

**Tampa Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
Spiritual State of the Meeting 2015**

Consider how Spirit has moved among us this past year, both as a Meeting and as individuals. This report faithfully records our current understanding of our continuing journey as a community of seekers.

The following queries were considered in our discernment:

- **How does the spirit of worship extend into our committee work and into Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business? How well do our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business lead to a corporate search for and revelation of God's truth?**
- **Has there been a deepening and strengthening of the sense of the Divine Presence in our midst during the past year? Do we leave our Meetings filled with a sense of love and peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit filled living?**
- **What was our Meeting's witness in the wider community in the last year?**
- **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?**
- **What do I need to say about our Meeting?**

Our community appreciates the unity we feel in most things we do as a Meeting. We feel this is not a way to avoid conflict but a sign that we are unified in our spiritual understanding. We truly try to listen to the wisdom of the Spirit in the words expressed in committee meetings and Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business. We see trust and flexibility as signs of God's work. The unity we have in our process, especially as regards the new meetinghouse, shows the connections we have in our spiritual standing. Friends also shared that being a small community we know each other individually. We have developed respect, trust and faith in one another because we share each First Day with each other. We appreciate the clerk bringing readings to Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business to remind us of God's presence. While some Friends have mystical experiences, some do not. And while our articulation may differ in description of this experience, our common understanding, Spirit of worship and faith that "all will be ok" reflect that our corporate search is Spirit led. Because we trust we aren't alone in this decision making, we feel led to be inclusive and to help others in the community. We view our moving forward and follow through as signs of God leading us.

Friends answered yes to a deepening and strengthening of the sense of the Divine Presence in our midst during the past year because they answered yes to leaving our Meetings filled with a sense of love, peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit filled living. Meeting for Worship is a deeper experience of the Spirit working in the depths of our lives. Friends shared that seeing others in the Meeting living in a Spirit-filled manner and truly seeking to be led by the Spirit in their daily lives brings hope and a depth of community. Another Friend shared "I feel the Divine Spirit moving in me and want to show it. The feeling can be overwhelming or I may not have the drive to attend to it. I have attended Sunday school at other churches that have discussions on Scripture on the most important teachings of Jesus. They are talking but not filled with the Spirit. We want this meeting as our home as we feel the Spirit moving in us when we leave here." The support that we give one another encourages Friends in our

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Meeting to be more aware of God's work in us. It gives us strength to move into the week to face the challenges that come before us as we carry our faith and actions with us into the community. Another Friend shared the markers of deepening and strengthening of Spirit in our midst: being present in the world; paying attention to those building the peaceable kingdom; and digging deeper and looking to each other for strength. Difficult challenges move us to turn more and more toward each other. We bring our Quaker mindset into our individual lives and jobs, either consciously or unconsciously, to mend the world one person at a time. Our ability to do this comes from our worship together.

Friends also shared that our recently formed Spiritual Formation groups will add spiritual nurture and depth to our community. More than one Friend shared that having companions on a spiritual journey was something they had wanted for a long time. These groups will also add to our ability to respond as Friends to the situations in the world that we encounter each day, thereby strengthening our witness and discernment of God's will. The more often we participate in this practice, the stronger our Quaker community will be in everything we do as we are more in the Spirit. The support that we give one another through the Spiritual Formation groups encourages Friends in our Meeting to be more aware of God's work in us. It is a gift that will only serve to gather us in the Spirit as a Meeting.

Tampa Meeting is a small community but active in wider Quaker witness which brings a richness to us and we to it. Our Meeting's witness in the wider community involved Friends working with FCNL, Friends Peace Teams, RSWR, FGC, SEYM, and AVP. Continuing work with the Immokalee Workers Fair Food Campaign, Earthcare and the Moral Injury of Veterans project reflects our ongoing concern for social justice. Friends also carry their witness in how we represent our lives in the world around us. The Meeting again participated in a book drive for summer reading books for children as well as adopting a family in need for Christmas and continuing the Meeting food pantry. The Meeting also provides space for an AA group to gather at the meetinghouse. This year our Meeting joyously celebrated a wedding that brought in new people, reflecting both witness and outreach. We have also had many new visitors in the past year. One Friend shared that the new meetinghouse may bring in more visitors and be a way to get our thoughts out in the community, yielding direct and indirect impacts. Another Friend shared that the Meeting community has grown in a deeper witness to Quakerism, witnessing more with Spirit, being who we are as a deeper meaning of witness – listening deeply to each person in each situation, living with integrity, and taking on responsibilities. One Friend shared that when trying to offer a peaceful solution in a difficult situation, being Quaker brings the whole community of Friends to each encounter. Another Friend shared using AVP in individual interactions in daily life.

Friends have seen new life in the Meeting emerge with the new meetinghouse, as the community joined together in the entire process to develop and build it. The marriage and new visitors are other signs of new life for the Meeting. One Friend experiences the period of worship after Meeting for Worship for the sharing of joys, sorrows and prayer requests, as a powerful corporate witness to the channeling of God's Love by the Meeting community as we hold each in the Light. Another Friend shared, "I look forward to coming to Meeting each First Day to refill with Spirit and to experience the joy of seeing new people as well as returning Friends." Our Meeting did experience a deep sorrow this year over the loss of one of our members, Jill Floerke. Jill was an active, beloved member who will be most remembered for her passion for peace and social justice issues and sports.

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As final reflections, one Friend asked members and attenders to think about what it means to be part of the Religious Society of Friends and what that commitment calls us to do. Additional questions shared were how the Meeting encourages attenders to commit to membership and how can attenders come to understand this community and its spiritual aspects as well as its broader connection to the wider Quaker world. As Friends, we have the expectation that we can connect with Friends anywhere in the world. We also hold space for seekers and those who didn't know they were Quakers. One Friend shared how grateful they are for Meeting and whatever it was that brought each of us here and that we listened to what brought us together. Friends hold in the Light those who can't attend Meeting for a time as they are a part of Meeting regardless. One Friend felt led to share about our Meeting "I have most deeply experienced God's love and presence during those times I have shared my brokenness at Meeting and been held in the Light of God's Love by Friends, who are present with me in my pain and help guide my discernment – true markers of a community filled with the Spirit."

Respectfully submitted,
Tampa Monthly Meeting