

# State of the Huntsville Area Friends Meeting 2024

March 2025

The Huntsville Area Friends Meeting (HAFM) engaged in a year of sharing, study, service, concern and change. 2024 was the first full year of in person meeting (with hybrid online also available) since prior to Covid. The meeting gathers at the Tree of Life behavioral health center and recently moved into their Autism Resource Center meeting room. The meeting sits in silence in a place of healing and acceptance.

Our numbers remain about the same as years prior. A couple of our meeting have moved or work kept them from meeting, but HAFM had a few new attenders show up this year at meetings. So HAFM remains a small monthly meeting but has not shrunk appreciably during 2024.

HAFM currently does not form many organized committees doing the good work of Friends, but is rather strong in individual action that is communicated and shared within meeting. HAFM members and attenders routinely share information about the service, organization work, volunteerism and general knowledge to all in the meeting. Most of this sharing occurs after silent worship in discussion, announcements, 2<sup>nd</sup> hours or during the monthly attention to business portion of the meeting. Several Friends send emails with items of interest or events out to be communicated across HAFM. Sharing of ideas, interests, life events and support is held at meeting in discussions not only after meeting but throughout the year at a few social events amongst members. So, HAFM valued appreciation amongst the group and sharing during the meeting this past year.

The Meeting spent some time discussing and pondering on the SAYMA suggested queries and the responses were as follows:

How have our practices in meetings for worship and business helped move us toward or away from unity as a spiritual community?

We are holding onto our HAFM unity even when we discuss divisive issues like SAYMA's difficult and troubling issues with racial justice committee and its effects on SAYMA and multiple monthly meetings, and on the ongoing devastation in Gaza, history of Israel and Palestine, Ramallah, the Quaker school in the West Bank. and other recent news events. Typically, the meeting allows for individualism and expression in a safe space. One member noticed the spirit of communal support as we had a faith sharing around the Gaza tragedies—a mutual offering of personal experiences and heart-opening for compassionate listening with each other. HAFM's history appears to maintain respecting what members and attenders bring to the meeting and highlight the positive, the care of the world around us within our control.

Moving into our newer space in January, capped a year that has been very conducive to community-building and great to have the "hybrid" capacity, especially for our "long-distance" HAFM folk, all helping us move toward unity for the future.

What has brought us to a closer spiritual meeting is our getting to know each other in a deeper way. We have become more of a community by knowing what is happening in each other's personal lives. We are not only worshipers who leave at the end of the hour; we sit around after worship and share more of our concerns and joys and daily lives.

These actions have broadened our concerns outside of HAFM and led us to think what could lead to peace when there is such great tension.

How have we as a spiritual community encouraged each other to answer the urgings of Spirit? What kept us from encouraging each other?

How we encourage one another...Checking in when concerns are raised. Sharing community resources, we are familiar with that address HAFM concerns. Deep listening to one another, to our individual and Meeting "joys and concerns," including following meetings for worship, by phone & email, and during gatherings outside of meeting times--especially as we've shared our stories/life-journeys during times in a long-time attender's home and our going caroling together, etc. Being grateful for our newcomers, including brief visitors, as well as those becoming parts of our Meeting. Doing book studies together. Learning about the situations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, including studying together about the Ramallah Friends' School in the West Bank.

What keeps us from encouraging one another....not lack of care, for sure. Maybe lack of time given individual concerns, given all of our respective different activities? One member sums it up nicely, "I also see our attentiveness to Spirit nudges within through corporate worship and our private devotions transforming into acts of service in our individual lives."

How have we as a meeting and as individuals used our worldly activities as acts of witness to answer that of Spirit in others?

As a Meeting: with our financial support of several charitable organizations, including Friend Olo's school in the DRC; with Interfaith Mission Service involvement; with Huntsville Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion involvement; with environmental action (Hethalyn); with lobbying members of Congress via Friends Committee on National Legislation guidance and input; with

Second Hours to discuss areas of concern; with HAFM activities to share our lives, concerns (Christmas caroling, snacks, and visiting) in Janet's neighborhood and in her parent's home. Inviting staff members from other community organizations to our Meeting to inform us of their work, e.g., Global Ties to learn about (and for us to contribute to their work) with refugee resettlement. Being part of other organizations such as Interfaith Mission Service, building relationships to learn about the spiritual lives of Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu, etc., faith communities and supporting community food banks together. Teaching at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Serving on broader initiatives, e.g., Advisory Council for the City's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Joining with friends outside, as well as inside of Meeting to witness that of Spirit within them and find courage as we "mind that which is eternal" during difficult times.

One HAFM family has been pulling away from purchasing from Walmart, Target and Amazon. They are working on buying less, buying used, borrowing or looking first to see if they already have something. They are trying to support small local vendors and or vendors that actively support diverse hiring practices. This is definitely a practice rather than a perfection that started a couple of years ago when the kids announced in the car one day that it wouldn't be right for them to eat at Chick-fil-a anymore. This is a really big conversation topic that they keep circling back to. They discuss corporate DEI policies and have dropped Amazon Prime membership in favor of Costco membership. Do we need that many gluten free pizza crusts in our freezer? Probably not but switching to Costco feels like they are doing something tangible with the resources to answer that of spirit in others.

In conclusion, HAFM continues to meet in a non-programmed environment and act in organic state of sharing. Though HAFM resides in the "Rocket City", a military, structured and conservative environment, the Meeting operates in patience, appreciation and consideration. We manifest the meeting with individualistic spirit. The members and attenders bring a wildness, a personal flavor to the spiritual stew cooked up every week in an anticipatory, yet persuasive silence.