

Jacksonville Friends Meeting
www.jacksonvillefriends.org

Clerk & Mailing Address
Mike Shell
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January 4, 2019

Friends,

On Sunday, January 27th, at 12:30 pm, Jacksonville Friends will gather following worship and potluck for our *2018 Spiritual State of the Meeting* worship sharing. Out of this worship sharing, we will craft a report for Southeastern Yearly Meeting to share with our fellow SEYM monthly meetings and worship groups.

The 2018 report is due to SEYM's Worship and Ministry Committee by February 28, 2019 (see the Worship & Ministry page at <http://seymquakers.org/resources/worship-ministry/>).

Our *2017 Spiritual State of the Meeting Report* is enclosed, together with the set of queries prepared by SEYM's Worship and Ministry Committee.



I am writing you as clerk of meeting because this year I am not clear on how to proceed in 2019. My hope is that each of you will write or call me or, better still, invite me to visit with you, so that, as a group of people tied together by local history, we can come to clearness about the future of our fellowship.

In the Quaker way, a monthly meeting or worship group is not the people listed on the roles but the people who participate. This is because the Quaker way is not about an organization or a set of beliefs and practices. It is about the day to day sharing of the present moment by people who know each other and have a commitment to caring for and taking care of each other.

For most of 2018, only a handful of those Friends recorded with SEYM as active members and attenders have joined us for meeting for worship—and that number has dwindled to two or three since the beginning of last summer. Those same two or three have been the only ones on the roles to attend meetings for business. A larger circle of Friends who are not able to attend in person continue to participate with their gifts of correspondence and of financial support.

At the same time, we have a group of six to ten newcomers, “seekers” in the historical Quaker sense, who attend weekly or at least monthly, and who participate in our third Sunday potlucks and discussion groups. In addition, Friends in St. Augustine have now organized to become a worship group under the care of Orlando Friends Meeting. Their first meeting for worship will be at United Church, 5880 US 1, in South St. Augustine, on Wednesday, January 9th, at 7 pm.

I lay all of this before you, Friends, to illustrate that Jacksonville Friends are currently functioning as a *de facto* worship group rather than as a monthly meeting. This is not something “wrong” with Jacksonville Friends. It is simply a transitional reality for us.

Since the summer, I have communicated about this with Bill Carlie, the clerk of SEYM. He shared his own experience of clerking a meeting during a similar transition. His advice was that I clerk Jacksonville Friends “as if” we were a worship group, minimizing any business and outreach activities not directly needed to sustain a weekly meeting for worship.

This is what I have been doing: not calling a meeting for business unless a critical decision was needed, not publishing a newsletter, not trying to maintain our social ministry activities in the community. Instead, I have given all my attention to those who come for worship, for potluck, and for discussion. There is an eager spirit among these new Friends, a joy at finding fellowship with others who want to sit together and wait for the Inner Light to lead and teach us.

Friends, the practical realities of Jacksonville Friends Meeting are these. We have sufficient funds to cover our rent at Florida Christian Center, our liability insurance, and incidental expenses through the end of our fiscal year on May 30, 2019—although contributions have declined somewhat during 2018.

Our treasurer, Sue Watson, and I are the only remaining officers. Our current terms both end on December 31, 2019, and neither of us wishes to continue in these roles.

My personal leading is that Jacksonville should consult with Yearly Meeting about returning to worship group status, and that we should ask for help to sustain us in that way, perhaps under the care of Tallahassee Monthly Meeting or some other geographically close group.

This, of course, is not an action for me to take on my own. Perhaps others of you Friends have better ideas, clearer leadings. My plea is that you will take ownership of your meeting, if you are led to, and help us to move forward.

Please remember my words at the start: the Quaker way is not about organizations but about the real-time connections of people in the present.

Thank you, and blessings,

Mike Shell
Meeting Clerk

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