Multnomah Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
State of Society Report March 2023

Spiritual Strengths and Efforts to Foster Growth in our Spiritual Life

Throughout the past year, we have found ways to say "Yes." Yes to caring for each other's spiritual and physical needs, through weekly "Hold in the Light" online gatherings, clearness and support committees, and person-to-person assistance with transportation, meals, and errands. Yes to maintaining multiple opportunities for worship, both blended and "plain," and to experimenting with summertime worship in a local park, with joyous outdoor potlucks following. Yes to bringing our Children's and Youth programs back to in-person activities, and to the hiring of a paid Children's Program Coordinator. Yes to experimenting with a three-person Clerking Circle, which has provided needed leadership without overburdening a single Clerk. Our spiritual life has been enriched by welcoming multiple visitors, new attenders, and new members and by celebrating the lives of several long-time Friends who died.

Our yes to participating in serving lunches to our houseless neighbors, first outdoors, and since January inside the Meetinghouse itself, has deepened and energized our spiritual life and commitment to social justice. Through outreach to housed neighbors about the lunch program, we have come to know our immediate neighborhood better than ever before. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee has facilitated tours of community organizations and programs that aim to address homelessness, as well as hosting educational forums on this concern. We continue to advocate for peaceful solutions to conflict in the middle east (led by Friends in the Quaker Palestine-Israel Network workgroup, aka QPIN-Multnomah), for racial justice (led by our Friends for Racial Justice workgroup), and for immigrant rights (led by our Friends for Immigrant Justice). We said yes to giving the bulk of a large bequest to multiple local and international organizations that promote helping unhoused people, protecting the environment, housing equity, refugee resettlement, Native American rights and culture, LGBTQ rights, and serving the poor in Central America.

Over the past year, we've maintained relatively conservative health and safety protocols when meeting for worship indoors, including limiting the number of people gathering for worship in our meeting rooms and requiring masks. Even with those limits, we've often had 40-50 people meeting in person (in two rooms, one with no technology, the other with the audiovisual equipment needed to connect remotely) and another 25-30 joining online for mid-morning First Day worship. Our Property Committee and Individuals within our Meeting have stepped up to assist with managing and improving the tools that make blended meetings possible and effective.

One of the gifts we as Quakers have most to share is saying yes to grounding ourselves in silence and listening to the Spirit collectively. This is increasingly against trends in the broader culture, and we believe this gift is much needed in our world.

Spiritual Weaknesses and Challenges to our Spiritual Life

Our continued experimentation with holding separate "plain" and "blended" worship has worked well for some, but not for others. Even with coming together post-worship for social hour in our lovingly landscaped garden, the feeling of living our worship lives in separate spaces persists. We are not in unity on how – or if – we should use technology in worship in the future. We continue to be challenged in filling some key roles in the Meeting, and we worry about burning out Friends who have carried us through the difficulties of the pandemic. While our Children's Program is re-emerging, we still struggle to meet the needs of families. And although we have strived to keep a focus on anti-racist, pro-equality actions, we still wonder how welcoming we are to all.

In our strengths and in our weaknesses and challenges, we strive to humbly walk with each other in Love, seeking the Light of Truth.