

Jacksonville Friends Spiritual State of the Meeting – 2015 Statement 2/7/2016

Attendees: Bonnie Hall, Ken Hall, Mike Shell, Wendy Clarissa Geiger, Al Geiger, Elaine Martin, Thandekile Mvufsi

Worship Sharing

Out of a very settled silence, Friends were each felt led to speak primarily to how they interact individually with Meeting. Though we have not yet reflected on what these testimonies mean for us as a community, what was shared informs us deeply about what is presently at work among us.

Here are some summary quotations and paraphrases.

- "I bring my sorrows and my city's sorrows and the world's sorrows into meeting for worship and wait to see what I'm led to work on."
- I have felt "spiritually absent from Meeting" this year as I have dealt with my family's challenges. I also feel that the activist work I am doing is mostly outside of Meeting, and I sometimes feel I have not been fully present or fulfilling my role within Meeting.
- Spoken on behalf of the previous Friend: "Go forth." You *are* representing Meeting in those outside works.
- I have been "wrestling with God" and haven't "felt connection with Meeting." It is extremely difficult for us to deal with our geographical distances and with the lack of interaction between First Day gatherings. We really need to reach out to each other across these "disconnects."

Our practice is so hard. We start "backwards" as Friends, not with an idea but with experience *in* the world. We often don't realize why we are doing what we are doing. We need to trust the truth, to trust connecting with each other to deal with the truth.

I care so much for Meeting and can feel hurt so much.

- I hit bottom emotionally during the summer and fall, and I came to Meeting wanting rescue and not finding it. However, coming out of that depth, I am becoming stronger by *being* rather than *doing*.

It is clearer to me now that the connections in Meeting are much stronger for me when I "come to Meeting for expectant worship but without bringing expectations with me."

- There are hundreds of varieties of churches in Jacksonville. For me, the value of Quakerism is in being able to get along with a great many cultural differences, philosophies, etc., without being wishy-washy.

Meeting has gained in the last year, though I'm not able to say exactly how.

I was somewhat amused at seeing 18 queries on Spiritual State of the Meeting. In the old days we had a retired professor from the University of New Mexico who spoke out of the silence each First Day to give us a history lesson. It was "interesting" but not "spiritual." Other people spoke freely too, regardless of how "spiritual" what they said was.

I never felt such speech was a waste of time, though I do see a reason for a Spiritual State of the Meeting conversation.

- We need to give ourselves more formal instruction in how to prepare for meeting for worship, so that meeting for worship prepares us, in turn, for the rest of the week's life. Our individual presences in the larger community represent Meeting. We need to claim the responsibilities of being Quakers.
- We are all one people. We have strengths and weaknesses. Because we are a mix of theists, non-theists, etc., we need to be careful how we listen to each other. All of us are from the light. It is easy because of the past for us to put up barriers. Instead, we need to listen past those barriers and become a community of love.

Review of the year

As our 2014 Statement acknowledged, we "did not see a clear path forward" and needed to accept the challenges of "being still and working as a meeting to create that place where God can work through us to find peace for all."

2015 was not a year for conflict, yet it was full of changes, uncertainties and disruptions. We welcomed several Friends who contributed much to Meeting life but then went their separate ways after having shared our "Quaker waystation" for an extended period. We did our best to care for the members of a family which was breaking apart. We made several interrupted efforts to start adult study of Quaker Faith and Practice, and we have determined to revisit this study during potlucks this year with the help of Rex Ambler's *The Quaker Way: A Rediscovery* <https://www.quakerbooks.org/book/quaker-way> (1998).

Meanwhile, Meeting's engagement in the larger community did become increasingly fruitful. Our hosting of March 25th and June 25th Moral Injury presentations by Lynn and Steve Newsom, Directors of Quaker House, has led to productive networks with other local groups, including local mental health activists and the Jacksonville chapter of Veterans for Peace <http://www.veteransforpeace.org/>. We also continued our connection with ICARE, especially its Youth Crime Committee <http://icarejax.org/youth-crime/>, and with Florida Coalition for Peace & Justice and Wage Peace.

Finally we began a local Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) <http://avpusa.org/> with a September training facilitated by Tampa Bay AVP, with Friends Cece Yocum and Beverly Ward, of the Tampa Meeting, and Ned and Christina Bellamy. This has led to Jacksonville Friends joining with Ft. Myers, Miami, St. Petersburg, Tampa, and Tallahassee Meetings to sponsor the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) within Southeastern Yearly Meeting.

We begin 2016 with the reminder that this will be the final year of our current clerk's second 3-year term. We need to plan ahead for a change of clerk (and perhaps other officers), and we need to consider setting a three-year term for clerk. We also hope to expand our committee work to include Hospitality and Inreach/ Outreach. We continue to learn how to be whole despite the challenges of being a very small meeting.

Mike Shell
Recording Clerk
2/21/2016