

State of the Meeting Report 2020, University Friends Meeting

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University Friends Meeting's strong community has helped us weather the initial year of the pandemic. We have taken good care of ourselves and each other and been fortunate that we've not lost anyone to COVID. The first example of Friends' initiative and generosity is the act of an attender who carried us on his personal Zoom account for months until Meeting established its own account. Much patient teaching and loving tech support has been needed, and the training has proved useful in the lives of those who had never heard of Zoom before March 2020.

Our lengthy history and strong traditions, which enabled the building of strong relationships, continue to support Friends as we adapt to this unprecedented situation. Technology allowed us to:

- Associate names with faces at the same time
- include people who had previously been excluded [e.g. hearing loss or other disabilities, distance, or transportation issues]
- focus on tasks that could be undertaken remotely rather than strain to find volunteers to undertake them in person. and
- enjoy the participation of Friends who live at a distance. A 98-year old technology holdout has been delighted by Zoom worship. Friends locked down in senior living have also benefited.

Weekly socially-distant gardening work parties have kept our campus looking cared for and loved.

In general, Friends have been kind to one another and demonstrated a lot of creativity. In particular, much of the technological work has been accomplished by ad hoc groups, as the normal committee structure is not totally right for this pandemic time.

University Meeting is smaller and older than we have been in the recent past. In 2020 we had six deaths and four new members, for a net loss of two and a total of 125. A substantial number of Friends have found that online worship does not meet their spiritual needs and thus have missed a year of worship with Friends. Some miss in-depth conversations and sustained thought and analysis of spiritual matters. Others find depth and intimacy in worship-sharing groups or regular weekly online gatherings. UFM continues to exclude a disruptive former member, who would not comply with norms we had created for our community. The quality and productivity of our business have improved, and our worship has deepened since then. While this year has been challenging financially, the Meeting has continued to generate the financial resources needed to maintain our regular operations from member's donations and the rental of our facilities. We have incurred significant expenditures due to the need to address infrastructure issues in our aging facilities. However, the reserve accounts that we keep funded for this purpose were adequate to cover these expenditures. Committees in general are short-staffed. In social concerns, we have worked with our staff and a skilled homeless outreach

worker to humanely manage unauthorized campers on our campus. We hosted an event, including unhoused persons, to learn how we might better help and advocate around this issue. Our homeless shelter tenant found it impossible to meet social distancing guidelines in our facility and had to relocate elsewhere. Our other homeless services tenant, Facing Homelessness, has been meeting growing needs of the unhoused in our neighborhood. Our Facilities Committee sensitively upheld Friends' values while addressing security concerns around the building.

Amid these difficulties, the Meeting community has made substantial efforts to foster growth in our spiritual life, especially by reinforcing our common bonds. The Community Building Committee has added "breakout rooms" after worship for individuals to chat in groups of 3 or 4. The Adult Religious Education Committee showcased individuals' spiritual life stories through "This I believe" presentations, which provide some of the depth and intimacy we are missing. Worship sharing groups have found it logistically easier to gather online than in person, though it's not the same experience. An Uprooting Racism Book Group, meeting monthly since the fall of 2019, has flourished on Zoom with larger numbers participating than in the past. Children's religious education shifted to meeting online once a month for Family Worship, including stories, songs, and even crafts. One family from South Seattle Friends Meeting attends frequently. Education Committee expressed appreciation for "musical and tech support from non-committee members" who didn't have to travel to assist with Family Worship. We had a two-part Meeting for Remembrance. The first was a Memorial for 6 Members of UFM whose memorials were postponed because of COVID: Kate Hunter, Tom Craig, Steve Wilson, Bob Edgerton, Henry Bernstein, and Charlotte Schreiber. The Second part of Remembrance was for sharing about losses and changes that had come for Friends during the pandemic year. For the winter holidays, a member who's a professional chef led two online baking demonstration clinics, with tasty results. Community Building Committee organized a three-part soup exchange where we cooked together while chatting on Zoom, traded soups and rolls in the parking lot, then dined and complimented each other's cooking on Zoom later that evening. One WS group celebrated a year of meeting online with a hilarity-filled games night.

As always, Friends found ways to witness to our social concerns: public vigils concerning election integrity, peacekeeper training workshops, and postcard-writing sessions both to elected officials and to support churches affected by hate crimes. In addition, many of us participated in demonstrations supporting Black Lives Matter, and a working group convened a spiritual listening session on queries about harm done by the criminal justice system and its repair. Participants reported feeling more connected with one another, and many people stayed on to discuss the term "abolition." Our Meeting is not at unity on this issue, and we continue to struggle with it. The Ad-hoc Committee on Disability surveyed Meeting members and attenders and recommended several kinds of action for Meeting to improve our responsiveness to the needs of people with disabilities. The QUEST program has continued to provide a full year of service to many of our agencies and communities in spite of COVID restrictions.

For the future, we will work to help people cope with the effects of the pandemic and maintain the strength of our community as we transition to the new normal. We are working to address

the spiritual needs of both those who miss meeting in person and those who can only participate online. We are exploring the use of hybrid meetings with some participating via Zoom and others present in person. When we return to in-person life, we will continue to use some of the new tools we've developed. The ad hoc Committee to Reopen Meeting began holding in-person meetings for worship with pre-registration using RSVPify.com and social distancing requirements in early March 2021. This has helped meet the needs of those for whom Zoom is unsatisfactory. We look forward to continuing to build the Beloved Community we all seek.