

Eastside Friends Meeting

State of the Society Report 2021

Approved at Meeting for Worship for Business, 4/18/2021

Eastside Friends Meetinghouse stands on unceded ancestral land of the Sammamish People, who were closely related to the First People of Seattle, the Duwamish. Descendants of the Sammamish today are members of the Suquamish, Snoqualmie, and Tulalip tribes. We honor these Native communities and their Elders. We appreciate that they have been here since time immemorial, and are still here, continuing to bring light to their ancient heritage.

We also recognize that American settlers forcibly removed the Sammamish from this land following the Point Elliott Treaty of 1855. The diseases, greed, and violence of settlers decimated Sammamish communities, along with many other local indigenous communities. This acknowledgement is part of our Meeting's commitment to moving toward right relations with Indigenous people, through recognition of our own history and responsibility, and through ongoing education.
(approved November 2020)

Like many other Friends groups, Eastside has been meeting by videoconference (Zoom) since March 2020, early in the COVID-19 pandemic. We find major benefits and major drawbacks in meeting online. It has been a joy to include members and attenders who “zoom in” from long distances. The temporary shrinking of our meeting’s carbon footprint is a plus. After initial adjustments and setting some Friendly norms (like turning off the chat function during meeting), many of us find the online experience of Worship and Meeting for Business to be better than we had expected. We are glad to have responded to the pandemic restrictions as well as we have and greatly relieved to learn that it is possible to maintain a sense of community despite the challenges of our time. The challenges are real, though. Not everyone is equally comfortable using the technology for online worship. Some members and attenders have chosen not to participate online at all. We make special efforts to keep in touch with them, but we miss their presence in Meeting for Worship.

Many of us feel the lack of sharing our beloved space, seeing each other face to face, and being as present to each other as public health guidelines would allow. However, Sonneva Wood, who lives near the Meetinghouse, goes there on Sunday mornings to “hold the space” during Meeting, which gives others comfort and encouragement. We are particularly concerned that we have no way of holding Children’s Meeting, though two of our young people spend other non-Quaker time together online.

When we are able to use the Meetinghouse again, we hope to establish some kind of hybrid meeting so that Friends at a distance can participate to some extent. We are not quite sure what form that will take and will want to ask advice from other meetings.

Even in this time of meeting online, we have welcomed several visitors, and one new attender, Molly Brewer, has become a member of the Society. We also completed Susan Cozzens’ transfer of membership from Atlanta to Eastside. Both of these new members bring great joy to EFM! At the same time, we also grieve the death of a member who had moved to Florida several years ago, Mary Ellen Sheridan, and three longtime attenders: Ramona Burks, Kim O’Keefe, and Bob Wells. Although they were not able to attend much in recent years, their absence leaves real holes in our community.

Kim O’Keefe’s death was a huge loss for Mid-Columbia Worship Group (under Eastside’s care). Eastside held an online meeting for healing with members of Mid-Columbia in the summer 2020 and we continue to seek ways to build on our connection with them.

A longtime attendee suggested (and funded) radio spots to raise community awareness of our meeting and others -- the statement mentioned QuakerFinder.org to help interested listeners find Friends near them.

We have continued many activities in the online format. A small group meets for Bible Study once a month. Our second hours have included several discussions leading up to a new Land Acknowledgement for Eastside Meeting (see above). This statement may change over time as we learn more. We are considering further education and action around our meeting’s relationship to local Native American communities and stewardship of the Meetinghouse woods. We have held several second hours on racial justice issues, including the history of race as a concept in U.S. history (with Paul Christiansen) and close looks at micro-aggressions (with Jodi Newman). We approved and circulated a statement rejecting violence and the threat of violence as tools in political disputes. We experimented with an “activism hour,” sharing information about current issues and sending e-mail messages to state and federal legislators.

Even though many volunteer opportunities have been suspended, Eastside Friends remain active in local, state, and national issues. Several Eastsiders have met repeatedly with representatives of the Redmond Police Department (RPD) about racial equity questions. EFM Friends provided statistical analysis about racial disproportionality in RPD reporting. We will continue the conversations about implicit bias with the RPD, and EFM Friends who live in Kirkland are considering similar conversations there. A record group of nine EFM members and attenders participated in the Quaker Voice Lobby Day. Friends continue to work on issues of racial equity, criminal justice reform, Alternatives to Violence, and climate change. An emerging concern is the proposal to broaden the selective service registration requirement to include young women.

Many of us have felt significant levels of stress recently, even feeling hopeless at times. All of us need mutual care more than ever. We have lived through a year of turmoil: a pandemic with all its griefs and restrictions; institutional racism, particularly in policing and voting rights; increasingly bitter political polarization; and an election and transition of power ending in violence in Washington D.C. All this is on top of ongoing concerns about immigration, prison reform, education, housing and homelessness, hunger, and the overarching menace of climate disruption.

It has been a strain to keep seeing that of God in everyone on all sides of all disputes, to keep reaching for compassion and unity – even though that is what we are called to do. It’s hard work. It’s essential work. It does help to recognize the unexpected joys, to focus on what it is that we can do, and to know that as people of faith we are not alone in the efforts. As one Friend recently put it: “I can’t imagine not having a Quaker community during times like these.”