

## State of the Meeting - Memphis Friends Meeting

A cohesive theme emerged from our worship sharing on January 19<sup>th</sup> in response to the traditional Quaker query *How fares the Spirit amongst you?* It was expressed in many different words, although by the end of our hour we felt we had experienced a gathered meeting. Some of those words identified challenges – transition, anxiety, accelerating change, crossed boundaries – while others spoke of our resilience as a meeting – cohesion, accepting change, moving forward, deepening our focus on caring for each other in our meeting community, feeling an abundance of gratitude, and maintaining the meeting as a haven of sanity for all who have found their way here.

For several years now, we have been experiencing an unexpected number of losses for a community our size. In 2024 alone we held memorial services for four Friends who had passed. Each memorial brought us gifts as the family and friends of the deceased joined us and shared their perspectives and stories. These were not our only losses; many of us have been grieving the absence of our former close connection with SAYMA. Happily, we have been able to provide the stability and safety of Quaker worship for ourselves and for new attenders who have joined us in worship, potluck, and meetings for learning.

Our outreach to the world has continued and even found some new avenues for connection. In addition to providing single-serve food packets and Thanksgiving baskets to the New Tyler AME Church as well as clothing and toiletries to Manna House, we have formed a new partnership with the Frayser Community Urban Garden and responded to a request from Room at the Inn for calendars. We share space in our meetinghouse with four or five local groups and each year we participate in events supporting the LGBTQ community. Our Justice Working Group is small but steady as it moves from educating us about problems to encouraging us to get involved.

As for inreach, we have found that simply being together helps deepen our sense of community. We've shared experiences about the 2024 total solar eclipse, held a spring retreat, experimented with game nights, and so forth. Hybrid meetings for worship, business, and learning have become a fixture and we've experimented with a special worship requiring masks so Friends with immunity issues can experience an in-person meeting once again. We have learned to be patient with ourselves and each other, serving as we can and sitting back when we must.

Our meeting is still adjusting to the profound shifts since the pandemic shutdown kept us out of the meetinghouse for over two years. Where once we had 30 souls in worship at the meetinghouse, now it is not quite as many as 20 divided between the meeting room and Zoom. Happily, it is also true that we have gained confidence watching our meeting survive in spite of our smaller numbers and we are heartened to watch a transition unfolding as the torch passes from those who carried so much of the responsibility for our meeting for decades to younger, newer Friends who are stepping up.

In a world thrown into chaos by a global pandemic and political retrenchment, we seek to renew ourselves in the Light and keep our options open as we go forward seasoning what is ours to do. It is clear to us that a vibrant meeting community is essential for helping us grow. Even as so much else in our world goes on changing, our meeting remains.

Seasoned in worship sharing; drafted by Mallory Woodard and Carol Ciscel, reviewed in another worship sharing, and finally brought to business meeting on February 9, 2025 for approval.