

Tampa Monthly Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report 2017

How has our Meeting for Worship or other Meeting activities nurtured our spiritual growth?

Tampa Friends actively engage in various activities to establish space for all to feel welcome, wherever they are on their spiritual path. Intentional gatherings along with regular Meetings for Worship include Adult First Day School, mid-week Spiritual Reflection, Retreats, and Friendly Dinners. These activities are forward looking, and the consistency of these activities create a solid foundation for nurturing each person's spiritual growth and are crucial to our viability as a Meeting. As a community we hold one another in the Light as we respond to our individual callings and seek to nourish the seeds of others. Using the new Meetinghouse to host musical guest concerts and other events offers the opportunity to welcome people from the broader community who might be intimidated by an unfamiliar form of Worship. As we invite seekers, we encourage people whose spiritual journey leads them through our Meeting onward to their own spiritual home.

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

The new Meetinghouse serves as an invitation to the local community to learn more about Quakers as there is ample space for more people to be present. Attendance at Meeting for Worship has grown from 8 to 12 people to upwards of 20 people. This past year we have welcomed 4 new Friends into membership. Hope is found not only in the number of new attendees but in the depth of participation of all. Those whose daily lives keep them from being fully engaged, find ways to be active within the Meeting by providing transportation, hospitality, and discernment. Meeting for Worship, silence, centering, and fellowship offers respite from the vitriolic negativity in society and the "world." The contrast between methods of communication among Friends compared to present day media is a significant source of hope; where comforting, encouraging, and simply the sense of oneness gleaned from seeing each other at Meeting for Worship is nurturing to Friends and attenders. Friends expressed a sense of missing out when unable to attend Meeting for Worship and hold a concern to be able to share about Quaker values with others. Worship ignites hope and carries a sense of Presence into our daily lives. This brings a sense of fullness to those inner empty spaces and serves as a lifeline. Living our lives with integrity is observed by people in the community during each of our activities and serves to bring hope to the broader world. As part of the "younger" Southeastern Yearly Meeting, Tampa Friends are sensitive to Florida Friends having more adult convinced Friends than birthright Friends and are aware that being open can bring new people to Quakerism. Tampa Friends are sharing their gifts within the Meeting as well as in local, regional, national, and international manners of witness. This reflects the courage of our Meeting and of Quakers in general to face what may seem to be insurmountable odds to undertake actions that would dismay many in more powerful positions. We find this faith and practice to be nurturing.

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

We continue outreach toward members and attenders who have been absent from Meeting for Worship for a while by sending "Thinking of You" cards. We also stay connected through social media, our website, and our newsletter. The sense of growing leadership shared among more Friends is paired with a vision of using the Meetinghouse and first building as a community center with activities taking place where people are welcome each day or night of the week. Thoughtful use of Tampa Meetinghouse space to bring Friends' message to the world may include informative presentations from Quaker groups that continue our ongoing witness. Additionally, sharing individual experiences of Friends meeting challenges of daily work, such as teaching, and how viewing work through a Quaker lens transforms it into ministry, has a positive impact on all touched by it. Tampa Friends value the diversity of the people in our community and are interested in strengthening and deepening relationships among them. Other ways to expand in-reach as well as outreach include participating in 'letters to the editor' efforts in the newspaper, accessing the valuable resources in our library, sharing conversations regarding ways to be a Friend, adding a hearing-assistance system to the Meetinghouse, and making physical improvements to the property such as upgraded signage and an expanded porch with wheelchair access between the two buildings.

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

Tampa Friends have a strong and intentional commitment to the spiritual state of the Meeting as stewards of "the ground on which we stand." We recognize that nurturing the spirit is an ongoing effort and not static. We

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seek to bring Quakerism into all our activities and interactions within the Meeting and beyond in a faithful manner, seeing “that of God” in each individual that we encounter. First Day Meeting for Worship gives us the spiritual means to live in love throughout our lives. Our commitment to deep and meaningful Worship is evidenced through actively remaining present with and for one another. The love and care for one another in Meeting and beyond was especially poignant for those present for the memorial service held for Bo Nicholson. Witnessing to love in action equips us to meet the challenges of the current climate of political divisiveness and societal negativity. The ongoing commitment to peace work among Tampa Friends through service to Friends Peace Teams, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Right Sharing of World Resources, and Southeastern Yearly Meeting Earth Care Field Secretary manifests as love in action. Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business serves as witness to how we make decisions. Each of us has the opportunity to serve and the responsibility to grow within Meeting. As we speak from the silence in vocal ministry we are careful to remain present for all in attendance and consider our faithfulness to the ministry we are given to speak.