

State of the Meeting Report

Olympia Friends Meeting April 2021

Olympia Friends began 2020 carrying pain from continuing tensions surrounding safety and welcoming, and how to move forward. Nominating Committee was challenged to find individuals willing to serve. Pre-COVID we addressed these issues in community conversations and through joint meetings of Care & Concerns Committee and Worship & Ministry. The committees continued meeting jointly during COVID, working with individuals. In October, they brought forward a proposal to Meeting for Business that the Meeting use a this time for reflection and renewal. It was enthusiastically approved. So began our Composting for Renewal period – in other Meetings, it has been called a Sabbath Year – to last until the end of 2021. During this period, committees chose how often to meet and are encouraged to avoid new projects. Meeting for Business is being held as needed with three Friends alternating clerking duties.

During this period, Olympia Friends is trying a variety of approaches to build community and nurture our spiritual lives, guided by the ad hoc Composting4Renewal Committee. We had an evening of guided meditation with Al Hendrix of Lower Columbia WG. Earlier in 2020, a weekly drop-in spiritual conversation group began, focusing on QuakerSpeak video, along with a group studying the work of John Woolman.

COVID-19 affected Meeting for Worship. While most people in Meeting worship on Zoom each week, there was outdoor worship which attracted 10-20 people in the summer on the lawn. As the weather cooled, it moved indoors, with two doors open, and chairs spaced six feet apart, attracting 5-10 people, bundled up.

Some Meeting members had opted to step away from Meeting due to the degree to which Meeting conflicts dominated the life of the Meeting, and have been holding Worship in homes. Resolving the conflicts, and the way in which they are resolved, may determine whether those needing separation can be ready to rejoin the main group, although at least a few have permanently severed ties with the Meeting.

As the Black Lives Matter movement grew in response to ongoing horrendous violence against people of color, the weekly spiritual discussion group morphed into a book group, reading White Fragility and How to be an Anti-Racist. Older Friends in particular were frustrated when COVID concerns kept them, for the most part, from group demonstrations.

In service to our local community, individuals from Meeting made meals on a regular basis for 2 homeless shelters, and provided material aid to the homeless, with our Sock Tree tradition and with direct engagement with those living in camps. Olympia Meeting continues to provide leadership and volunteers to Quaker Voice. Friends were active in the 2020 legislative session when they could lobby in person pre-COVID, supporting Quaker Voice priorities.

Even without income from renting our Meetinghouse, Olympia has managed to make ends meet. It continues to tithe to different charities each month and annually

contributes 1% of general revenue to an international charity and 1% to a domestic charity. We continue our ministry with Friends Ugandan Safe Transport, providing material support to get threatened gays, lesbians and transgender/queer people out of Uganda where they are in imminent danger of their lives literally. The danger had abated until the campaign culminating in January's presidential elections there engendered increased persecution and violence.

Olympia co-hosted the first Quarterly Meeting Zoom gathering last spring, when the idea was still new. Out of that arose the opportunity for our Children's Committee to offer our Zoom-based first day school to other Friends in the Pacific Northwest Quarter including an on-going curriculum focused on racism. The curriculum includes the wealth gap, media and culture, education. On the fun side, we also enjoyed several Zoom games nights as well as a virtual version of our annual crafts night which are to continue on a quarterly basis. The organizers delivered crafts kits to the virtual participants.

Olympia has benefitted greatly during this pandemic year from having a Hearthkeeper, a paid position aiding Meeting administrative, technical, and rental issues, staffed by a capable member who also serves on key Meeting Committees. The increase in Zoom demands alone might have overwhelmed this active Meeting without her quickly mastering Zoom.

In summary, Olympia Friends met the challenge of adapting to COVID realities and in the fall, chose to slow down, reflect, and restore. Nonetheless, we continue with two weekly Meetings for Worship which have attracted new participants, even three new members in the works. Zoom has allowed people with physical challenges and hearing loss to participate as well as regular attendance from F/friends in Montana, California, Arizona, Texas, Uganda and the Washington coast. Participation remains lower due both to COVID fatigue and to the residual tensions in the Meeting that Meeting continues to address in 2021.