

Jacksonville Friends Spiritual State of the Meeting – 2016 Report

January 27, 2019

Introduction

The English word *worship* derives from the Old English *weorthscipe* (*weorth*, worth + *-scipe*, -ship), meaning “acknowledgement of worth.”

From their beginnings in the 17th century, Quakers have understood that the most important thing they can do is to worship together, and that *the ground of their being*—whether they call it God or Nature or Life itself—calls them together *to acknowledge each other's worth*. Everything else that we do “after the manner of Friends” begins in this communal activity.

Our sadness in Jacksonville Friends Meeting in recent years has come from the loss of in-person participation in worship by almost all of the recorded members and attenders who still support Meeting from a distance. Our joy has come from the steady stream of visitors and returning newcomers, *Seekers* in the original Quaker sense of that term, who have found us because they have read or heard something about Quaker worship.

A year ago, we wrote: “Jacksonville Meeting is a sort of ‘Quaker way station’ for those who need to touch base, even if they are on their way. The door is open, Friends and Seekers find us easily, and what needs to happen will happen.”

Since mid-2018, with so few in attendance, we have adopted the advice of the clerk of Southeastern Yearly Meeting and scaled back all activities other than meeting for worship, social gatherings, and Friendly study. We are operating as a *de facto* worship group.

Spiritual State of the Meeting Worship Sharing

On January 27th, following meeting for worship and potluck, four Friends—two long-time members and two newcomers who joined us last autumn—gathered for worship sharing over the “Spiritual State of the Meeting” queries. The following paraphrases and compiles the testimony of these Friends.

- Quakers are a union, meeting is a place, and this has been a year of loss. The consistency I have relied on for years in the Quaker world is now very topsy-turvy—not only in meeting but also in other long-time peace advocacy organizations I have loved. I can find spiritual feeding at Yearly Meeting events, but rarely here locally. Even so, meeting for worship can be very subtle. You leave with *something*.
- I was in spiritual crisis last January. Around the time of our marriage last August, we discovered Quaker YouTube videos from Britain. I saw people based in recognizable Christian tradition and a place where I wouldn't get weird looks for being who I am. This meeting has been a blessing from God. Small means welcoming and comfortable. As I've gradually felt that “something was not connecting,” the inward response has come: “Because you haven't asked.” Now I want to find young Friends groups, I want to find ways to seek out those who need help in our country.
- I can sit here and genuinely call you Friends, because of the deep things you deal with. Gradually I've become concerned that my Quakerism has been too self-focused. It is important to do work out in the world. There are stories in the Bible about the apostles realizing they had to set aside being deacons in their own groups in order to go out and do this work. How do Quakers practice this?
- It has troubled me to see this meeting's decline, yet I am not concerned about any lack of the Spirit's continued presence here. Things change. It's good knowing that St. Augustine now has a worship group. What I long for is some way—the organizational form isn't important—to make sure we continue to have weekly *meeting for worship* here in Jacksonville.

Submitted by
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2/12/2019