

University Friends Meeting
State of the Meeting Report
March 29, 2018

University Meeting had a year that has been both exciting and challenging. We have sought guidance and support from the Spirit as well as from each other. We continue to learn as we bump along this journey. Our demographics make it a challenge to recognize and confront racism, classism, and other demonstrations of privilege within our community and in the larger society.

Worship remains at the center of our community. The number of attenders at the 11:00 o'clock worship has decreased and currently ranges from 45 – 60. Our worship is generally centered and refreshing, though rarely without vocal ministry. The 9:30 worship remains loyally attended by 15-30 people who seek a more intimate, silent worship. Attenders of our small Wednesday evening worship find it very valuable. By ending unprogrammed worship after half an hour and starting our business meetings at 11:30 on the 2nd Sunday we continue to have significant attendance. As we begin each business meeting, our clerk reminds us that we are meeting on land of the Duwamish people. Sometimes business is hurried so we can end by 1:00; sometimes we go late, which results in problems with child care and lunch preparation.. We have not yet found a good solution.

Our First Day School continues to thrive. As the children have grown older, they are increasingly forthcoming about reporting what they have done in First Day School at the close of 11 AM worship. We are grateful for the regular teachers who prepare lessons/themes and for the volunteers who assist.

Our Adult Religious Education remains well-attended with diverse offering from spiritual education to practical matters like earthquake preparedness. The committee has chosen monthly themes that challenge us and provide opportunity for sharing in depth.

This is the 25th year of our QuEST program (Quaker Experiential Service & Training). In May 2017, we welcomed a new QuEST Director, the 6th of the program and said goodbye to the last Director who served faithfully for 8 years. We are pleased that South Seattle Friends Meeting has become a co-sponsor of QuEST.

We seasoned a minute for North Pacific Yearly Meeting (NPYM), Welcoming All Genders. We educated ourselves and approved a minute for ourselves as well as supporting the one for NPYM. Many of us came to a deeper understanding when a new person who had become active in the Meeting shared that they felt they had found their spiritual community their first day when they saw preferred pronouns on nametags. However, preferred pronouns remain a challenge for many Friends.

As a big meeting, we struggle to draw new people into the life of the meeting. We have had 5 deaths in the Meeting this year and have welcomed 2 adult members and 2 new junior members. The staffing of committees is a major challenge as we have 17 committees and only 60 active people on the roster. Several positions remained unfilled this year, most notably that of recording clerk. We are looking at a possible new configuration of committees. Our Peace and Social Concerns has joined with Friends from South Seattle and North Seattle Friends Church to develop the Quaker Social Concerns Network to work together on issues.

A big change this year has been the departure of our long-time tenants, the American Friends Service Committee and Global Garden Preschool. The Northwest Indian Committee, spun off from AFSC, rents a small space from us. Operation Nightwatch provides beds for up to 50 homeless men each night. Facing Homelessness is organizing the Block project to place a Block Houses (125 sq. ft.) in a backyard in each city block as well as providing clothing and other materials to homeless people. We feel well led that our basement is being used by organizations addressing long-standing concerns for homeless people and Native Americans. The Meeting is deeply grateful to members of the Finance Committee for shepherding these changes: finding the tenants, overseeing the building changes and staying in touch with the organizations.

We have approved the new volunteer position of Gardening Coordinator to lead others who share a passion for our grounds. However, we have struggled to care for our buildings. After many business meetings, we approved a new staff position: a full-time live-in Facilities Manager. The position was proposed by Finance, Facilities, and Personnel Committees and changes our current staff configuration. It was a challenge to balance Meeting needs and care for current staff. We have lost some valued members in this process.

This year we began discussions about the future of our campus with a well-attended retreat facilitated by the ad hoc committee on campus discernment. Options are to stay where we are, sell and either buy or rent elsewhere, remodel part or all of the current property. This will be a multi-year discernment process!

In a long process, we came to unity that we will hire people regardless of immigration status, knowing that this could lead to civil disobedience.

We recognized that we need to deal with our conflicts. We had a retreat in May 2017 to build community, learn how we can hear one another, feel heard and connect when we disagree. We had another retreat in January 2018, led by John Calvi, dealing with conflict and connections. While these have not resolved the issues, they helped us learn ways to address issues and concerns.

We have also recognized that we have tolerated cyberbullying and other inappropriate behavior. Care & Counsel named the behavior in the July 2017 business meeting and Friends were urged to confront such behavior or contact C&C. Acknowledging this problem and setting limits has been a continuing challenge. We have lost attenders because of this. We have discovered that a loving community that strives to discern the Spirit, individually and corporately, is not and will not ever be calm and peaceful. But we must continue to try to be that loving community, to confront inappropriate behavior and to set appropriate boundaries so that all may grow.