

## **Spiritual State of the Meeting 2013 January 5, 2014**

**Attendees:** Wendy Clarissa Geiger, Bonnie Hall, Kenneth Hall, Al Geiger, Connie Guenther, Doug Halpin, Elaine Martin (Clerk), Mike Shell (Recording Clerk)

*“It’s a bit of a paradox, that the more vulnerable we are with one another, the more at home we are; the less we fear each other.”*

—Liz Oppenheimer,  
[“Being known by being vulnerable”](#) (1/1/2014)

On 1<sup>st</sup> Month, 5<sup>th</sup> day, 2014, six Friends joined in worship-sharing, after meeting for worship and a “bag lunch,” in order to reflect on the current spiritual state of Jacksonville Friends Meeting.

The Liz Oppenheimer epigram used above was quoted early on and speaks to our sense of how we are maturing as a Meeting. Here are some of the recurring worship-sharing themes.

### **Maturing of the Meeting**

One Friend spoke of Meeting as being like a field. It may lie fallow for a time, growing with weeds. Then there is plowing, planting, waiting, sprouting, thinning, weeding, nurturing. The processes can take longer or shorter than expected. 2013 felt like a year of preparing the garden for the year to come.

Another Friend said we seem more content to be in the present with each other, practicing quietness—not in complacency, but in expectation. Formerly we felt more genuine urgency to find physical and spiritual space. Now we are in touch with each other, even when we are not all present with each other.

A third spoke of having increased hope for Meeting and encouraged us to be fearless, acknowledging the human condition, since we can’t deny it, yet proceeding with our ministry.

A fourth affirmed that Meeting is meshing as a group and doing more functions as a group, and urged us to increase such shared activities.

### **Opening to and caring for each other**

The Friend who quoted the epigraph spoke to the challenge of being vulnerable. One has to “get out of God’s way” as an individual to allow this. Such movement is even more challenging for a group, but everyone seems willing to try, week after week. Meeting is becoming more like a body, with members bringing different talents, ideas, beliefs, interests, yet functioning together.

Another Friend noted both many accomplishments and many wants in Meeting. There is palpable improvement in the spiritual state of the Meeting. Our needs don’t negate our progress, because spiritual foundations are being forged. We are getting to know and care for one another, learning that we can find something to nurture in each other, that we can love despite annoyances. The Christmas gathering was an especially spirit-filled demonstration of this.

This growth is reflected in the ways Friends are taking care of each other. One Friend spoke about needing to spend a lot of personal energy dealing with family this past year and about being helped by Meeting as “various Friends kindled fires in me.” Another spoke of attentiveness to other’s needs in the Meeting’s search for a more accessible location and the building of a wheel chair ramp. (However, see [Ongoing Needs](#) below in this regard.)

## Articulating our faith and practice

Friends noted that we need to become articulate as a Meeting in responding to the query, “What do Friends believe?”

One Friend shared two basic reasons for coming to Meeting. First, there are many denominations in the phonebook—not just many churches but many denominations. Unlike some other denominations, which tend to threaten punishment for misbehavior or misbelief, “Quakers don’t have beliefs because we are told to believe.” Second, Quakers are pioneers in making decisions by consensus. As Benjamin Zablocki wrote in [The Joyful Community: An account of the Bruderhof](#), no community can survive long without consensus decision-making.

Another Friend said that we need to acknowledge the roots of Quakerism, especially in teaching our newcomers. It is okay to speak from the Bible, the Qur’an, etc., because the Light is there in all scriptures. This Friend cited the second verse of “The Ballad of George Fox”:

*With a book and a steeple and a bell and a key  
They would bind it forever but they can't, said he.  
O, the book, it will perish, and the steeple will fall,  
But the Light will be shining at the end of it all.*

A third Friend spoke of joy in attending and being part of Meeting. “I came to deepen my own spirituality and to be part of a spiritual group. Others may seek this as well.” Far too many practice religion as something to do once a week to get forgiveness and salvation, then return to their usual behavior. “I know people who call themselves very religious yet pray, ‘Jesus, protect me while I rob this house.’ I search for something more than protection. I search guidance for my own actions. The attractiveness of Quakerism for me [is] not a set of ideas [but] a set of principles to apply seven days a week.”

## Witness in the community

Several of us spoke to the Meeting’s role of witnessing to the larger community. Although we sometimes doubt that we can make any difference, a common theme was that the mere visible presence of Quakers who act out of their faith and practice influences others.

Here are some of the comments:

- We come to Meeting to recenter, so we can go back out, living from our center.
- We can contrast politics/social action as concepts with the day-to-day “What’s up now to deal with?”
- [Cardinal Emmanuel Célestin Suhard](#) said: “To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda, nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one’s life would not make sense if God did not exist.” This past year, Meeting was such a palpable mystery.
- At the alternative New Year event at King’s Bay, some people said, “We’re just not effective,” to which our clerk replied, “Yes, you are.”
- We may not sense what Meeting gives to us, to Jacksonville, to NE Florida.
- Jacksonville would be different without Meeting. People notice the witness of Quakers. When we name ourselves, they remember that witness (e.g., conscientious objectors).
- We seek common grounds for community actions.

## Ongoing needs

With these blessings, Friends also acknowledged needs continuing spiritual and practical growth.

As addressed above, we want to focus more on our efforts to [articulate](#) our faith and practice to the larger community and to be a [visible witness](#) in that community.

We are very grateful to our current host, who welcomes us into her home every week. Even so, we know we still need a more centralized, visible and accessible Meeting location. Some Friends have a very long commute to reach our present location, and the present location lacks accessible restroom facilities.

We are also very grateful to our First Day School leader for her ongoing, excellent preparation and presentation of the bi-monthly FDS events. We acknowledge, though, that Meeting still lacks a full-fledged FDS program. Our youngest regular attenders are in their 50s. As a small Meeting, it is hard for us to fulfill our Quaker obligations. Unless we find ways to make space and ministry for young people and families more central, where is our continuity as a Meeting? Will our Jacksonville presence end?

We know and trust that Jacksonville Friends Meeting will continue, so we lift up these challenges for the year to come.

## Thanks

The Clerk noted that the 2010 Spiritual State of the Meeting worship-sharing was the first worship event she led. Today felt like a new beginning for her, and she welcomed the trust and guidance Friends continue to give her.

Friends in turn expressed respect and admiration for the Clerk and her bravery in guiding us

We want to recognize the commitment, dedication and hard work that presently exist in Meeting. The individuals involved truly want meeting to flourish and contribute abundantly to our small yet growing family.

An incomplete list:

- Friends from Fernandina, St. Augustine and elsewhere who regularly travel a good distance to attend Meeting on First Day
- Treasurer and Recording Clerk, who are always prepared and do an excellent job for Meetings for Worship for Business
- Representatives to two local organizations, the Interfaith Council of Jacksonville and the Florida Coalition for Peace and Justice
- Friends who commit to providing First Day School, the newsletter and the website
- A Friend who built a handicap-accessible ramp and researched community projects
- Friends who generously host and provide pot luck gatherings
- Active involvement of Friends in SEYM activities, including the Youth Program
- Involvement in other Quaker Organizations, the Steering Committee for QUF, etc.
- A Friend who regularly communicates with members and attenders and networks through phone calls and emails, providing information, spiritual writing, and poetry. Her activities are like glue holding us together.

Submitted by  
Mike Shell,  
Recording Clerk  
1/16/2014

