State of Society Report for Salem Friends Meeting  2019-2020

We look back on last year as another complex year for our Meeting. Several of us suffer poor health and cope with other difficulties; yet we find hope and strength in our faithful circle of attenders and members. We sometimes struggle to help and support each other adequately since we are such a small group, but we are striving to be a community of care, reaching out to those who are experiencing trying times. We are increasingly worried about the state of the world, yet the work of peacemaking and social action heartens us. We are challenged but not overwhelmed by current events and turn toward our commitment to Quaker Testimonies to strengthen our resolve to live in the Light. Our biggest challenge as a meeting is achieving balance between spiritual nourishment and the work of the meeting. We have begun a process of discernment to determine what is realistic for us to accomplish together as a Meeting and find clearness as to where we should place our energies and how we should conduct our business. We have begun devoting one “second hour” program each month to the exploration of spiritual deepening practices that may sustain our work for peace and justice.

Our attendance at Meeting ranges from eleven to twenty-two. We occasionally have visitors to Salem joining us for Meeting for Worship. Our fellowship is enhanced by Friends who have recently moved to the area. We encourage long-time attenders to seek or transfer their membership to our Meeting. We recently celebrated both two attenders’ transfer of membership and a deeply committed long-time attender’s approved request for membership. Despite having prepared a well-rounded First Day program, we only have one child who attends with some frequency. We celebrated the high school graduation of two young women who grew up in the Meeting. We hope to have more families with children join us; they bring joy and energy to our circle. We mourn the unexpected death of Rose Lewis, whose exceptional dedication to peace, equality and justice inspired and challenged us.

We extend ourselves in service to the greater Salem community as individuals and as representatives of the Meeting. We have a good relationship with our neighbors and our Little Free Library in front of the Meeting house is in frequent use by the community. We have engaged in outreach to the Fellowship of Reconciliation and volunteer as regularly as is possible to serve in both Family Promise (an interfaith program serving homeless families) and South Salem Friends Church’s free community dinners. We are seeking discernment regarding our corporate presence in the community. Our meeting house serves as a meeting place for peace advocacy and community action groups. Simply having this physical presence is an important way we can serve the community.

Members of our Meeting are active in the larger Quaker community and have attended the North Pacific Yearly Meeting Annual Session, Willamette Quarterly Meetings and Convergent Friends retreats and worship services. We are hosting an FCNL Advocacy Team, one of 130 such teams in the country. Attenders of our Meeting who are active in this group have generated three letters to the editor of the local newspaper.
Our Meeting House is aging and the cost of repairs and upgrades of vital structures is a concern we carry forward. In order to minimize costs, we endeavor to do much of the necessary work ourselves. We have experienced increased camaraderie and joy while working together gardening and maintaining the yard. We choose hardy native and climate-friendly plants that will not have to be replanted, subjected to much if any fertilizing or require herbicide and pesticide applications. While we exercise Quaker simplicity in the care and maintenance of the Meeting House and its grounds, we also recognize our duty to pay our bills and keep the space clean, safe and functioning for us and for our many guests. Our property stewardship is a significant responsibility and many have put hours of their own time into painting, landscape maintenance and repair work. We are exploring new ways to share the tasks of property maintenance within the Meeting so no Friend is carrying too heavy a burden. Our Meeting House has one room that serves as an archive for some of the history of our Meeting and of the larger peace and social justice community in Salem. Another asset within the Meeting House is our library, which contains a well-stocked collection of books and periodicals of interest to Friends.

Faced with our own health challenges and concern for the suffering of immigrants, refugees, the homeless, and people of color, we sometimes have a somber circle. Yet we still share many moments of hope, peace and spiritual renewal. We trust the Light will be with us in the coming year, as we focus on our spiritual and physical health.