

## State of the Meeting Report 2021

4/10/2021

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On Sunday, February 21, Friends gathered on Zoom and responded to three queries in a listening meeting for the State of the Meeting Report. In addition, some reflections were received by email after the meeting.

### Joy, Hope, and Spiritual State of the Meeting

So many of us have been able to get together virtually, to hold Meeting, see each other, hear voices, and visit, but we are aware that this reflects our privilege in comfort level with technology and access to devices. We feel joy in having Friends join us by Zoom who are far away or cannot travel to attend Meeting. We look forward to returning to in-person worship and hope this can continue without losing people. Also, we have enjoyed the world online - outside readings, concerts, dance, events, videos, worship - and we hope some of this keeps going in the post-pandemic world.

We appreciate the steadfastness of meeting on Zoom; it allowed our Meeting to survive the pandemic. Friendly Sevens by Zoom have continued to be effective for some, allowing connection and sharing from near and far. Our strong spiritual community has kept us grounded and anchored, and has been central to our ability to weather this year. For many, the silence of worship is deep, and our Meeting feels interconnected and vibrant. Our Meeting was described as calm and mature, like a banked fire from which flames can come up, but without a lot of vocal ministry. Our Meeting feels sustainable, like a tree with deep roots, aging and still growing. As we meet remotely, without a sense of a room, the mystical is laid bare.

Many people give so much of themselves to the Meeting and work so hard; we are grateful for their time, care, and meticulousness. So many people offered to serve on Nominating Committee that it seemed easier this year to find a strong committee. Committee service has helped people stay connected, and people want to continue their connection. We have offered each other and the Meeting a rich spiritual depth and strength in a year of duress.

Meeting supports many things we are doing with anchoring, clearness, and support committees. Our spiritual lives inform our ministries, and people who are spiritually grounded here have been able to go out in the world and become involved in positive change. Our Meeting seeds and anchors many ministries. Meeting members and attenders support ministries through direct volunteering and through the work of our active committees. Many expressed appreciation for the love and support they have received from the Meeting to help deal with difficult life circumstances, including help with death of loved ones and support to ease isolation.

Quaker practice is important in our Meeting community, and the original Quakers still have a lot to teach us. We might offer another Quakerism 101 to help us remember where we came from.

### Sorrow

It's been a very hard year, full of stressful news and events, and grief, anxiety, and loss. Some of us feel off-balance from isolation. We miss people who have not been able to join us on Zoom; we are not whole as a family without those who cannot worship with us. It is different to meet over Zoom. For some, it doesn't work at all, and we miss them; for others it has been difficult to center down on Zoom. For some, it has become easier over time as we have 'exercised new muscles' to maintain the Meeting and the beloved community. We miss each other, without physical presence and in-person contact. As one Friend mentioned, we are mammals and we are meant to be together. With social connections harder to keep, we need to overcome introversion or shyness to reach out to one another. We hold in the Light those who are not with us, and those suffering from losses during this time.

We are sad that the children's program has not transitioned to Zoom, and wish we could do something for the children if they want it. More broadly, for the future of the Religious Society of Friends, we recognize the need to grow the children's program, and to bring children, young people, families, and people of color into the Meeting. We need to connect our Meeting more to the community around us. Aware of our leading to be more inclusive and of how far we have to go, some of us have visited meetings across the world that seem more welcoming to Black and Indigenous People of Color. Other meetings have things to teach us about how to welcome all.

#### PPR Subcommittee and the Minute on Engagement to Uproot and Dismantle Racism

The Power, Privilege and Race subcommittee and the Minute on Engagement to Uproot and Dismantle Racism both support the mindfulness of the Meeting. PPR activities have been a robust expression of our Meeting and they have helped us meet the challenges of this year. We appreciate them because they strengthened our community and helped us learn. The many suggested readings and resources related to white fragility and racism have caused us to question our feelings and responses. Some PPR activities have been uncomfortable, but the discomfort is supported, and people have been willing to speak frankly. PPR gave us a mirror to see something so ugly that is part of everything around us. They created a safe space to look at it together with people who have skill and lived experience, and we have learned and grown.

The Minute on Engagement to Uproot and Dismantle Racism is larger than our Meeting. It has been integrated with love in our Meeting, encouraging and speeding up learning. We've found we can say awkward things without fear of judgement as we've worked with it. The minute has been effective both in guiding the Meeting's work and in supporting the work of individuals in the communities around us. It is helping us become less exclusive and more connected to the world outside the Meeting, and has led to the development of a community sharing fund now in the works. We need to continue pushing ourselves further in this area. One Friend encouraged us to open our hands, noting that our Meeting tends to come from a place of scarcity as to what we can do, but that we have abundance.

Quaker Action Worship Group provided powerful experiences for some, and earlier, contributed to the creation of the minute, which educates us and gives guidance for both individuals and the Meeting to live into. QAWG work has been restorative and enriching, if sometimes a struggle, leading some to more participation in the local community.

#### Earthcare Testimony and the Minute on Engagement to Uproot and Dismantle Racism

Earthcare continues as a deep concern of our Meeting, with many of us addressing environmental concerns as individuals, such as stopping buying water in plastic jugs, and firing their bank. 2020 marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Meeting's Earthcare Testimony, developed to reflect the Meeting's experience of living and witnessing in the world in alignment with ecological integrity and environmental justice. This year two sessions were held to celebrate the Meeting's more than 30 year commitment to care of the earth, and to consider how well we are living the Testimony and how this relates to the Minute on Engagement to Uproot and Dismantle Racism. One Friend holds that caring for the earth is one of the best ways to care for people and to improve health. Another suggested our work on racism seems interconnected with earthcare and that caring for people will help save the earth, noting that across Indigenous cultures, earthcare combines place-based and community-based concerns.

As one Friend affirmed, even though she hasn't seen us in the flesh for almost a year, she still believes we exist. Our faith stays strong in our Meeting.