

State of the Huntsville Area Friends Meeting 2023

March 2024

The Huntsville Area Friends Meeting (HAFM) experienced another year of organic growth, loss, interest, development and sharing. Due to the pandemic beginning in March 2020, the Meeting has consistently met virtually and finally resumed in-person worship in the last quarter of the year. Now hybrid, HAFM continues to be a centered place of worship for members, attenders and visitors to come and get some peace and listen for that of God/and Spirit.

The Meeting spent some time worship-sharing on the suggested queries and reading over them and sharing thoughts within the Meeting and in messages to the clerk. The queries and responses were as follows:

What has our Monthly Meeting been holding/carrying this past year?

Concerns of HAFM members and attenders: family health declines and deaths, serious illnesses, separations, rejections, work concerns and stresses, and also, worldwide humanitarian concerns. HAFM has a virtual attender from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that the Meeting was led to support. Friend Olo runs a community program supporting groups women and children in need. The Meeting enjoys seeing Olo, occasionally getting updates on what has happened in the DRC.

A new member felt very held by the group, including introductions to other social activities like the Huntsville Feminist Chorus and support from members. Some of our members voiced how grateful the meeting is for the energy and vision of new attenders, and a new baby! Returning to physical meetings and enhancing meeting with hybrid has brought joy, connection and some additional vitality to the meeting.

The Meeting has held connection with SAYMA and many activities including volunteering for SAYMA committees, participating in racial justice conflict transformation small groups and training, participating in FCNL advocacy groups and sharing information about relevant organizations like Global Ties, Interfaith Mission Service and others.

The Meeting supported a local-based community free clinic that serves those without funds or insurance. Also, HAFM supported a local non-profit, Crisis Services of North Alabama. HAFM members/attenders involved in the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) Huntsville Advocacy Team met with local representatives, Members of Congress staff from Senators Britt and Tuberville and personally with Representative Strong and communicated FCNL concerns. HAFM also donated to the University of AL in Huntsville to benefit students with special financial needs. The meeting used Friends Journal and Pendle Hill resources on "Vocal Ministry," a session led by a member for "Second Hours."

HAFM worked with Brent Bill's Life Lessons from a Bad Quaker: A Humble Stumble Toward Simplicity and Grace over many Second Hours, a light and Light-filled experience together. The Meeting used the

discernment process to provide recommendations to FCNL's for new focus for national legislative advocacy.

How has our Meeting embraced the Light, and in so doing, how have we been changed?

The Meeting embraces the Light in others and the new energy and decisions they have brought (most particularly, meeting in person). The appearance and active participation of new attenders and seasoned Quakers have added to the Meeting's energies. Their wisdom, ideas, and vision and active participation have been encouraging. HAFM embraced and encouraged new attenders and their energies to contribute to the Meeting's life. Several are younger (university or career folk); some are seasoned Quakers; one is a newborn (last March). This growth has been a joy. Reconnection to Friends in person has helped member to rebalance and improve the sense of community in worship.

A member pointed out that the Meeting returned to using queries more often in meetings for worship and discussions and in conjunction with shared processes. This queried worship brings us into a state of listening. The Meeting embraces the value of Quaker practices, connections and worship, adding depth and strength to daily life.

Some members joined with the Huntsville City Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the Huntsville Public Library to support the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit on "The Bias Inside Us." The exhibit helped members grow in many ways. Meeting members collaborated with the Black Quaker Project to disseminate information about international contributions of African Americans to peace and justice.

What holds us together and helps us avoid becoming overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world?

Meeting together with shared worship brings us peace in silence, finding perspective, and space to heal. When we simplify life, we remember our path in this world. As we voice our common despair, we know we are not alone, and this joins our hearts. The testimonies we share in Meeting offered "hope in spite of..." and improved our meeting's connectedness. The Meeting grows with every example we have seen this year of members and attenders "going through and coming out the other side." We grow and heal together.

Quaker testimonies help us to have hope in spite of evil and mishaps in the world. Sharing after worship time the joys and concerns regarding illnesses, declines, deaths, concern for family members, so many of us see ourselves come out and into the other side with compassion, and this joy helps us lean on one another and grow in a positive light.

We come together in Meeting with common sense, hope and help. Media and business make money by making people dependent, inflamed and angry. The calm normalcy of worship brings joy in spending time with others with shared soul searching, power and light.

The complications of the world created the opportunity for focusing back into our basic needs and guidance. We collaborated with the Interfaith Mission Service (of which HAFM is a member), as well as Global Ties, to support refugees, e. g., Afghan and Ukrainian immigrants. Also, we met with Ukrainian guests of Global Ties for listening and sharing about Quaker involvement, past and present to benefit immigrants/refugees. The members have spoken with Ukraine refugees, and to just be with them so recently out of a warzone was grace at work and a privilege to be with people whose lives are so very complicated. This was shared with the meeting.

The Meeting has supported emotionally and spiritually the HAFM community in times of illness and death of family members to be “beloved community” together. Many members went together to a Rocket City Trash Panda baseball game at Madison Town Center. The Meeting has a get together or two during the year in a non-meeting status to share our personal lives which strengthens our spiritual ties.

HAFM has the pleasure of being in the company of others with similar concerns, goals, leadings. We enjoy one another’s company, wisdom, strengths; we support one another when one of us is troubled; and we rejoice with one another when a trouble passes or a gladness arrives and give thanks for and with that person.

Conclusion:

The Huntsville Area Friends Meeting focuses on our time of unprogrammed worship-the growth, sharing, and connection during worship. If someone witnessed one or two of our worship meetings, HAFM wouldn’t appear highly active. But over the course of a year, like this last year, the cumulative effect adds up and gives the Meeting a decent footprint of care of this world around us and of our members and attenders. HAFM is a peaceful organization that promulgates a fertile ground for all to be introspective and to find their current purpose. HAFM has been a place of healing, growth and regeneration. Out of respect, love and spiritual drive, we have stumbled into a good year for HAFM’s little part of this world.