go unnoticed. We remember a Friend who reads over the phone to a sightless attender, many who invite new faces to their homes for a meal, those who give to favorite charities, animal shelters and homeless shelters, another who gladly is the storyteller for the community of children and adults.

Looking around to things that will shape our country and ourselves, we acknowledge concerns about political instability, ongoing contagions affecting our health, voting rights, human rights, equal rights, and climate change. These issues affect all of us. Regarding the effects of climate change, those living near the shorelines may need more immediate attention.

Submitted February 14, 2022
Douglas Woodward, Clerk Clearwater Friends Meeting

Deland Worship Group

2021 Spiritual State of the Meeting

The Deland Worship Group has had a varied history. First gathered in 1996, the group became a Preparatory Meeting a few years later only to be laid down in 2009. Recently, we have had a resurgence with a number of new attenders who have helped expand and deepen our Quaker experience and presence in the community despite the limitations COVID has imposed.

The Deland Worship Group continues to be under the care of Orlando Monthly Meeting (OMM). While OMM has not appointed a Visiting Committee for us, we are closely connected with them through membership, committee service, communication, and financial support for use of the Dreka Theater meeting space.

Our attendance has been between 10 - 15 each week during the past year since we started using the downtown Dreka Theatre space. We have implemented ZOOM meetings every Tuesday that often have more attenders than First Day worship. These mid-week gatherings have been used not only to share and deepen our personal spiritual journeys but also as outreach to our sister worship group in St. Augustine.

The lack of oversight by OMM has not been a serious impediment to our worship since we have many seasoned attenders with long Monthly and Yearly Meeting experience. We established two committees, the Education and Spiritual Growth Committee, and the Outreach and Events Committee. The first has worked to program our ZOOM meetings and monitor the quality of our in-person Quaker experience, while the second has helped create outreach in the Deland community with participation in local events and creating a Quaker identity through use of t-shirts and banners.

Our experience of having a booth at the Deland Annual Fall Festival of the Arts revealed that there is potential for productive outreach in terms of expanding our attendance.

Going forward, we are looking to expanding our involvement in local events through programs like the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP).

Fort Myers Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends 2021 Spiritual State of the Meeting

Resilience of our Meeting and our faith reflects most deeply the Spiritual State of our Meeting. In these challenging times, hope grounds us, and Spirit guides us.

In Meeting for Worship, messages began to reflect the anxieties of the current turbulent political atmosphere and the disquiet of Covid. Still, members have commented at times on their sense of Divine Presence among us or the feeling of a covered Meeting. Aware of a shift in vocal ministry, Ministry and Counsel worked with the Religious Education committee to present programs to renew our focus on more Spirit-guided ministry. In the spring a presentation on ministry was held using the pamphlet *On Vocal Ministry* by Barry Crossno and J. Brent Bill. In the fall, another presentation on silence, using the book *Holy Silence* by J. Brent Bill began the Religious Education's series on Quakerism 101.

The prolonged pandemic and on-going consideration for the health of our aging population have awakened a concern for staying connected to each other and to the larger community in which we live. We have become more flexible and creative in ways to achieve this. We are grateful for the use of a member's private property to hold outdoor Meetings for those who feel comfortable gathering in person, offering both FirstDay and midweek Meetings. Monthly potlucks have begun at the same location, bringing back a much-needed sense of the old norm of fellowship. Zoom continues as the alternative for those who cannot attend in person. Hybrid worship, thanks to the technological wonder of the Owl video conferencing app, allows us to blend both in-person and on-line worship groups, avoiding the sense of two Meetings. A social time prior to Meeting for worship through the hybrid format needs further fine tuning but offers the possibility of more fellowship and interaction. And we cannot forget the benefits, sometimes unforeseen, that this forced hybrid has brought. First, our attendance in both Zoom and in-person have remained stable throughout the year. New attendees have found us because of the technology. We have even gained a new member who began worship through Zoom. Members who live out of state for part of the year or who reside far away and those with health issues that prevent travel have been able to join us. Committee work and one spiritual formation group continue, in great part, because of Zoom.

Regardless of our method for coming together for worship, our loving support for each other holds us tight. We try to keep in contact with members, to identify needs for care and support, and to extend financial assistance as we can. We recognize gifts of members, offering help with discernment through clearness committees and encouraging them to pursue leadings. Our Religious Education committee encourages interactions among us through learning opportunities to keep us in touch with our Quaker roots or to enlighten us on the foundations of others' spiritual paths.

That same loving support reaches out into our community. We contribute more both financially and with our time than our small numbers might predict. We support community and Quaker organizations which make a positive impact on issues of justice, environment, equity, and more in the world. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee's work included:

- This year, we continued to educate ourselves about racial and economic justice. We recommended books, videos, and actions to the Meeting, and held thoughtful discussions with others in the Meeting on these topics. For instance, in conjunction with Religious Education, we hosted a discussion of the book *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo.

- With help from Bobbie Trice of FCNL, we learned how to hold discussions with legislators and their aides who may not agree with our positions, and how to write letters to the editor that persuade with personal stories rather than arguments.
- After the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, we wrote a “Statement in the Light of Recent Public Violence” that affirms Quaker conscience in the face of injustice.
- We supported charitable and activist organizations whose clients live in poverty, including farm workers in Immokalee. These organizations include the Harry Chapin Food Bank, and four organizations in Immokalee: the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Misión Peniel, Cultivate Abundance and the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance.
- We worked to ensure a strong Quaker presence at meetings of Lee Interfaith For Empowerment (L.I.F.E.), who are working on affordable housing and mental health this year.
- In September, we participated in the Annual Southwest Florida Peace Day event, held at Wa-Ke-Hatchee Park in Fort Myers.
- We distributed bilingual flyers developed by the Pine Island Pandemic Task Force (headed by member Jim Koopman) to local food banks, encouraging residents to get vaccinated.
- We recommended that The Fort Myers Monthly Meeting approve the signing of the CIW Faith Leaders’ Letter following the death of Nicolas Morales, a mentally ill farmworker. The letter, with signatures from the local Faith community (including Fort Myers Quakers) was presented to the Collier County Sheriff at a rally.
- Following a hurricane that devastated the Louisiana area, the P&SC Committee sent \$1000 we had budgeted for “Needs that May Arise” to Baton Rouge Friends Meeting to use at their discretion. They passed our donation to a family that had lost everything in the hurricane.
- In October and November P&SC members began consideration of a request from SEYM to write letters to legislators to protest proposed Florida legislation hurtful to transgender youth and their doctors.
- We are currently looking at a request to join a network of anti-death penalty organizations, and another that would shut down the Glades County Immigrant Detention Center, which has been cited for abusive practices.

Perhaps the biggest challenge and on-going uncertainty has been finding unity about where we may worship as an entire group again. For some time, Friends have been considering the need to find a better place to worship and build community. With the renewal of our lease coming up in 2022 and with the advent of Covid, the search took on more importance. Covid forced us to recognize that the Calusa Nature Center, the place we have gathered for more than 30 years, was no longer a place that could meet the challenges of a clean, safe environment for us to worship in the long term.

That led to consideration of a new place to meet which led to consideration of building our own Meeting House. We are appreciative of the groups and subgroups working to find a solution. We are also grateful for the generous, anonymous donation to fund a Meeting House if that is the direction we ultimately take.

This, along with a fund begun years ago for this purpose, will help keep us fiscally sound so that we may continue to do Quakerly work within and outside of our Quaker community. The process has not always been easy, and at times, some felt there was not a clear discernment or unity in the decisions before us. Still, we have tried to remain loving and faithful in our search for understanding of what is spirit-led and what is best for our faith community as we move forward.

This year has reaffirmed lessons of sorrow and joy and faith. We experienced a deep loss in March with the passing of Dudley Fennell, a longtime, wise member of FortMyers Monthly Meeting. We also witnessed new seekers finding their way to our Meeting, including a few children whose presence, though rare, is always a delight. We were humbled with the announcement by SEYM that a member of our small Meeting, Nancy Fennell, would be the speaker for the 2022 Michener Lecture. Above all, this year has taught us with certainty that our faith is not place-based but driven wherever we are by expectant waiting for ever-present Spirit to lead us.

Approved by Friends on 9 First Month 2022
Helen Fox, Recording Clerk

Gainesville Monthly Meeting

2021 Spiritual State of the Meeting

Gainesville Monthly Meeting is blessed with a worship space in the woods with benches provided by Bud and Sybil Brennen and maintained by Bill Mitchell. They were used twice a year for our regular worship session before Covid-19 arrived and have become the regular site for any informal worship group of our members and long-time attenders. Our Zoom Worship works well for many of us and is especially important to those who live at a distance and/or have health concerns that make it prudent for them to avoid from in-person worship. We have a greeter coordinator for our zoom worship and greeters are encouraged to share a poem, quote, or, in one case, play harp music as part of our centering down. Our zoom worship this year has been rich.

In our quest to foster Blessed Community, the Earthcare/Peace and Social Concerns Committee hosted two workshops in Compassionate Nonviolent Communication, to further develop our skills to listen and speak without violence, and to deepen our connection to the Spirit and one another.

Our meeting faces challenges and choices balancing needs for safety and needs for connection in this pandemic time. We upgraded the ventilation in the meetinghouse to make it safer in a time of pandemic respiratory illness. We have developed guidelines based on risk levels for when and how meeting in-person in the meetinghouse might occur with reasonable safety. We are in the process of developing the capability for hybrid worship and have a version with audio connection and have hopes that getting an OWL to add visual connection will increase participation in our meeting for business.

Throughout the year, smaller groups have met for work in the meeting lot, for walks in nature, or lunches outdoors that have helped maintain connection. Many people in the meeting have reached out to others with phone calls and birthday cards. Our corresponding secretary has a list of those willing to share their birthdays, and emails them monthly to members, attenders and those who are no longer living nearby. Some of us gather on Zoom for Tuesday lunch and fellowship, which occasionally is focused on a special topic. Mid-week meeting has become a meeting for learning how to become an anti-racist as individuals and as a faith community. Those of us currently participating welcome others to join us.

Quaker Meeting of Melbourne

Spiritual State of the Meeting 2021

2021 was a difficult year for our meeting. This year we weathered the loss through death of one of our dear members, Susan Freedman, as well as various personal challenges facing nearly every member and attender of meeting, from serious illnesses to family crises. It is a joy to have endured and persisted in the face of adversity.

Restrictions due to the ongoing COVID pandemic sharply impacted our ability to gather in person for most of the year, although we were able to meet in person outdoors at a nearby park for socially distanced worship for first days this summer and fall. The subsidence of infection rates allowed the Friendship Fellowship at Pineda, the local Unitarian church whose coffee house we had been using to meet weekly, to reopen their campus for in person worship toward the end of the year, and many Friends took advantage of that opportunity with a hybrid in-person meeting straddling inside and outside to allow social distancing for those who required it. Those unable for meet in person have continued our practice of meeting in the Spirit from our own homes at our regular time for in person meeting for worship on First Days at 10:30 am.

We have continued to meet virtually through the year for Monthly Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business on the first First Day of the month, and for a monthly worship sharing preceded by “coffee hour” for visiting and socializing on third Wednesday evenings. Through these practices, we’ve continued to experience the strange paradox of deepening of friendships and relationships despite the lack of in person gathering. This format has also allowed participation by Friends scattered across multiple states, with attendees some weeks from California, New Mexico, North Carolina, and multiple locations within Florida.

We have also continued our weekly book group via Zoom; this year our reading list has included *Walking in the World as a Friend* by Nadine Clare Hoover, *Materiality as Resistance* by Walter Brueggeman, *Time on Two Crosses: the Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, and *Living The Quaker Way: Timeless Wisdom for a Better Life Today*, by Philip Gulley. We are currently reading *Primitive Christianity Revived*, William Penn’s book translated into modern English by Paul Buckley, in preparation for taking up Buckley’s book, *Primitive Quakerism Revived: Living as Friends in the Twenty-First Century*.

The increased virtual nature of the meeting has continued to support an increased ability to share the housekeeping tasks of the meeting among several Friends, since these tasks are completed remotely no matter who undertakes them. This has been particularly helpful this year as Friends have been able to shift responsibilities when needed. Our presiding clerk Hope Ascher has been faithful in ongoing outreach to those in the meeting who cannot or do not wish to participate virtually as we work hard to remain connected with each other. We continue to strive for care of each other as an expressed measure of how God is working in the meeting. Barbara Deppner continues to serve as our treasurer. We have established a mailbox at a local mail receipt facility to facilitate distribution of hard copy mail. Melissa Hoagland has taken and distributed notes of meetings. Guy Hoagland has moderated most book club discussions with occasional guest hosting by other members of our community. Larry Ascher has served as our IT and virtual meeting wizard.

We remain a small meeting, but feel that given the current circumstances, being able to hold our numbers steady is a victory. We continue to strive to find ways to be a welcoming group by extending invitations to members of the Unitarian congregation and the broader community to join book discussion groups. In December we were blessed to be able to meet in person at Barbara Deppner’s home for a socially

distanced in person Christmas potluck, a longstanding annual event we had to forgo last year. Several members' children who grew up in our meeting were able to attend this year, an additional joy.

We have also continued to reach beyond our meeting to the wider community this past year with continued support of Brevard Schools Foundation, the Backpack Project (providing hunger relief to local children), and SEYM's Earthcare program. The meeting encourages members and attenders to act on individual leadings and explores those leadings which are corporate. Members and attenders have attended other meetings' virtual meetings for worship, virtual workshops and discussions on climate change and alternatives to violence, Pendle Hill workshops on the arts and spirituality and right relationships with indigenous people, earth care stewardship worship sharing by SEYM, and Friends' Association for Higher Education meetings.

Our goals and desires for the coming year include more interaction with other meetings, and with the wider local community as we seek to bear witness to the hope of Quaker testimonies. We would like to develop more visibility so that people can find us, through online and physical presence, with attention to visitors who may be unfamiliar with unprogrammed worship, and in that we feel we have achieved some measure of success as we've been able to welcome several new attenders over the course of the year. Our enrichment activities have been appreciated by members of our meeting, and we hope to expand these in the coming year as the world becomes ever more virtual.

Orlando Monthly Meeting

2021 Spiritual State of the Meeting

While 2021 was a tumultuous time in our community, Orlando Monthly Meeting has proven to be a spiritual oasis for our members and attenders and a support to our community. We have responded to the uncertainties of the pandemic by evolving how we hold meeting for worship, and by re-learning what it means to be gathered together in community. We have welcomed new members and attenders and continued to support the needs of our community through this difficult time. Deland Worship Group and St. Augustine Worship Group are under the care of Orlando Monthly Meeting. Both worship groups and Orlando Monthly Meeting are greatly enriched by our relationship.

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

The pandemic has given ample opportunity for our members and attenders to support each other and we have consistently done so. We accepted the need for, and willingly participated in remote worship for much of the year, even though some of us find it less nourishing than in person worship. When in person worship resumed as an option, we embraced the changes necessary to protect our more vulnerable participants.

Several new families with children have begun attending OMM in the past year, enriching our worship and enlivening our intergenerational community. Young Friends Group has resumed meeting in person, holding space for youth in the meeting to share their lives with one another and with adult volunteers, and explore spiritual topics together.

We have been active throughout the year watching for needs within our community and addressing them lovingly while maintaining the dignity of those who found themselves in need of assistance. We have found our members taking an increasing role in committee work, offering their diverse gifts to support OMM and its worship groups. Our embrace of technology has facilitated this, enabling those who live farther away from our meetinghouse to be more active participants in the life of the meeting. We actively encourage participants to share their concerns with the meeting so that the meeting can hold them in the Light. Some members maintain a practice of holding these concerns in the Light daily.

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

The pandemic has in some ways limited our outreach to the wider community. We are not currently offering our meetinghouse as a meeting space for community groups as we have in the past. With many of us no longer attending in person meeting for worship, our in kind donations to local groups have decreased as well.

We have been able to increase our outreach in other ways. During the pandemic we have substantially increased our monetary commitment to organizations that support our community as it deals with the pandemic.

We are actively considering our relationship to Native Americans, have approved a land acknowledgement, and have made supporting Native American groups and issues a part of our Social and Community Giving program.

We continue to offer financial support to various local groups that work with marginalized groups within our community, including groups dealing with immigration, LGBTQ+ issues, and those offering scholarships for minority students to attend college.

We have made our meeting house and grounds a weapon free zone, and have communicated that by placing signage prominently throughout our property.

We also continue to model responsible behavior designed to keep our community healthy, while respecting the choices of others and accommodating them to the degree we can do so responsibly.

How is God's presence being experienced in our meeting?

We began the year with Zoom only worship which many friends found to be a rich spiritual experience, though different from the type of experience experienced at in person worship. We have resumed an in person component to meeting for worship and now have a hybrid meeting with some members attending the meeting via Zoom and others attending the meeting in person.

While this hybrid meeting has occasionally suffered from technical issues that can be distracting, for the most part it allows for a good experience for both in person and remote attenders and allows the Spirit to be present among all of us.

Some friends have appreciated the convenience of online worship which eases the burdens of distance and transportation that can make attending meeting challenging. We have also enjoyed having friends who no longer live in the area join us for worship.

We experience the Spirit in the silence of our meeting for worship, in our vocal ministry and in the love and care the meeting expresses before, during and after meeting for worship. We also feel the Spirit moving among us when we gather for a meeting for worship with attention to business, guiding the meeting as we deal with the many new issues that have come up over the last year.

The Spirit also seems to be moving through the meeting and guiding us towards a more impactful witness within our community.

Do you have other reflections on the current condition of the meeting—places where you see new life emerging, loss or sadness that you want to share?

At the beginning of the pandemic we lost some attenders who didn't find that Zoom worship met their needs, but since we have started our hybrid meeting many of those attenders have returned and we have seen some new attenders as well.

Some new friends joined us first via Zoom and then moved onto in-person worship.

We have seen some younger families start participating in the life of the meeting bringing the welcome sounds of children's voices and a hopeful orientation towards the future.

We also welcome the broader participation of our young friends in the life and work of our meeting. In addition to playing a greater role in the management of our meeting through participation in committees, they are also nudging us to greater participation in our wider community.

How does love manifest itself in our meeting, in our communities and in the world?

Our meeting is rooted in love, for each other, for our neighbors, and for the world. There is a spirit of care and concern for each other that permeates all of the activities of the meeting.

There are disagreements of course, but there is always a concerted effort to handle them with tenderness, to remember that the disagreement is less important than our relationship, and to answer to that of God in each other. This can be seen not only in our meetings for worship, but also in our committee work, our social time and our meetings for business. None of us is perfect, but we are all perfectible.

It is clear that friends look after each other both inside and outside the structure of the meeting. Being active and proactive, and much of the meeting's care occurs informally among friends themselves. Our love for our community is demonstrated, not only in the activities of friends as they live and work within our community, but also in our corporate decisions to support organizations that do great work in our local community and throughout the world.

What has already and would nourish you in our meeting?

Religious education, for young friends and adult friends, would help new friends have a greater grounding in our tradition to guide them on their spiritual paths, and refresh more seasoned friends on their faith journeys as well.

Taking time to spiritually prepare for meeting for worship can increase the depth of our worship experience. The upheaval of COVID caused the loss of some of the 'transition' signals our meeting had that helped everyone know that it was time for worship. Reinstating those rituals or creating new ones would be helpful.

Taking greater part in interfaith activity would also be helpful. We did this to a significant degree pre-COVID and while we have kept it up to some degree during the pandemic, we haven't been able to do it as a meeting to the same level and this has been a loss to our meeting.

What would we like meeting to be to meet our needs and needs of those who would attend meeting?

We would like our meeting to:

- be more connected to faith groups and other organizations that share our Quaker values.
- be an open and welcoming place that benefits from the participation of friends with diverse backgrounds, abilities, ages and life experiences.
- be more actively connect to local communities of color and indigenous peoples.
- be accessible to all members of our community so that all can fully participate in the life of the meeting.
- deepen our spiritual grounding.
- create greater public awareness of our meeting and of Quakers in general.

In Closing

We are grateful for each other, for our meeting space, for the guidance of the Spirit, for the growing, changing, thriving life of the community and for the spark that it provides each of us to do good, to do

more, to reach out to the helpless and the hurting, and to take good care of one another as we foster the growth of our community and of the spirits of the individual members.

Palm Beach Monthly Meeting

2021 State of the Meeting Report

Palm Beach Meeting continues to persevere as a presence of Silent Worship and Peace in South Florida, despite the challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic. Our Meetinghouse has remained closed to the public throughout the year. We have maintained weekly Zoom meetings for Worship and socializing, and have added a monthly Meeting for Healing. 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.

This year we printed 50 copies of:

PALM BEACH MONTHLY MEETING OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS HISTORY
Part 1: 1955-1975, compiled by Jean Pusey Irwin; Part 2: 1976-2000, compiled by Ellie Caldwell

It is an 8x10 paperback book of 82 pages containing information gleaned from the Minutes of Monthly Business Meetings. It contains 47 photographs. One copy has been given to every Member and Attender and former Members. It was also made into a PDF file and posted on our website for anyone to read or download.

We have spent the year renovating our Meetinghouse and property. We have maintained our monthly landscaping service and employed them to do additional work, such as clearing overgrown areas, planting new plants and mulching. We accomplished a major renovation of our downstairs space, including new cabinets, sink, appliances and flooring. Some new furniture and other items were donated by members.

In our ministry to 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.

Our Trustees made sizeable monetary donations to several local organizations which help local people with food, clothing, child care and education. We have also continued to donate to other Quaker organizations financially.

Our Meeting experienced with an unfortunate situation involving the arrest and detainment of one of our long time Members. We communicated with SEYM and our Quaker and local community. We held a Meeting for Healing and individual Members have reached out and offered prayers and support to those concerned.

We also felt the loss of our Clerk, Sandra Heys, long time Attender, Pat Buchholtz, and Attender Angela Margolis this past year.

We are looking forward to the end of the Covid threat, when we can once again enjoy our Spiritual Community in person. To that end we are investigating setting up hybrid Meetings when we reopen to the public, to be more inclusive of those who cannot join with us physically.

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

Saint Petersburg Monthly Meeting

2021 Spiritual State of the Meeting

Our Meeting reflected a tremendous coming together in a spirit-led manner, despite the second year of pandemic conditions. Some of the actions and decisions reflecting spirit were as follows.

The establishment of a beautiful butterfly garden covering the full west side of our grounds, which replaced an old and dangerous children's playground. The fully established garden is a successful attraction for butterflies and the many of us humans who delight in this calming environment.

The establishment of a flourishing and inviting natural habitat encompassing the east side of our rather extensive grounds. Previously essentially unused, this inviting area is now used for committee meetings, informal gatherings and private contemplation. A new sliding glass door opens the area up for enjoyment from our Peace Room.

The transformation of the Peace Room, which previously housed ProNica, into a beautifully open and light-filled space. It serves as our office and will also house our rather extensive library, which is currently located in an uninviting room in the Meeting House.

Friends* receptivity to calls asking them to serve on various committees: From our nominating committee, "There is an abundance of experience for the Quaker process within the committee's membership. This gives us a feeling of the importance of our work to gather the other Meeting's committees together, since all committees are the foundation of our service to each other and the community."

Continuing social action and establishment of activities in support of increasing awareness around social issues: From our peace and social concerns committee, "We have joined with Friends from this and other meetings to support many actions and groups with our gifts of time, finances and commitment. These activities and involvements have included: FCNL annual meeting and the building of a Florida Advocacy Team.... The team shares information and has been persistent in reaching out to the staff of our Senators to promote peace. SOA Watch and Border Justice and continuing involvement with Ana Z., her children, and their efforts to gain security and stability as immigrants. Local demonstrations, petitions and canvassing for voting rights, racial justice, affordable housing, saving, and improving the postal service and electing an advocate for these justice issues to city council. Joined with the Association for the Study of African American Life and History in an outdoor viewing and discussion of *The Barbara Lee Story: Speaking Truth to Power*. Established a collection box for nonperishable foods, personal items and money to Day Star to help less fortunate neighbors in these times of rocketing housing and food costs."

Enhancement of our communication efforts: Like other Meetings, we experienced discouragement and heartache at some of the news and politics our nation experienced in 2021. Friends find hope, support and spiritual grounding in our Meeting and its various activities. Our weekly Friendly Reminder, which announces not only Quaker activities, but community and Zoom activities and opportunities, is significant in keeping us "sane" and spiritually grounded. <https://stpetersburgquakers.org> and mindthelight.org are useful to us and to those seeking information about us.

Improvements to the property: Many of the improvements have been described above and others include a new storage area adjacent to the Peace Room, beginning work on our kitchen renovation, needed repairs and establishment of a vegetable garden and composting area. We were delighted to have installed solar panels upon which we are now fully reliant--and exemplify living true to our spiritual values. Many of the panels were donated by a benefactor and others were paid for through

donations and our meeting budget. We have tested our well and installed a pump, which should be fully operational for watering the grounds early next year;

"A wolf in the henhouse:" We perceived a need for a coordinating mechanism for the various physical changes being undertaken. The Meeting clerk called a special meeting of all clerks whose committees were undertaking significant projects. It evolved that an underlying issue was deviation from Quaker process by several committees. Disagreements, grievances and hurt feelings were resultant. When we peered even more deeply into the proverbial "wolf," the basis of the issue was the now two-year-long pandemic and our not having understood how extra attention needed to be paid to Quaker process because we were not coming together as we had P.C. (pre covid). Recognition of the "wolf" led to changed behavior and, therefore, resolution.

Continued additional worship and ministry activities: Started in 2020, Worship and Ministry has been very visible during this time of virtual and hybrid meetings. It has added a Wider Quaker World class to Adult First Day School that has helped the Meeting get outside of itself. The committee has continued to host and facilitate other virtual discussion groups that have brought people together to discuss delicate issues that have drawn us closer. The committee has also contributed to the restart of in person gatherings at the Meetinghouse as the pandemic receded.

Despite the limitations and awkwardness of finding a balance between Zoom and in-person meetings, the important work of all our committees has continued in earnest. As with Friends in other parts of the nation, St. Petersburg Meeting has been sharing a journey of self-exploration. We have faced unexpected (and sometimes unwanted) technological changes that have come in this second year of COVID.

We recognize that the 21st Century has presented us with exciting opportunities that would seem like magic to our ancestors. We have been delighted to use Zoom to welcome Friends from our Lake Wales Worship Group as well as Friends in other far-flung regions of the country. In that regard technology has allowed us new and dynamic ways to connect with one another.

There is ongoing discernment about the use of so-called "hybrid meetings," which accommodate both Zoom and in-person attendance simultaneously. Several Friends feel that our Meetings for Learning and, even more importantly, our Meetings for Worship are not living up to our expectations of spiritual fellowship in these hybrid settings. Some Friends have stopped coming to Meeting entirely because they feel unable to worship with the distraction of the Zoom camera and attendees on screen. We remain hopeful that we will find Spirit led solutions that will allow us to continue to enjoy the camaraderie and spiritual fulfillment that have always been hallmarks of St. Petersburg Friends Meeting.

We continue to work together with other religious groups in the community. We are represented on Interfaith Faith Tampa Bay, Faith and Action for Strength Together (FAST), the monthly meeting of pastors with our Chief of Police, and the monthly pastors' prayer vigil at the St. Petersburg Police Station.

Our Meeting lost two persons to death, each of whom contributed much to the spiritual fabric of our Meeting. Carol ("Ahbi") Hudson chose her own death at age 92. It was very "Ahbi" for her to wait until she could cast her vote in what was a major election. Her keen intelligence and Buddhist wisdom remain remembered and appreciated. Jay Ortego Rand was a long time Quaker and was steeped in our process, history and practices. His rich singing voice was often received as a message, with his aptly chosen songs ringing throughout our Meetings for Worship. Ahbi and Jay are missed.

Message from the Meeting Clerk: "It has been a pleasure to serve as Clerk for 2020. I have grown spiritually and increased my understanding of Quaker process. I had been an attender or member of six

other Quaker meetings and so was not surprised at the outstanding energy and values of our small monthly meeting. I thank the Meeting for honoring me with this opportunity to serve.”

* ”Friends” is used to denote members and attenders.

Sarasota Monthly Meeting

2021 Spiritual State of the Meeting

Our cherished Meeting felt the impact of national and world events in 2021. Unprecedented political events and tensions surrounding the November 2020 presidential election led to thought and discussion about how we as Friends can contribute to reconciliation. Added to this was the worldwide impact of the new deadly virus Covid 19, which caused widespread fear, anxiety, and disruption of daily life as well as financial hardship for many. People were advised to self-isolate to avoid the spread of this disease. These chaotic times were unlike anything most people had experienced. In mid 2021, vaccines against Covid became widely available. Over the following months, much of the population gradually became vaccinated. However, due to the continual appearance of new viral strains, it has remained problematic for groups of people to meet.

Sarasota Friends Meeting felt the effects of these events. The meetinghouse was closed from March 2020 to May 2021. We learned to use an internet system to convene virtual Meetings for Worship. Eight to twelve Friends participated each Sunday, as compared with our past in-person Meetings of 15 to 20 people at the meetinghouse. For a time, we also held virtual midweek Meetings. These were laid down after six months due to low attendance. Because of Covid-related restrictions on travel, none of our seasonal Friends and attenders met with us in the winter of 2020-21. Our Meeting was already struggling with diminished attendance. Prior to the pandemic, active membership had decreased to nineteen Friends. Correspondingly, our budget for 2021 was half what it was in prior years, regrettably including our charitable contributions.

Mimi McAdoo, a foundational member of SMM, passed away on June 17, 2021. We honored her memory with a memorial meeting and a Minute of remembrance.

With smaller numbers, we continued our spiritual practices and maintained the traditional structure of a Monthly Meeting. Despite outreach to inactive Friends, it remained difficult to fill positions and maintain membership of the Meeting's committees. Our most active Friends participated in several meeting positions and committees. We tried to maintain our Meeting in the usual manner, offering adult education opportunities after Meeting for Worship and keeping a cheerful heart. There was no change in the sense of warmth and love among us. In some ways, the pandemic helped to bring us together and enabled us to make changes, such as meeting remotely, about which our Meeting previously could not reach unity.

We felt it especially important in these times to maintain communication with our absent and inactive members and regular attenders. To that end, willing Friends were given lists of non-attending Friends to reach out to for spiritual and loving connection. A different list was put together for all our members and regular attenders, matched in pairs as telephone partners to form a bond and ease the sense of aloneness that can arise because of isolation.

As vaccinations became available, most members and attenders chose to be vaccinated. Starting in May 2021, vaccinated F/friends were invited to resume meeting in person at the meetinghouse. We obtained the necessary equipment to create a combined Meeting for Worship, meeting virtually and at the meetinghouse in one group. This has been successful and has led to participation by some widely dispersed Friends around the country as well as local Friends unable to attend the meeting in person.

Many informal discussions and a structured threshing session were held to consider the reasons for and ways to address the decline in attendance at Meeting for Worship, as well as the overall spiritual state of the Meeting. There was a sense that the demands of committees, especially when managed by only a small number of people, had become a distraction from spiritual growth. With this in mind, we decided to try

decreasing the frequency of Meetings for Business to every three months, with additional called Meetings when needed. The individual committees each decided at what intervals they wished to meet. Some committees took a break from meeting and resumed, refreshed, after a few months. Although there were concerns about making these changes, we reached consensus that, consistent with our testimony of simplicity, it made sense to try them. We are finding that some of the work formerly done by committees is now done by the Meeting as a whole.

We as a Meeting are finding strength by shifting our focus inward. Our members continue to address critical issues of homelessness, social injustice, and violence through individual activities and work with groups outside the Meeting. By building the strength of our Meeting spiritually and interpersonally, we provide a stronger center from which members and attenders draw strength for individual, Spirit-led work.

Tallahassee Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

2021 Spiritual State of the Meeting

Nineteen Friends gathered in worship-sharing, with 9 on Zoom and 10 in person at our meetinghouse, to speak to queries as part of our discernment on the spiritual state of our Meeting in 2021. The queries follow this report.

Tallahassee Monthly Meeting has experienced a deepened sense of Beloved Community and spiritual renewal in the past year. We often felt the spiritual nourishment of being taken into deeper worship. A Friend remarked, “Friends give a synergy to my lifelong pursuit of the Spirit.” The SARS-CoV-2 virus brought us closer together than ever before and also presented some of our greatest challenges.

Our community was strengthened when we joyfully welcomed into membership a long-time attender and a couple who transferred their membership from another Meeting. Three young adult regular attenders have also deepened our sense of Beloved Community, along with two new adult regular attenders.

The death of a long-time member who had not been able to attend for several years, made visible in a different way the strong bonds we have together. Those who knew this Friend were saddened, while at the same time, the love in our community brought us tenderly together with her family. We heard from her sons at her memorial service, held elsewhere, how much the support of our Meeting continued to mean to them. We were grateful for the love and service their mother had generously shared with us, and the active presence of her sons in our First Day School. They all contributed significantly to the community we have today.

Meeting through both Zoom and in person at the meetinghouse made it possible for Friends from a distance to attend, at times with small children. Others, who live locally and had not been attending, attended regularly with the learned ease of Zoom. The technology also enabled us to also hold Thursday evening meetings for worship sharing and our meeting for worship with attention to business. A Friend expressed appreciation for the lightness of heart with which our Meeting clerk presided over the latter—an aid to reaching unity. Zoom also broke through the sense of isolation some Friends felt. In an attempt to address loneliness from the isolation, we offered Friday afternoon tea-times at the meetinghouse. They were a joyful connection for those Friends who attended in person and sometimes on Zoom.

The beautiful outdoor space embracing our meetinghouse also brought spiritual deepening and community-building for some Friends. One Friend spoke of her illuminating experiences being in that “sacred space.” Friends also bonded more closely as they worked to establish our community garden.

Our Beloved Community was further enriched as we became much more active in putting our spiritual beliefs into practice beyond the walls of our meetinghouse and Zoom rectangles. Those activities surprised some of us and taught us more about the foundation of the Quaker way of life.

We enjoyed sharing the fresh produce from our newly planted community garden with the iGrow Garden, a Tallahassee Food Network partner, to address hunger in an underserved area of Tallahassee. Those of us who volunteered at the garden learned from and made friends within that multiracial community.

Our other ministries included replacing our “Black Lives Matter” sign in front of the meetinghouse for the third time, and our membership in the Capital Area Justice Ministry. The latter is working to increase affordable housing and decrease gun violence in the Tallahassee area. We have had multiracial

engagement with at least twenty area churches through this organization. We look forward to increasing the involvement of more of us in their efforts. Our representation with the Big Bend After Reentry Coalition began opening our eyes to the needs of returning citizens. We once again continued our support of the Hilltop residents in Madison, part of Apalachee Mental Health. We experienced the joy of contributing to their Christmas party with requested gifts and the presence of some of us. We renewed our representation to the Tallahassee Green Faith Alliance, where we joined with other faith communities in Creation Care and making places of worship sustainable. We were grateful to have selected a new contact for the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) to increase our involvement with peacemaking through them as well. We held our third Racial Justice Study Sessions series, which, for the first time, included participants from the wider Tallahassee community. The sessions deepened our sensitivity to and ability to challenge racism. We know we have much more to learn. Our involvement in the Community Remembrance Project (CRP), in conjunction with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) and many other local faith communities and organizations, led us to participate in the installation of a commemorative marker from EJI. The marker honored the lives of the four documented men, of the many undocumented ones, who were lynched in the Tallahassee area.

Living in Beloved Community brought challenges as well. We were saddened by a Friend's laying down his membership and realized our continuing need for more effective communication and conflict resolution skills with one another.

We missed the Friends who could neither learn Zoom skills nor were drawn to worship through Zoom when they felt unsafe meeting at the meetinghouse. We could have done more to keep in regular communication with those Friends and learned more about how to better care for meeting members and attenders. Likewise, we decided to increase our efforts to address the needs of members and attenders who had, and will have, difficulties of various kinds.

We also continued to be challenged by the few, and often no, Black, and other People of Color attending our meeting. There was also little or no presence of children, teenagers, and younger families in our Meeting. We seek to welcome into our Meeting the diversity of the Tallahassee community who may be looking for what we, as Friends, offer. We are learning more about the intersectionalities of race, ethnicity, gender identity, ability, sexual orientation, age, economic status, and other qualities and how to be more thoroughly welcoming to everyone. [We grieved and grieve that the young adult Black Friend who is a member of our Meeting and stopped attending because of the racism he felt among us has not returned.](#)

Some of us wished that our meeting as a whole had been more deeply engaged with Southeastern Yearly Meeting and other wider Quaker organizations for the broader experience of spiritual support they offer.

We were challenged in our prison outreach during the pandemic, including service with the ministry of a Friend addressing the needs of death row residents. Though we contributed financially to Kindred Spirits, we realized we must make that organization more visible within our Meeting, along with Tallahassee Citizens Against the Death Penalty. We look forward to the extensive resource a new member brings with his experience with the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP).

The challenges and joys were all a vital part of our spiritual growth. We feel our solid foundation in God or Christ Spirit guiding us. As one friend reflected, ["I never cease to be amazed by the power of the way in which we share together that deepens communication. It must have something to do with the love of the Meeting and support of Friends. It changes my view."](#)

**Queries for Reflection on the Spiritual State of
Tallahassee Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
2021**

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 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 ongoing 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 TLMM 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?