

Tampa Monthly Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report 2019

QUERY: How do we contribute to the life of the Meeting through our attention to committee work and Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business?

Friends acknowledged that we are accomplishing most of what is needed to be done by typical committees, but that only a few individuals are actually carrying the work. Most of the committees are not functioning well in terms of process and involvement, and a revision of committee structure and purpose is being prayerfully discerned by the new nominating committee. Communication was identified as a concern going forward, so those who are willing to participate can know what is needed, and can contribute accordingly. The newsletters are now more consistent and are having a positive effect. Healthy committees reflect a balance of desire, purpose, spirituality, and results as God wants, and meeting regularly and following Quaker process will create a greater engagement in Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business.

Understanding how corporate worship allows for the Spirit-led process of making decisions is best learned by experience, so attendance and participation each month is vital to the life of the Meeting. Most understand that being a Friend is a lifetime commitment which involves being open to the Light revealing something that brings us closer to being the beloved community we are supposed to be. Friends feel that membership is important, otherwise it is like being in the world of Quakers, but not of it, and that sense of accountability, ownership, and structure is lacking. Friends also felt that being fully present is important for Meeting to follow where it is being led.

We are conscious that age, health, and distance can be roadblocks to involvement, and are grateful that some attend as fully as they can. We 'find ourselves by losing ourselves' in order to come alive in committee work and by participating in the life of the Meeting.

QUERY: How has a sense of the Divine Presence in our midst been deepened and strengthened during the past year?

Memorial services helped us to not only see the life of those who passed, and know them better, but helped us to understand each other more. We saw how these Friends lived their Quakerism. We found joy in sorrow through Love. Love is how we hold both joy and sorrow in tension, an example of not "either/or", but "both/and".

For some, the Divine was seen in visiting those as they journey into death, or are ill, or in connecting with the family of those affected. Conflict and resolution of difficult situations has required that we stay close to our Guide as we struggle to discern the right way forward. Our lessons in this have been character, hope, endurance, integrity as revealed in the process. The presence of Friends who stood up gave strength to Ministry and Counsel and brought Light and Love to bear on a difficult and grueling discernment. Reading the spiritual reflections on our website blog, quotes on the website, attending Adult First Day Program, Wednesday night spiritual reflection group, Worship, and fellowship after Worship all help to deepen our spiritual connection with the Divine.

Watching the transcendence in others, and experiencing that in ourselves is deeply spiritual, and this reflects the importance of the Divine Presence in community. As our deepest and most heartfelt understanding of this world is being challenged, we see God at work in our ability to be present to others. Our seeking of the Divine has deepened in response to the feelings of grief and horror in the world, as we know part of our Quaker witness is to stand firm for others who are more fragile. We seek to maintain and secure a foundation in this ineffable Presence in order to build the vessel needed to stay the course.

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QUERY: What are ways in which we as individuals address the areas where the Meeting isn't reaching fully for the Light or speaking to our condition?

As Friends, it is our practice to come to Worship with hearts and minds prepared to reach fully for the Light so it can speak to our condition. Worship in the manner of Friends is a corporate seeking of the Light, and we understand that we need to do work individually in order to be grounded enough in Spirit to participate. For some, this means holding Meeting in prayer each day. Others know that being faithful in discerning vocal ministry as being Spirit-led before speaking allows God to work through us and nourish us.

We reach fully for the Light when we listen to what Spirit is giving us to hear and we test the leading before we speak to know whether a message is for the Body, or in truth, just for us. We understand that we sometimes need to recharge in order to be available for ministry in whatever form God chooses. Friends see that young people have a need for action and we want to improve our ways of providing opportunity and communication in this.

We are mindful that when we seek to divide a community with gossip and speaking in a manner that is harmful to others, we are not reaching fully for the Light. When this Meeting comes together to stand for something in integrity, it speaks to our condition. In creating this report, Tampa Friends affirm their commitment to one another and to the life of the Meeting.