University Friends Meeting’s State of the Meeting Report, 2019

Our Meeting’s collective spirit still reverberates from the impact of a difficult decision that we made in October. After laboring with a Friend’s increasingly disorderly behavior over the course of several years, the Meeting chose to lay down this Friend’s membership. Three Friends were recorded as standing aside. In order to create the necessary space to heal and to renew our community, the Meeting also approved a minute to restrict this Friend from our campus and activities, with certain exceptions. The minute set forth that this restriction would not be reconsidered before January 2021.

We made the decision with solemnity, and in recognition that an involuntary termination of membership had never before taken place at UFM; nor, to our knowledge, had it taken place in the history of NPYM. This Friend had been a member for over twenty years. Finding a way forward, for many, felt like separating a piece of our heart.

In the months after this momentous decision, we have been able to tend once again to each other and other issues. Many Friends are participating on one or more of eleven Care Committees, and some are on Clearness Committees. We held a community building retreat in February of the new year, and planned two workshops, one on end of life decision making and another on setting limits and dealing with conflict. Our meetings for worship and for business have felt more gathered. Mid-week evening worship was suspended in the fall, but has recently resumed on first and third Wednesdays at midday.

In December we approved a minute for the formation of an Ad hoc Committee on Disability, with a charge that includes enhancing the Meeting’s understanding of disability issues, providing support for individuals to make accessibility needs known, and making recommendations for improvements to our processes or facilities. We began experimenting with the use of a microphone in 11:00 Meeting for Worship, after having successfully used one in Meeting for Business and weekly Adult Religious Education sessions.

We approved two new memberships, transferred five to other Meetings, and laid down three. Three members died this year: Polly Knox, Nina Sullivan and Tom Craig. We minuted posthumously the Meeting’s admiration for Judith Kolokoff, former Executive Secretary of the AFSC Pacific Northwest Region. We are conscious of our membership gradually decreasing as well as our median age increasing in recent years.

We hired one of our Junior Friends to be a consistent presence with our toddlers and preschoolers (3-5 year olds). We continue to hire regular teachers for our group of 1st – 5th graders, but are challenged to offer these children consistently meaningful Quaker education. On the first Sunday of each month we continue to provide a program for Central and Junior Friends, with young people from other Meetings in the area.

We bring a rich variety of dishes to our monthly potluck on 4th Sunday, and committees are scheduled to prepare the meal after Meeting for Business on 2nd Sundays. The community has taken up this responsibility that was previously held by the Quaker House resident. Our Garden Coordinator facilitates hands-on service that is inviting for newcomers to participate in and enhances the beauty that our grounds provide.

One welcome constant at our Meetinghouse on most First Days for over 25 years was the tall and quiet presence of Roy Lee "Stanley" Anderson, who enjoyed fellowship in the UFM Social Hall, and at other times lived outdoors in the University District. We were
saddened to learn in November that Stanley had died; the Meeting has planned a
memorial service.

Addressing the larger issue of homelessness in UFM’s dense urban neighborhood has
long been a ministry of our Meeting. Since 2017, UFM has rented space in the lower
level of our building to two nonprofits that serve unhoused people. After a remodel of the
former AFSC room, Operation Nightwatch hosts a shelter with beds for 50 men seven
nights a week. Facing Homelessness has their office in part of our large First Day
School room and hosts a daytime service window that gives out supplies and kindness
to about 20 people per day, four days per week. Our Facilities Committee spends a
considerable amount of its attention on issues related to these programs, as well as the
maintenance burden of an aging building. We have now hired a full-time Facilities
Manager who lives in Quaker House. Like many places of worship and community in
these times, we also consider how to best foster safety on campus for our staff,
members, and guests.
The Library Committee completed a major two-year effort to create a digital catalog of
over 1400 items, which is now available online through LibraryCat.

The Peace & Social Concerns Committee supported a variety of events and causes
related to earthcare, uprooting racism, supporting immigrants, and denuclearization.
Each month, the Committee hosted a table for writing letters to legislators and
contributed an article to our Gleamings newsletter.

Adult Religious Education sessions continue each First Day at 9:30 a.m. One session
per month is called “This I Believe” (borrowing the title from a NPR series), in which a
Friend from our own Meeting talks about their life and spiritual path. These sessions
consistently have high attendance, as each is a meaningful opportunity to learn more
about a Friend’s unique journey while reflecting on our own.

Under the care of the Meeting, Nora Percival has continued the ministry that she began
in 2018, when she was led to develop and disseminate preventive health training for
community health volunteers in Kenya. She gave her class over the last two years in
three locations in Kenya and refined it each time. She has now been asked to teach both
students and faculty once a year over the next three years at a vocational college. Her
goal is to enable Kenya’s health system to carry on this program without her.

QUEST (Quaker Experiential Service and Training) is in its 28th year, co-sponsored by
UFM and South Seattle Friends Meeting. Six young adults are working full-time for a
year in social service and justice agencies, creating an intentional residential community
and gaining experience to be agents of social change.

At the time of writing, our city has been the sentinel case for the coronavirus pandemic
that is now greatly impacting our Meeting’s activities as well as our daily lives. While we
refrain from in-person gatherings, we find ways to support one another and stay
connected, including the use of videoconferencing for Meeting for Worship and Business
and spiritual sharing groups. We hold in the light our loved ones who are suffering during
our pandemic. Injustices in our society continue to be revealed and an election of great
consequence approaches. As darkness grows, so does our determination to let our Light
shine for others who seek health, sanctuary, and peace.