

Tampa Monthly Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report 2023

The Tampa Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends met on 3 Twelfth Month 2023 to discern the Spiritual State of the Meeting (SSOM). The following queries from Southeastern Yearly Meeting were used as a starting point for this discernment:

- What has already and would nourish you in our meeting?
- How is God's presence being experienced in our meeting?
- 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?

Friends are aware that we are a changed meeting after the last few years and the effects of COVID. But we are also focused on the importance and vitality of Quaker worship with a belief that the depth of that worship continues to transform us. Even with fewer people, we have a core of people who experience gathered meetings. In our worship, we are able to quiet our minds and have our lives changed. Friends discussed the nourishing benefits of joining worship and other events online because, though other options might be available, nothing is quite like our meeting. We recognize that we need to focus on the things that matter most to us while also not overextending ourselves, and we feel hopeful that we are in a good place for that after the recent years of turbulence. We also realize that the past few years made us step back from others and that we need to re-learn how to be in community.

All the things that have always been important to us still are: that people can be vulnerable here and share their thoughts and emotions freely, that sharing leads to ministry and community, and that community leads to people feeling safe. We know that having a safe community is still needed in a world that often feels dangerous and confusing. We were reminded that clearness committees are a visible way to listen and support people. Focusing on our basic beliefs and allowing ourselves to be present for others is still needed today.

We more regularly held Meeting of the Whole committee meetings once a month by Zoom that have led to several good ideas and actions for the Meeting. We regularly have potlucks at the meetinghouse along with after-meeting snacks and fellowship. When we could, we had Friendly Dinner gatherings in homes. We have had some Adult First Day programming and we have enjoyed some jazz concerts at the meetinghouse. We continue to maintain our property and feel it is an important way to help people find us while also being a natural and inviting space for us weekly.

Others recognized that while this wasn't a time to determine full actions for the coming year, that we have hopes and ambitions for new members and impacting more people. There is a concern about having more outreach - which one person described as an "invitation to those seeking a safe place" - because having more people gives us more ideas and more support for projects. Ideas were given for inviting personal friends to potluck, using the Facebook page more, having a movie night, and making sure to talk in depth with visitors. We affirmed that if people have leadings, we want to support them

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in their work. We recognize that balancing what we want to do with what we can actually accomplish is hard.

We also recognize the loss we have felt this year. One member died and we had a beautiful and well-attended memorial for him at the meetinghouse. His death has also meant that his partner is no longer attending, either. Another long-time, active member of the meeting moved away to be near her children, and we have felt the sadness of that move.

The last few years have been transformative for Tampa Friends and we are accepting that transformation. We are in a good place, feeling renewed by who we are now and knowing that we are enough as we are.