

Missoula Friends Meeting State of the Society Report 2020-2021

Missoula Friends Meeting met June 13 to consider an assessment of the state of our meeting and for a report to the quarterly (MGOF) and yearly (NPYM) meetings.

This meeting is summarized as follows:

Missoula Meeting has met the challenges of the COVID year with resiliency and flexibility as well as fatigue and simply dogged determination. We have grown in diversity, insight and creativity as a result of this experience, and have strived to listen for whisperings and nudgings of Spirit in the strange, though now familiar space imposed by computer conferencing platforms.

Last spring and summer, we met for Meeting for Worship outdoors, masked and at a distance, until the Montana weather intervened and sent us onto the internet. We have been enriched by the attendance of Friends from distant worship groups under our care in the Flathead, Mission, and Glacier Valleys as well as from Colorado, England and British Columbia, including some newcomers to Quakerism and to our meeting. Some of us have attended meetings elsewhere and have appreciated that experience. We've also held a mid-week virtual Meeting for Worship.

We have clearly benefitted from the ease of gathering by teleconference for committee meetings and meetings of groups with shared interests. Many of us have found richness in being able to gather virtually with our Quaker neighbors to the west, the Moscow/Pullman Friends meeting as well as with the Montana Gathering of Friends (MGOF) community.

We're aware and concerned that there are other Missoula Friends who haven't attended meetings during much of this year and for whom the virtual platform isn't workable. There is no substitute for meeting in person.

The events that mark our lives have moved on during COVID. We sadly lost Richard Dunn, a dear, long-standing meeting member, in the spring of last year. Many Friends, Richard's family and other members of the community who also treasured Richard gathered in the fall to celebrate Richard and hold a tree-planting in his memory.

We joyfully gathered on May 22nd in person, masked at the Meetinghouse, to support Spencer Kellum and Heather Cummins who married under the care of our meeting. It was a remarkable time for those gathered, filling all Missoula Friends with hope, joy and wonder—and laughter.

A moving experience has been to unite in support of a new statement acknowledging Native peoples as the original inhabitants of the land we now occupy:

"The Missoula Friends Meeting House is located on land cared for and held sacred by the Salish and Kalispel tribes for more than 12,000 years. We acknowledge the theft of tribal lands by the U.S. government and colonists. We recognize the consequent disruption of tribal culture, spiritual practices and life-sustaining natural resources, and the devastating effects of forced assimilation into European culture, with resultant loss of tribal languages and practices. We honor and support the resilience and determination of the tribes in meeting ongoing challenges and revitalizing their culture, spiritual practices and languages."

We have searched for ways that we can also make a difference as allies for racial justice. Our meeting has sponsored a monthly gathering concerning issues of racism. Through poignant meetings of this forum, we've had opportunities to become more informed and aware regarding the many issues confronting local Native people, as well as those of refugees from Central and South America.

As the last gathering of this series, on June 27th at 5:30 PM, Ellie Bundy, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) Councilwoman, will give a presentation for Quakers and other interested people on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP). Ellie Bundy presides over a new task force, which is the first comprehensive tribal response plan to address this nationwide tragedy, in conjunction with national and state officials. The plan focuses not only on law enforcement but also on victim services, community outreach, the media and public communication. It will be used as a national model. Ellie will provide an overview of MMIP, describe the components of the plan and discuss ways Quakers and others can assist tribes in addressing this terrible tragedy.

We have had enthusiastic Meetinghouse work parties and plan some community-building gatherings and excursions. We have plans to finally begin again to use our Meetinghouse, coming together for blended meetings in July.

"We continue to struggle as a small Meeting to accomplish all that we seek to do. We find that we are heavily reliant on a few people in Meeting to do much, and in particular this burden falls far too heavily on our Meeting Clerk. We are challenged to find balance and to work together more effectively to share our work and support one another."

We long for the felt sense of a gathered meeting where we will all be in the same familiar space once again, where Spirit will move among us in a way more familiar to those in human form.

Draft of June 23, 2021

Missoula Friends Meeting M&O Committee