

Multnomah Friends Meeting

Multnomah Friends Meeting adapted to the novel Coronavirus lockdown remarkably well. We have met virtually for almost a year in many different and creative ways. Meetings for worship met on a personal Zoom account for several weeks until Multnomah Friends Meeting acquired accounts to host worship, committee meetings, children's programs, workshops, book groups, Quaker Roots groups, clearness and support committees and memorials. In immediate response to the onset of the pandemic, the Care and Counsel Committee worked with volunteers to reach everyone in the Meeting's Directory in person, through email, or by telephone. Within a month of closing our building, an ad hoc Committee on Re-opening the Building began to meet weekly to develop safe protocols for very small groups, including parents and children, to use the building now, and to prepare for eventual reopening. Committees shifted the way they worked to meet the current needs. The Communications Committee has been vital in keeping Multnomah Friends connected through regular updates to the Directory, our website, and Facebook page. They have trained and coordinated volunteers who generously host Zoom gatherings. We are grateful for our monthly Newsletter editor, and also our Hearthkeeper, who writes the Weekly Bulletin. Both do a terrific job of keeping us informed about many activities and concerns being addressed in our Meeting.

The challenge to be an equitable and inclusive spiritual community has been daunting. Zoom isn't warm and cuddly. We miss participation from older Friends for whom the technology is difficult, from younger families whose children are fatigued with screens, and from parents who are working and teaching from home. We have endeavored to create alternate ways to connect with children and families: deliveries of home-made birthday cakes to children's homes, Saturday story time, a kids' newsletter, a Halloween parade at Laurelhurst Park. Children's Committee, along with other individuals and committees in the Meeting, continue to seek an inner Spirit of faith and belief, to be shared and encouraged in our children and families.

Also, in regard to children, Meeting has been led to revisit the Child and Youth Safety policy which was last revised in 2016. The ongoing work, taken up by the Children's Program committee at the request of business meeting, and now with support and guidance from Nursery, Youth Program, Personnel and Care and Counsel Committees, is being carried out in a spirit of love and discernment. Spirit has led this group to develop proposed amendments and supplements to the policy that aim to both lessen the chance of incidents occurring and to respond to safety concerns and incidents in a consistent, comprehensive manner that attends to all the relationships within our community.

Remote, virtual meetings have increased connection and participation in some ways. Folks who are unable to come to the Meetinghouse in "normal" times, whether due to distance or physical challenge, now join via Zoom as freely as anyone. Meetings for worship often include folks from the coast, from central Oregon, and other states as well. We are delighted that Amigas del Senor, with whom we have a Covenant of Caring, now regularly join Worship and Meeting for Business all the way from Honduras.

For some, the quality of worship in a virtual meeting is not as spiritually satisfying as meeting in person, yet attendance is strong with sixty to eighty regular worshippers at 10 a.m., a dozen at 8:15 on Sundays, and thirty or more participants in Meeting for Business. An unexpected upside of virtual meetings: the break-out rooms after worship jumble people together in stimulating ways, and people who probably wouldn't have met and talked during the old social hour are cultivating warm friendships. We note our lighter carbon footprint when we meet virtually as well. We foresee that when the blessed day comes that we will meet in person again, we will continue to offer virtual (and probably hybrid virtual/in-person) worship.

During this pandemic time, perhaps more than ever, many individuals are stepping forward creatively and energetically to organize activities where the spirit thrives: Weekly Wednesday walks, Quaker Roots Groups, Bible Study, Vigil for Racial Justice, Book Group which now meets weekly rather than monthly. During this time, the Library committee has worked diligently to redesign the library space, reorganize and re-catalog the entire library. They are now lending books with delivery or curbside pick-up. A new Adult Religious Education Committee has been formed and has adopted the theme, "Engaging in changing our world, how to stay spiritually grounded over the long haul?" • Spirit has been strong with us this past year, and sustained us in working beyond our virtual walls. Friends have vigiled for racial justice, lobbied lawmakers, supported immigrant rights, joined affinity groups to counter racism in our lives and in our communities. After years of on and off consideration, Multnomah Meeting moved forward in 2020 to request affiliation with Friends General Conference (FGC), and in September, Multnomah Meeting was welcomed into affiliation with FGC.

While we've faced considerable vulnerability and stress this past year, we look to the horizon with hope. And we wish to not "go back to how things have been," but to allow the experience of the pandemic and increasing sensitivity to injustices to continue working upon us to slow down, re-focus, center upon what really matters, and to let our Quaker values shine.