

TAMPA MONTHLY MEETING SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT 2011

Our Spiritual State of the Meeting report arose from a discernment in which we were asked to consider how Spirit has moved among us in the past year, both as a Meeting and as individuals. This report tries to faithfully record both our current understanding as well as the questions that underlie our continuing journey as a community of seekers.

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 our meetings for worship with a concern for business lead to a corporate search for and revelation of God's truth? Do we leave our Meeting filled with a sense of love and peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit filled living?

We long for a deepening and strengthening of our worship. We recognize our experience of worship to be inconsistent and feel a need to listen more deeply, to spend more time in preparation for worship, to better help newcomers understand and participate in our worship, and to commit more fully as individuals to those practices we know can help us strengthen and deepen our corporate worship.

We struggle with our understanding of what is required of us in conducting our business under the guidance of the Spirit. We often tend to discuss rather than to listen and seek to understand how we might be led by the Spirit. Again, we realize a need to more fully prepare to participate in this process. We need to be mindful of the gifts brought by the clerk and recording clerk and recognize their ability and faithfulness in guiding us.

Our worship provides solace, encouragement and often a sense of renewal which many find vital to supporting their commitment to live as Friends in our difficult world. We are nourished to provide ministry in various ways beyond our Meeting community. Our ability to witness to the truth of the path of love, peace and Spirit-filled living is grounded in our corporate worship.

Do we find our vocal ministry Spirit led?

"It seems that the only one who can judge that is the individual who speaks." We understand vocal ministry to be a product of careful discernment which brings the Friend led to speak to a place where the message is not about what one wants to say but a sharing of what God is asking for the Meeting to hear. The phrase "It has been given to me to say..." is helpful in that process. We do not fear silence and are often fed by the weighty silence that is worship. We continue to seek to grow in our understanding of how we as individuals and as a Meeting know when we are Spirit -led.

How do we support each other as members of this beloved community?

This is "one of the things we do best". We do care for one another and seek to manifest that care

both in action and with prayer. Ministry & Counsel is fulfilling its role in pastoral care and seeing to it that needs are met and that all participate in meeting those needs. While we are careful to listen and eager to offer support, we also respect those who may desire more privacy and may not want as much active support on their behalf. We do want to expand our understanding and use of clearness committees and may once again undertake the ministry of Meeting for Healing, seeking to be sure that our community is fully aware of and encouraged to access these forms of support.

Are all of our members and regular attenders engaged in the work of the Meeting according to their gifts and capabilities?

Friends must answer this for themselves. Individual discernment is needed. We recognize that some Friends do carry a heavier load of responsibility than others and nominating committee needs to consider carefully as to when this is okay and when it may have become unhealthy for the individual and/or the Meeting. We have been intentional in encouraging all to be involved. We do need to talk more about our process of discerning gifts - what each may have to offer in service to our Meeting. We also need to be more clear about the work of our committees and what our needs are.

What was our Meeting's witness in the wider community in the last year?

In looking over the past year we were able to:

Host our second annual International Day of Peace gathering on September 21st

Adopt a Family for Christmas

Have a Food Drive to support local families through Metropolitan Ministries

Provide discernment and support for a Friend with a leading to find a way to distribute food that was being thrown away at his place of employment and see that it was put to good use by those in need.

Support our Yearly Meeting by both hosting various meetings and supporting individual members who serve SEYM in many capacities.

Support members who are representatives to organizations in the wider Quaker world: FGC, FCNL and Friends Peace Teams.

Support members who have been called to witness with the Occupy Tampa movement.

Join, as a co-sponsor, with various Christian and Muslim congregations to commemorate 9/11 with two days of special public events.

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

We find hope in the youth of our Meeting and are inspired by their knowledge, enthusiasm and their willingness to speak from the heart.

Hope lies in the actions of our children when they show that they have heard us and understand what we try to share with them.

We have grown in so many ways as a community - in size, as individual seekers, in our commitment to one another.

Hope lies in our recognizing we are outgrowing our meetinghouse.

Hope is found in what lies between the words that bind us.

In the way in which we bring up differences openly. Concerns can be raised in an open, kind and honest manner and we follow through in the same way in seeking to solve our problems or come to agreement.

We are nourished by our communal commitment to seeking through worship sharing, adult first day school and in conversation.

In the individual, daily witness that leads members of our Meeting community to think carefully about the consequences of their spending, of their actions, of their speech. Trying to live the testimonies daily.

Hope lies in losing faith and finding it again with gratitude for the shared silence that nurtures that possibility.

Hope is found in seeking, trying to be faithful, witnessing, acting, loving, listening....in our community of faith that seeks to be Spirit -led.

Respectfully submitted,
Tampa Friends Meeting