

**2020 State of the Meeting Report
from Whidbey Island Friends Meeting (WIFM)
to Pacific Northwest Quarterly Meeting**

Mailing Address: PO Box 691, Langley, WA 98260
Email: whidbeyquakers@gmail.com
Meeting Website: www.whidbeyquakers.org includes a public and member calendar of events
Meets at: During normal times: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Whidbey Island, 20103 State Route 525, about two miles north of Freeland.
During Covid: via Zoom

Regularly Scheduled Events

- Meeting for Worship: held each Sunday at 4:00 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Freeland, WA from January through March 1, 2020. Thereafter held via Zoom.
- Mid-week Meeting for Worship, Wednesdays from 9:00 to 9:30 a.m. via Zoom.
- Meeting for Worship for Attending to Business: held on the third Sunday of the month following Meeting for Worship via Zoom.
- Men's Spiritual Nurture Group: every other Thursday from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. via Zoom.
- Women's Spiritual Nurture Group: first Thursday of each month from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. via Zoom.
- Faith and Practice Discussion, fourth Sunday of the month from 2:15 to 3:45 p.m. via Zoom.

Highlights of 2020

Life of the Meeting

A meeting for discernment in January concluded WIFM's exploration of the previous year around how Spirit was leading Friends to handle the work of the meeting. As a result, we laid down some committees and provided instead for ad hoc groups to form easily in response to specific needs. The budget was approved to fund the new approach. The meeting discerned that this gave us space more flexibly respond to Spirit rather than being overly concerned with job descriptions and calendar items. As the Covid-19 pandemic ramped up during 2020, this flexibility served the meeting well.

By the second Sunday of March the pandemic was upon us, and meeting for worship was being held online via Zoom. Since then all our meetings have been held virtually. We have realized that – despite the initial strangeness of seeing each other only on the computer screen, and despite missing in-person worship, hugs, cookies, and the relational vibe of sharing the same physical space – Spirit is not stopped by electronic communication. Following meetings for worship (except on third Sundays) we have a half hour of informal sharing. We also discovered the support and connection to be found in special Zoom meetings for worship and fellowship in moments of crisis such as the November election and in moments of joy such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, when these Zoom gatherings also included virtual meals together.

Our WIFM community discovered greater appreciation for the bonds that unite us and the ways that Spirit guides our lives as normal activities were stripped away and the fragility of life became more apparent. Attendance increased at meeting for worship and meeting for business. A Wednesday morning meeting for worship was added. The men's and women's spiritual nurture groups continued to meet. The bi-monthly Friendly Flyer kept us abreast of activities within WIFM and in Quaker and related groups outside our meeting. While the annual men's retreat had to be cancelled, other activities began during the pandemic, including a monthly

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discussion of *Faith and Practice*, a bi-monthly group reflection with an anti-racist book, and a Facebook page for WIFM. All of this seemed more important than ever in keeping us connected and supported in mind and heart and spirit, even as our lives were more physically separated.

We have been so pleased to gain new attenders during this time who have become dear members of our circle. Meeting electronically has turned out to have unanticipated benefits including allowing those who aren't feeling well or who don't drive in the dark winter months to continue to attend; seeing Friends who have moved away; and reducing the commuting time and carbon footprint of a community that is as far flung as ours.

In March the meeting was led to approve two people to be co-clerks of the meeting, following fourteen months of Ministry and Counsel serving in that role. This has given a sense of stability to the meeting during a time of instability in the greater world.

Response to the Wider World

In response to the nationwide protests in May and June over deaths of African Americans through police violence, Whidbey Island Friends Meeting worked to craft a statement that reflected Quaker values, vision, and commitment for the future. The resulting minute, "A Statement for Dismantling Racism: A Faithful Ethical and Moral Framework," was printed in paid ads in Whidbey Island newspapers and sent to Friends Committee on National Legislation and other organizations. Friends engaged in online anti-racism workshops and other learning opportunities, and in October a group began meeting twice a month to work slowly and deeply with Ijeoma Oluo's book, *So You Want to Talk About Race*, which allowed us to examine our own experiences around race, confront our thinking and reframe responses to White Supremacy. In this work, we aim to uproot unconscious biases, transform fears and guilt, and respond more freely to Divine Guidance into action. We are aware that for us as a meeting of mostly White people, it can be only too easy to talk about anti-racism without engaging in the soul-searching and active effort that is called for.

WIFM Friends also continue to be active around issues of restorative justice, climate change, sustainable food supply, and other social concerns.

Looking Forward

As 2020 drew to a close, Whidbey Island Friends realized the pandemic would not be over in anywhere near the optimistic timeframe that buoyed our spirits in the spring. But we also knew more clearly than ever that Spirit is not stopped, and that we still experience Spirit moving among us, deepening our ties, and guiding our steps.

Prepared by Diana Butler and Sarah Schmidt, Co-Clerks
Whidbey Island Friends Meeting