

## **Tampa Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends Spiritual State of the Meeting 2014**

Our Spiritual State of the Meeting report arose from a discernment in which we gathered to consider how Spirit has moved among us this past year, both as a Meeting and as individuals. This report faithfully records our current understanding of our continuing journey as a community of seekers.

**The following queries were considered in our discernment:**

- **How do we support each other as members of this beloved community?**
- **How well do our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business lead to a corporate search for and revelation of God's truth?**
- **What has already and would nourish you in our Meetings?**
- **What was our Meeting's witness in the wider community in the last year?**
- **Has there been a deepening and strengthening of the sense of the Divine Presence in our midst during the past year?**
- **Do we feel a sense of our individual spirits fusing into an undivided group as we worship?**
- **Do we leave our Meeting filled with a sense of love and peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit-filled living?**

Our community recognized the deep gift of support that members and attenders of Tampa Monthly Meeting feel both on the spiritual level as well as the material. Spiritually, how we hold each other in the Light makes a big difference in the level of support we feel. Being held in prayer is deeply felt and sometimes life-changing. One of the strongest qualities of our Meeting is the unfailing love and reassurance we all experience. Support is felt simply through Friends' attendance at Meeting for Worship. It makes life easier even if people are not experiencing difficult times. Friends also feel an abiding acceptance by the Meeting for who we each are. Sometimes the depth of listening quietly, even if tangible support cannot be given, is very important to the spirit of encouragement. There is a strong sense of "lifting one another up with a tender hand." When members are experiencing difficulty or loss, practical, tangible help such as hospitality, transportation, supportive cards, and shopping is given. Many things done to show support are done by individuals behind the scenes. A desire was expressed to have more of these acts made known to the Meeting. However, others expressed the idea that some like to do things in humble service without acknowledgement. Friends often take initiative to address concerns that are unspoken or to give unasked-for support.

Our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business have reflected a seeking of divine Truth in a manner evident in the unity of the Meeting. We do not have very many contentious issues, so unity comes easily. This Meeting is ready to wait and listen until Friends are easy with the decision, rather than rushing into a solution for any issues at hand. A concern was raised that perhaps the Meeting was doing what the committees wanted rather than what the corporate body of the Meeting discerned as God's will. Further discussion revealed that trust in the work of the committees to follow God's truth made for clearer sense of the Meeting. There is a desire to have more members and attenders involved with Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business. Others expressed the observation that committees do hard work but individuals not on committees feel involved in the work of the Meeting as well. We welcome new people to the fold and work to accommodate their needs. People who are obviously interested in the work of the Meeting are more easily welcomed; it was expressed that perhaps we need to work on the welcome of those not so overtly interested. The suggestion was brought forward to announce the upcoming Meeting

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for Worship with a Concern for Business the week before and remind newer people that they are welcome to attend.

There are many things that nourish our Meeting. The resumption of Adult First-Day School has renewed many and given opportunity to deepen their connection with the Meeting. There is a need for more people to work with the children's First-Day School program. The readiness of people who do the children's program strengthens and encourages the Meeting even when no children show up. Friends were reminded that rising and speaking up would help all Friends to be able to hear and feel involved. Educational opportunities for new people – a "Quakerism 101" type of program – is being discerned by Ministry and Counsel. Readings at the beginning of Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, usually from Faith and Practice or other Quaker writings, have served to nourish and teach both members and newer attenders.

We have been able to witness to the wider community in the following ways this year:

- Continue the book drive and program to provide books and activities for children in underprivileged situations. We collected over 500 books for many students.
- Adopt a family for Christmas
- Support our Yearly Meeting by supporting individual members who serve SEYM in many capacities including financially supporting the sending of first-time attenders to Yearly Meeting and hosting Executive Council Meetings.
- Support members who are representatives to or involved in organizations in the wider Quaker world on regional, national, and global levels (FCNL, RSWR, FPT, FGC).
- Witness to Quaker values in the wider world in various jobs, especially those members who are teachers – modeling these values in structures and systems that are sometimes directly opposed to the values and testimonies we hold as Friends.
- Support of members working with the Mountaintop Removal and PNC Bank actions including the participation in the Climate March in New York.
- Host a visit and talk by David Zarembka, Coordinator of the Africa Great Lakes Initiative of Friends Peace Teams.
- Support of Quaker House and discerning a rising witness regarding moral injury
- Support of the work of John Calvi and presence at his workshops.

There has been a deepening and strengthening of the Divine Presence in our Meeting this year. For many it remains deep and strong but is difficult to measure, seeming to be more of an individual determination. The unity of the Meeting around the new Meetinghouse is an example of the movement of the Divine. Many messages of vocal ministry were less random and seemed more Spirit-led. The Divine Presence is also moving through Friends witnessing to the various concerns stated above. There are some moments of unity during worship with more of a wholeness when more are present. Everyone brings something to Meeting and absence is felt.

Socializing after Meeting for Worship weaves it all together. Some members expressed the desire to have more philosophical, deeper discussions. Meeting for Worship as well as interactions outside of this help to enhance that which we need to meet the challenge of Spirit-filled living. The idea was brought forward to have a project for the entire Meeting to work on that would have a

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similar energy as the SEYM Youth Committee. When we work together, we get renewed with love, peace, and courage.