

Bellingham Friends Meeting State of Society Report for 2017 (DRAFT)

- ◆ How does the Spirit fare with us?
- ◆ How well do we “set the table” for our Meeting community?

The most visible recent development for Bellingham Friends Meeting is that we began meeting in a larger and more open space downstairs in the same building. We have also become more intentional about accessibility issues, particularly those related to mobility, hearing impairment, and gender identity. Our new space presents challenges, being larger and thus harder to hear in, so we are adjusting to the use of microphones. We now have unity that we want a more permanent home, better suited to our needs, and are exploring both rental and purchase options.

We feel that Spirit is rising. We have a greater sense of unity among us, as we heal from differences following our consideration of a building purchase in 2015. Our fall retreat, “Roots, Shoots, and Fruits,” was facilitated by the Runyans of Ben Lomond Quaker Center (BLQC), and helped us to get to know each other better and to increase trust. We have launched 3 small spiritual nurture groups as an outgrowth of this program. Attendance at our monthly spirit group is strong, and we also invite individuals to share their spiritual journeys during second hour.

We participate in the wider Quaker community: Annual Session, the FGC Gathering, Quarterly Meeting, and consultations at BLQC. We planned the spring 2017 Quarterly Meeting session together with Lopez Friends Meeting; this partnering works well for us, drawing on broader base of inspiration and energy.

All the work we offer is holy, and we recognize the importance of “letting our life speak” (which we do daily, whether or not we intend to) and how spiritual grounding undergirds activism. Active participation, both in the inner workings of meeting and the community at large, helps people feel connected. We recognize that people have different gifts to share and are called to serve in various ways. We have many positions and committees, and we notice that some slots on the list of weekly sign-up tasks go unfilled. We try to be mindful of leaning too heavily on a few and to simplify when possible.

Supported by the Social and Environmental Concerns Committee, we seek to let our lives speak--via Concern of the Month, film sponsoring, tabling at community events and carrying our BFM banner at Bellingham Pride and Science marches. We have committed to a community program (Family Promise) that helps homeless families by partnering faith communities to provide temporary housing, meals and support on a rotating basis a few weeks each year.

Our Outreach and Welcoming Committee works to make Meeting more accessible, “setting the table”, and trying to meet varying needs. We help each other as needs arise with assistance and care committees. In 2017 we held trainings and second hours to create greater appreciation for acceptance for gender diversity and have taken concrete steps--bathroom signs and the opportunity to give pronouns during introductions and on name tags --to make this evident.

We appreciate the richness that age diversity offers our community and seek to make young adults and children feel welcome. We have drawn young people looking for a spiritual community. We've "set the table" for a dynamic children's program for our children and hope to attract more families with children.

