The Missoula Monthly Meeting of Friends has spent a challenging but spirit-led year of discernment on how best to meet the spiritual needs of our community and to deepen our spiritual commitments and understandings. The Covid-19 virus has been a particular challenge, as Friends can no longer gather in person. The Meeting has responded both by conducting Meeting for Worship via Zoom and by adding a worship sharing (via Zoom) for an hour and a half prior to the Meeting for Worship. We decided to undertake this worship sharing in recognition of the difficulties Friends are facing due to the social isolation. Specifically, it was a way to explore how we can meet each other's need for spiritual companionship, witness each other's stories, and seek clarity on how we function as a Society of Friends through these difficult times. Our worship sharing began on April 12 under the leadership of Jack Rowan, a weighty and longtime Friend who drew on the history of Friends’ responses to crises and presented reflections on ways of nurturing spiritual companionship. We have continued this process weekly, sending out queries during the week in preparation for the worship sharing, Examples of the queries include:

- How are we led to respond to those in our meeting/worship groups who are alone, sick, worried, experiencing economic need and/or grieving due to this outbreak?
- How are we led to hold in our embrace those in our meeting/worship groups who cannot participate in online fellowship?
- Is our Meeting able to adapt to an extended period of physical distancing protocols, and how do we envision what we might look like in the future?

The worship sharing has been inspirational and has deepened the sense of spirit in our Meeting for Worship. An additional benefit is that Quakers from other meetings are able to join us via Zoom, which has enriched our community and brought much joy. We have decided to continue to hold all of our meetings on Zoom for the time being, as the State recommends that those over age 65, or who have underlying health conditions, continue to shelter at home.

To help during this crisis, M&O has also gathered and sent to Friends a list of websites of local resources that are available in Missoula, including childcare, food security, housing needs, employee assistance, virus testing and school announcements. We have additionally informed Friends of ways that they can get involved as volunteers (with descriptions of need, expected background experience, and level of urgency).
Our meetings have seen many additional changes over this past year. Perhaps most significant, three Co-Clerks were nominated to share the Clerk responsibilities on a rotating basis, as there was no one individual able to take on the role of Clerk. This arrangement has worked well, although the Meeting is thrilled that Jack Rowan, who is a longtime member of Missoula Friends and has just finished a Divinity Degree from the Earlham School of Religion, has agreed to be Clerk for next year. Further, we have been invigorated by the presence of several new young Friends, who requested that we add an additional Meeting for Worship on Wednesday evenings, as they are unable to attend Meeting on Sunday mornings. At their suggestion, we have also added a book club reading and discussion of *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, by Robin DiAngelo. All of these events are currently being held on Zoom.

In addition, concern was raised that very few people were attending Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business (MWCB), even though Friends felt that it was important to the spiritual life of our meeting. We held a threshing session to discuss this and decided, on a pilot basis, to move the MWCB, which had been previously been held monthly at 9:00-11:00 AM, to 10:30-12:00 PM, preceded by a half hour of silent worship. The agenda for the MWCB is also being sent in advance of Meeting.

Among many activities this year, we hosted Sarah Freeman-Woolpert from the Friends Committee on National Legislation, to conduct an advocacy training, and to collaborate with the Jeanette Rankin Resource Center to consider establishing an FCNL Advocacy Team in Missoula. We also conducted a threshing session with FCNL Advisory Board Member Jasmine Krotkov to consider our priorities for national legislation to guide FCNL in setting their national legislation work.

To strengthen our community and foster fellowship, we have also continued potluck dinners in Friend’s homes during the summer and at Christmas time. One of the most delightful events is the annual Gingerbread House Making Party, where about 25 of us gathered over pizza to use graham crackers, frosting and a wide assortment of candies to create amazing designs. The young boys and men particularly expanded the concept of what might be considered a house. There was much laughter and fellowship during the building phase and as we displayed finished products. Many of the Missoula Friends have also continued attending the quarterly meeting held by the Montana Gathering of Friends (MGOF). We had a rich and special weekend in February at Camp Mak-a-Dream, with other dear Montana Quakers. MGOF is currently deciding how this wonderful fellowship will continue during the Covid-19 crisis since Luccock Park will be closed for summer 2020.
In addition, Missoula Friends have experienced a number of hardships this year, including the continuing decrease in our membership, which has resulted in fewer financial gifts from Friends. This has prompted us to consider ways to reduce our expenses. In late April Richard Dunn, a long time member and attender to our Meeting, died. In reflecting on his life and contributions to our Meeting we found Richard spoke to the condition of many Friends with words he wrote when seeking to be recognized as a member of our Meeting: “… being a Quaker is not being a member of a passive group and that quite conceivably my thoughts and impressions – built up over the course of a lifetime and sometimes worn comfortably, perhaps too comfortably – will be challenged. I hope that this is the case.” In addition a number of Friends have gone through loss of family members, operations and hospitalizations or other family traumas. Many have reported that they have felt held in the Light and loving care of the Meeting over these difficult times and have expressed heartfelt gratitude for this caring and support.

Perhaps the global pandemic gives us opportunity to reflect on what really matters when we are challenged to “be the Meeting” in new ways.