

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report 2024

Tampa Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Tampa Friends Meeting met on November 24, 2024, to consider the spiritual state of the meeting for the past year. Queries for this worship sharing time asked about where we are spiritually, what is deepening us and challenging us, and what priorities God is calling us to.

Friends express optimism for our community, calling it lovely and finding it fulfilling to attend worship. Several feel that worship has an important depth that feeds our spirituality even though we are experiencing a period with relatively few spoken messages. The use of queries continues to support us and deepen our community. A new attender shares that their spiritual state could be currently described as “adrift” but feels that being with Quakers is a chance to be adrift together, being in community while searching for meaning and purpose in an overwhelming world. Our spiritual state is seen in the actions of our meeting community: we are vulnerable with each other, we share joys and concerns, we create a safe space to share, and we listen to each other. This sense of Spirit is also reflected in our social times when we visit and laugh together. Friends describe our meeting as a place where we support each other during difficult circumstances. Meeting fosters a sense of purpose in our lives which also shows that we are still in a good place to welcome new people and show them what Quakers can be.

We offer most meetings for worship in person and online. Committee meetings, meetings for worship with a concern for business, and adult first day discussions are also offered in hybrid formats. Those who are unable to attend in person show appreciation for this while also acknowledging the reality of periodic technical issues. Others share that meeting in person makes them feel more connected. We have access to online opportunities for spiritual growth that are planned and offered through Southeastern Yearly Meeting and are spiritually impactful for Friends.

Tampa Friends Meeting continues to face the challenge of lower attendance and membership numbers than before COVID. While we acknowledge a sense of loss of involving members from the past few years (moves, deaths, etc.), we also acknowledge a stability this past year with a mix of members and newcomers leading to a steady number of attendees that leaves us hopeful. Friends believe that those who are meant to be here have been brought along, leading us as a whole to be more focused on Quaker ways. We have enough participation that we function well week to week, though we still want to make sure our wider community of Tampa knows this spiritual resource is available to them. We recognize that we must focus on what is most important to us and what we are able to accomplish with our current community size and resources. Tampa Friends are led to participate in a variety of causes and organizations. This year, that has included making statements about the Gaza genocide, supporting Friends Peace Teams, holding food drives for local food banks, and collecting books for prisoners. We cherish that our faith tradition calls us to go deeper and find how we are

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led to contribute, seeking a connection to Spirit rather than answers from a hierarchy. The Tampa Meeting provides support, but we each have ownership and satisfaction over our leadings. We understand that the more involved we are, the more successful our projects and meeting will be. We often wonder if we are able to make a difference in such a complicated world with so many problems, yet we are convinced that being faithful in the small things, connecting to the Light, and holding space for peace and justice is as important now as ever. The injustices in our world can leave us angry and at times empty, but our meeting grounds us and reminds us of Quaker perseverance and hope for creating a better world. We affirm that we still want to respond to important needs and causes while using careful discernment to know where we can be of the most help without depleting our already-stretched resources.