

## Growing Together in the Light State of the Meeting, 2022

At Friends Meeting of San Antonio we continue to treasure being together in the Light. In the third year of the pandemic, we have felt the weight of changes in ourselves, in our meeting, and in the world at large. The sense of loss from the interruption of the pandemic restrictions is slowly easing, but remains profound.

We gathered each Sunday in person and virtually, finding worship deep and meaningful. Along with the reduction in our numbers, we have keenly felt the frequent absence of vocal ministry. Even so, in the silence we have experienced gathered meetings and the time for grace and our most loving selves to be in the room. We are trying to identify the barriers to participation in worship on Sundays, and to reach out to long time Friends who we are missing dearly.

The impact of our declining numbers extended beyond meeting for worship. When committee participation dwindled, individuals took on tasks as needed, and the collective discernment of a group effort was sorely missed. As we tried to rebuild our committees in support of the meeting's spiritual and earthly needs, ministry and grace have been at times overshadowed by frustration and weariness on the part of those on whom the weight of meeting those needs have fallen.

We held a series of forums around restructuring of our organization with the goal of finding a way forward. This has been a difficult process; change is hard! We made an effort to identify what we must attend to and what we are not addressing. We identified four categories: spiritual, pastoral, physical, and other. This is a start, but we are still in the process of finding the way.

To ease the burden on the clerk, for 2022 we appointed two co-clerks who have divided the responsibilities according to their leadings and their strengths. We tried to find ways to support not only the co-clerks but also the committees, striving always to set things up so Friends can find their place in meeting with a sense of joy rather than obligation.

We developed a routine for managing our COVID precautions; each week three or four Friends monitor the rates of infection in the area and let us know what level of masking or social distancing we need to follow. Friends are comfortable with our arrangements.

Our hybrid meeting system is working smoothly and provides a relatively integrated experience for both in-person and Zoom worshipers, and for participants in forums and Meeting for

Business. Friends at a distance and others who are unable to attend in person appreciate the connections we can keep. We now have a system of speakers, microphone, and video screen which is unobtrusive yet includes the distant Friends clearly and audibly, and we are grateful to those who worked hard to find a way for us to worship safely, inclusively, and meaningfully.

Our buildings and our grounds continue to be a place of welcome, nurturing a sense of peace and helping Friends settle as we walk through the gates. With construction of a new walkway, a long-planned memorial garden is taking shape. We are thankful for the Friends who tend to the beautiful landscaping and who make a welcoming habitat for birds and other wildlife in the midst of the city.

Our children's program consists of a small group of young ones who tend the vegetable garden, make soup for the monthly pot luck lunch, read stories, decorate the twice-a-year birthday cakes, and learn about making hard decisions. They join the meeting for worship in respectful silence.

We have held deep and substantive forums on spiritual and faith matters. Friends have explored subjects both broadly and specifically connected to our lives as Quakers. Forums on discernment and community support were particularly meaningful to newcomers, helping them connect with Quakerism and San Antonio Friends. Fighting climate change through investor awareness, examining our Quaker "heroes" through the lens of retrospective justice, finding our shared intent and shared truth in worship, consciously engaging with the world, and the work of wider Quaker groups were just some of our forum topics.

The fall retreat was well attended. "If Meeting for Worship is meant to be a restorative time, or even redemptive, what is this power or truth that strengthens and heals?"

Friends enjoyed active participation in the wider Quaker world. A number of us took active roles in South Central Yearly Meeting, Friends Peace Teams, Peacebuilding en las Americas, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Woodbrooke Centre for Quaker Studies, and Friends General Conference.

We found this to be a year of grieving and loss, not only of absent Friends at meeting for worship, but also of collective energy, of a diminishment of our corporate life even as we find our way back to a new normal. We are attempting to come to terms with the way things are; we are trying to strike a balance between looking back at what we have lost and growing in the Light into what comes next.

