

SPIRITUAL STATE OF JACKSONVILLE MEETING FOR 2011 - FINAL

It has been a year with a lot of changes: new recording clerk, new clerk, updated website, new Christmas tradition, and new treasurer. The clerk is learning to recognize and express the sense of the meeting, and she asks for our input and for all to use our clerking consciousness. In the past year, we've opened all doors and windows. We've felt led to do so, yet we don't know what's going to be coming in and going out. We haven't experienced the scariness dropping our defenses might mean for us.

Even so, we know that something stronger might be coming through these changes. There's a sense wanting to grow, wanting to be more, wanting to deepen our spirituality, wanting to be more supportive, wanting to be more connected to each other (when most of us live far from one another).

A new Friend says that what would nourish her in meeting would be: a real sense of fellowship; an invitation to stay, visit, and learn about Quakerism; educational activities; and discussions after meeting about what was felt or said. Others of us echo those feelings.

There are precious children in our Meeting, but until recently none of us has regularly nurtured a First Day School for them. During much of 2011, a teenager who needs First Day School herself volunteered to be with the three children during worship time. Now several Friends have expressed the hope to begin First Day School for adults as well as children, together with intergenerational meetings for learning.

We are strengthening our sense of meeting community as a safe place, as a true home for seekers to find peace and soul again when they get lost in the world. Part of our challenge is that we come together for refuge and safety for different reasons, seeking and defending ourselves from different things. How do we help each other feel some safety in voicing hurts, discomforts and resentments? We sometimes feel that we are a meeting of individuals rather than a community, and yet there's a hunger for community.

We are still learning how to do a collective search for God, God's presence and God's leading. A part of the challenge is that some of us use "God language" and others do not. How do we help each other to hear our deepest leadings, how do we learn to hear each other, past these differences of language?

In reading last year's Spiritual State of the Meeting Report, we recognize we've had some really strong movements in directions we wanted. We have invited a different kind of process for meeting for business, and we have become more attentive to needs of others, for example by realizing that we need a different place to gather so all can attend meeting. We're testing possible new meeting places.

During this next year, we want to welcome and help each other more in the sharing of spoken ministry during meeting for worship. One Friend new to Quakerism feels intimidated by Quaker expression of words and so seldom speaks in meeting, asking,

“How do I express myself while using Quaker wording?” Another long-time Friend said Quaker terminology (such as "Conservative" and "liberal") may be a barrier to understanding. We are still learning how to discern what is worth saying in meeting and where a message comes from. May we help each other become more comfortable so that we are led to speak, feeling the courage to do that, and able to listen to ourselves as we speak.

New attenders have found Jacksonville Meeting. Some attenders have come to meeting for a while and "drunk at the well," then moved on (which has been a common aspect of Jacksonville Meeting throughout our 50+ year history). This year, though, more new attenders are staying and bringing their children. We also hope to get out more in the community to serve and also to grow our membership.

The clerk notes: “How different people are! Some move fast, others, slow. What's the Lord going to do with this?” She says that the Lord responds: "All voices are heard." The clerk feels led by God to be the new clerk and says, "The meeting isn't changing because I am clerk; I'm clerk because the meeting is changing."

Until recently, we have needed to give little concern to the Meeting's financial status. When the treasury is low, the treasurer alerts Friends, and Friends come through, paying for the necessities. However, we have been ambivalent about our obligation to pay the full Yearly Meeting apportionment, primarily due to SEYM's large budget item for donations to outside organizations. Our preference has been to let our members and attenders make personal donations to the organization of their choice. We are now revisiting this matter, in order to move forward in this area of community building.

Over the past five or so years, we have acknowledged in our reports that we have been struggling with a loss of grounding as a meeting. Last year, we observed that Friends have "gone through more-than-usual challenges with health, family, deaths, and other crises, and we have been there for each other." This past year again has had some losses but many gains. Now we are starting to see a new burst of energy - a revitalization - in our Meeting. More Friends are interested in exploring participation in our Yearly Meeting activities. Change is in the air and in our Meeting! Change, however, is hard, and can challenge beliefs and values. But change is essential for life to continue; and this Meeting wants to live.