

**Montana Gathering of Friends  
State of the Meeting Report  
2019 to 2021**

**No one could have anticipated in 2019 what was to come in the next two years. Clearly there has been suffering due to social isolation and other stressors from the Covid 19 pandemic. But it is equally clear that there have been unexpected gifts which will change us forever.**

**Looking back before the pandemic we met for Summer MGOF 2019 with a theme of “From Spirit to Action and Action to Spirit.” A couple shared their personal journeys of healing and leading toward social justice, especially on the southern border of the US. The teenagers provided a memorable skit on immigration that was both powerful and funny, ending in the song, *The ocean refuses no river, no river....***

**In the winter of 2020 our theme was Listening to Where the Words Come From. We wanted to address concerns that some F/friends have felt alienated when their primary language of spirit was not well received by others. Sometimes that difference is named Christ centered in contrast to Universalist. But in this gathering we tried to go deeper than labels to “where the words come from.”**

**Shortly after our winter gathering, all of us had to shift. It became impossible to meet in person. We were bereft of our worship groups. It was at this point that we made different choices. Some found Zoom an acceptable platform for worship. Others found it uncomfortable and stilted. Bozeman discovered the richness of worshiping with near and faraway folks. Red Lodge Friends started a worship group in late summer of 2019. When covid hit, they met by zoom, with some attending Bozeman when they could. Dillon folks decided not to meet in person while continuing important personal connections, especially outdoors. Great Falls welcomed isolated Friends, Helena folks and even out of state Friends joined them in worship on Zoom.**

**We realized that if we wanted to hold any gathering at all for summer 2020, it would have to be on Zoom. Ministry and Counsel saw the need for a message of hope and asked Carrie Newcomer, a Quaker singer/song writer, to lead us in “Gardening in the Dark.” Carrie provided just the hopeful energy that we needed.**

**For Winter MGOF 2021, still on Zoom, we were privileged to have Diane Randall, General Secretary of FCNL, serve as our Friend in Residence. The theme was “Bridging our inner and outer worlds.” Diane encouraged us to settle into inner stillness to help us in finding our unique gifts. We were inspired by the effective and persistent work of FCNL.**

**What's new? MGOF agreed to take on the Honduran Families Project (see Bienvenidos discussion in the Bozeman Worship Group report) and statewide Quakers have donated funds. One challenge faced was the sorting out of how to make legal donations that could be documented. The men's group recently met in person after covid zoom meetings: the men continue to find important connection with each other.**

**A member who has served in our state legislature started a zoom lobbying group called "Truth to Power." Her leadership kept a light shining on a state legislature in which light of any kind was hard to find. She inspires us all.**

**Some groups are now experimenting with a hybrid model of worship, with some attending in person and others by Zoom. The next challenge is figuring out how to use a hybrid model for Summer MGOF (if possible).**

**To those not familiar with Montana Friends, MGOF is technically a monthly meeting but serves as our Quarterly Meeting. Worship groups in the west of the state function under the care of Missoula Monthly Meeting. Billings Monthly Meeting, the third meeting in the state, continues to meet regularly.**

**The challenges reported two years ago are still with us. We have few children and family units among us. We want to be more effective in our welcome to newcomers and returning friends. We want to clarify roles and responsibilities including terms of service on committees. But most of all we want to be open to Spirit, in each other, in our communities and in the wider world of which we are a part. We know that if we focus our work on being channels of Spirit, we will breathe new energy into our Montana Quaker community.**

**Linnea Wang  
Clerk of Ministry and Counsel  
June 28, 2021**