

Strawberry Creek Friends State of the Meeting Report, March 2019

Our Meeting for Worship remains at the core of our spiritual lives. In Meeting, our members and attenders find centeredness and depth, a precious feeling that we belong together. Even as we as individuals move in and out of Meeting, as a community we are a unified whole, strong and graceful. We are grateful for those who have stewarded Strawberry Creek for many years, creating this spiritual home.

Meeting for Business continues to provide opportunities for us to further our worship, honor Spirit, and find unity among ourselves. It also allows us to be mutually supportive, not just of our personal needs, but of our witness in the world. Celebrating the leadings of others is one of the most powerful things that we do, and in supporting each other in our personal leadings we are following the inward Light. In particular, we have tried to be instruments of Spirit in serving the homeless, pursuing racial justice and protecting the earth.

The size of our large community is both a challenge and a gift. Despite our concerted efforts at welcoming and inclusion, it can still be difficult for newcomers to gain a foothold into our community. There are so many of us that it can be difficult to meet the needs of any one individual. On the other hand, our love for each other and our desire to meet each other's needs makes us stretch and grow. We become companions and witnesses on our journey together.

We wrestle with providing a safe space for all to be heard and held, a place for us all to "come as we are" and celebrate our individual gifts. We continue to reach out to our LGBTQ members and attenders, providing avenues of open expression, education and support.

Addressing our collective role and responsibility in our Meeting's racial dynamics continues to be a challenge. There is a call for further education, as well as for tangible action that will establish our meeting as an inviolable space for people of color. There is a tension between being too timid in our education efforts and being so forward that we might leave some behind as others forge ahead. We are committed to deepening our efforts to learn and grow beyond our current understanding of racial politics, to be ignited by the deep and brilliant unknown.

We sense Spirit in our careful, loving care of each other and in the good work of our Mutual Care committee. Our community is bigger than First Day, and we need to continue reaching out to all members and attenders, for both spiritual and practical companionship and support. Some of our committees do struggle to attract sufficient members, and some members serve on several committees. This can lead to spiritual as well as physical exhaustion. Even if at times we lack sufficient resources, we are still driven towards action, and strongly desire to magnify our efforts together in the world. This desire must be weighed against what is possible so that we can conserve our energy for what Spirit is calling us to do. We must also continue to guard against gossip and the pressure to conform to one point of view; our differences are our strength.

Often our struggles are places where we as a community are most alive to Spirit. We open up for guidance when we need a centered, Spirit-led solution to a problem and we rely on worship and deep discernment when we handle difficult issues. Our depth of conversation and our labor to build compassion and understanding binds us together. In a similar way, our small groups and worship sharing circles allow us to know each other with more intimacy and intensity, enhancing our spiritual lives.

Deep listening and vocal ministry are both so important in the unprogrammed experience. Some find peace in the collected silence while others yearn for transformation, and it can be difficult to find a balance. Our meeting has worked hard to find the Light in some messages that were difficult or painful to hear. There is also much work we can do to raise up the voices of those who rarely speak, especially attenders who have much to add to our community but who may feel inhibited by non-membership or unfamiliar practices. Many Strawberries do find deep acceptance in our meeting as well as support that allows their unique voice to come forward. One particularly moving Meeting for Worship honored the numerous survivors of sexual violence who attend Strawberry Creek.

Our children are working seriously to understand our Advices and Queries and Testimonies. The whole meeting benefits from the special and lively energy of the young people who come into Meeting to share a report of their First Day experience. We are grateful to them, and we aim to be so dynamic and thriving that they can't help knowing us and seeing who we are.

As solid as we feel as a community, we are not alone. We are part of a greater caravan of Quakers, and our relationship to other monthly meetings increases our strength and resilience. Together, we are journeying inward and seeking a deeper vision about what we can manifest in the world. Let us continue to come to Meeting, alive with expectant waiting, excited for the Light.