

Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting 2022 State of Meeting report

On February 20, 2022, Friends gathered in the spirit to reflect on the spiritual life of Strawberry Creek Meeting over the past year. Thirty-three members and attenders were present on Zoom, preceded by a request for written input from those who do not use Zoom or could not attend. A rich, intimate, and spirit-infused sharing reflected many different aspects of individual and corporate spiritual experience in our Meeting in 2021, many of which continue to be framed by the COVID pandemic.

We oriented our time together in the following queries:

How fares the truth among us, Friends?

How have you felt spiritually supported in the Meeting?

In these extraordinary and uncertain times, how are we engaging with our testimonies?

Gratitude:

Friends expressed gratitude for a wide variety of experiences.

We celebrated the work of individuals, committees, and the Meeting as a whole in engaging with the world beyond Meeting and with one another within our community. We were grateful for the sharing of engagement with homeless youth, for education increasing our consciousness of the burden of racism on us all, and for support of those in our Meeting leading efforts in Earthcare. We gave thanks for the sense of connection to one another that is provided by service through committee work and other shared endeavors. One Friend lifted up gratitude for the care he has experienced from the Meeting in challenging times. Friends expressed gratitude for our clerk. Her sensitivity to the subtle motions of spirit while clerking our meetings for business has made our shared experience of the pandemic much less difficult than it might otherwise have been.

Many expressed gratitude (and, for some, surprise!) in their experience that Spirit has been present in gathered meetings for worship online, despite physical distance.

We asked ourselves, “How fares the Truth amongst us?” Friends noted that our “truth muscles” are getting stronger, and that the denial that creates a veil is not getting in the way as much. Another Friend noted that the great thing about Truth is that there is always more of it to confront and absorb.

We saw the Pandemic as providing inward time to refocus on existential issues of climate and racial justice. The sense that our Meeting continued to make progress in these areas was seen as evidence that Spirit has been present, nurturing our Meeting during the past year. We were grateful for the increased interweaving of climate and anti-racism work amongst us. A Friend noted that we are getting better at letting ourselves become uncomfortable—citing Dorothy Day that comfort can insulate and isolate. A Friend offered the impact of the minute on uprooting racism as a point for reflection. The query asking how our corporate work, as a Meeting and as particular Meeting committees, advances our work to dismantle racism can be seen as a seedling to be nurtured.

In thankfulness, we lifted up the favorable impacts of Zoom on our Meeting, including allowing participation by those for whom disability or distance would make it otherwise impossible. We were

grateful for the practice of naming others to be held in the light immediately after close of meeting for worship, in an extension of worship

Longing and Loss:

Friends expressed a deep longing for physical presence with one another, mourning the pain of separation. Some felt that Zoom presented an obstacle to the corporate experience of the transcendent. We noted that the impact of the lack of contact with those of our community for whom Zoom is a barrier preventing participation, including in this listening meeting, has been a flip side to the increased inclusion of others.

Trepidation:

We were concerned about the consequences of not having a children's program since early in the pandemic. Though the children's program committee has found meaning and value in continuing to meet, holding children in the light, and investigating resources to support families with children, these activities have been limited in their impact. We were concerned about the long-term existential implications of the aging of our Meeting. The short-term implications include a declining number of individuals to fill the numerous positions required for our Meeting to function. Some new attenders and one renewed member have become part of our community through the Zoom connection over the past year. A Friend hoped that we would offer everyone grounding in Quaker practice, including Quakerism 101 sessions and what it means to rise in ministry. No clarity was offered in how we will grow as a community going forward.

Crossing a threshold:

We sense that we have come through a significant time and are on the threshold of a new chapter in the life of our Meeting. We value looking back at this recent time as we prepare for our new life together, in a form to be determined. We trust in the deep work of Worship and Ministry with our Meeting community in preparing the ground for a hoped-for coming together soon in a blended meeting. This will be different. We will have opportunities to consider how to retain some new experiences from the last year, renew old practices, and try fresh ideas. Retaining new experiences might include continuing to use random break-out rooms for social time after worship, where Friends can have more intimate conversations with others we don't usually talk with. Renewing old practices could include sitting in a room to worship and work with both those you agree and disagree with. Trying fresh ideas could mean following the leading of those breaking new ground through participation in our wider community.

Together as one Meeting body, we hold the multiple truths of gratitude, longing, deep concern, and hope.

Betsy Morris, Christopher Hogness, Michelle Bellows
March 13, 2022