

Memphis Friends Meeting, State of the Meeting Report for 2023

2023 began with a twelfth night candlelight on Epiphany that was postponed from Christmas Eve. As we discern where our orbit takes us, it seems that our meeting is full of life and in the process of awakening.

Grief has been a theme interwoven throughout our meeting. We have grieved the loss of Friends who are no longer able to worship with us. We have grieved both Friends and dear friends who are no longer with us at all. Yet there are glimpses of our healing that call us back to the people we have lost and those we still have around us - a dance block in the meeting room, the flowers in the yard and along the fence, a brightly colored lap blanket that was used to comfort a dying Friend, the donations we made of belongings of a friend to those in need, and the unused food purchases of a friend that were used in our first day potlucks. Not only are these glimpses seen in the physical remembrances that they have left behind in the meetinghouse, but also these glimpses are seen in our ability to continue to be with one another, in spite of our differences.

More broadly, we have wrestled with the fracturing of our meeting, our yearly meeting, our communities, our city, our country, and our world.

However, we endeavored not to be overwhelmed by the heaviness we feel in our lives, in our community, and in the world. We continue to hope. And we have looked to what has sustained us, nourished us, encouraged us, and kept us going:

- Getting more fully back into the Meetinghouse: creating a new sense of normalcy and keeping our meeting's proverbial cogs greased & moving.
- Caring for each other and the meetinghouse, in large and small everyday ways: committees such as Ministry and Nurture, as well as House and Grounds quickly came to mind among Friends — but also Finance, First Day School, Education and Events, and Nominating, that play integral, at times behind the scenes, roles.
- Sharing space and resources: with each other, as well as Peacebuilding en las Américas (PLA), an initiative of Friends Peace Teams; a global sojourner from Japan who visited us and stayed with Friends in our meeting; students from a Quaker school in PA who visited on their tour of the South to better learn about civil rights; regular clothing contributions to Manna house, which provide hospitality to unhoused people; and routine donations to New Tyler AME food pantry.
- Connecting and communicating with each other and F(f)riends regionally: daily online worship at noon, the newsletter, monthly candlelight services, restarting monthly First Day potluck, and sending and supporting a Friend to provide listening and support to monthly meetings in SAYMA.
- Carrying Friends' concerns and standing up for racial justice: supported Quaker legislative priorities via FCNL, advocated for equality and against discriminatory legislation to the LGBTQAI+ community, advocated for reproductive rights, advocated against gun violence, approved a minute regarding Quakers & Indian boarding schools, and struggled with our relationship to yearly meeting.

- Supporting Friends: championing Friends' professional and personal ministries that grow from their connection to the meeting.

These are the practices that sustain us, the regularity and advocacy that have us turn inward so that we may move outward. And with that, we closed out the year as we began it - with a Christmas Eve candlelight service, the first one held actually on Christmas Eve in the meetinghouse since the beginning of the pandemic. We hope that this was a significant sign of the re-opening to further connection of the spirit, and our deep, deep connection to each other as we look towards gathering in a retreat together this upcoming year.

Generated based on a listening session held on January 21, 2024

Edited by Friends over several months

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