

Jacksonville Friends Spiritual State of the Meeting – 2017 Report

January 28, 2018

The following paraphrases and compiles testimony of four different Friends.

- Since January 2017 we've seen a welcome increase in visitors (27 in all), some passing through, some staying as new residents, and some of joining us as newcomers or as participants in outreach activities such as ICARE icarejax.org, Veterans for Peace www.veteransforpeace.org, and TakeEmDownJAX www.facebook.com/TakeEmDownJax. If nothing else, this means our websites and directional signs have made us easier to find.

On the other hand, our regular attendance has dwindled to 4-6 per week. A bit disappointing, since I'd love to worship with a larger group, but it doesn't trouble me. Jacksonville Meeting is a sort of "Quaker way station" for those who need to touch base, even if they are on their way elsewhere. The door is open, Friends and Seekers find us easily, and what needs to happen will happen.

- Numbers are not the issue. Our little meeting has a very big community footprint. We are known widely in Jacksonville for our deeds and actions. We grow from this. That public character of Quakers is what first attracted me, that readiness to take a stand.
- I am increasingly grateful for Meeting. One query stands out: "Do we leave our meetings filled with a sense of love and peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit filled living?" This has been a tumultuous year for the country and for the community. It has affected me very much personally. Meeting for worship *does* ground and center me. It's very helpful on the personal level as I deal with changes both in the world and in myself.
- In 2017 I was invited twice to *Second Sundays at Stetson's in Beluthahatchee Park* www.stetsonkennedy.com/second-sundays.html, the monthly musicians' gathering. Always standing room only in a space for 60 people—but no people of color, even though Stetson was greatly loved by them. My guess is that Black folks prefer to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, rather than having "benevolent White folk" do it for them. This year I have more questions than answers.
- I am thankful to Meeting for the inward challenges and openings I have received this past year. Ministering to Friends in need has been very much my calling this year—but I have been gifted with leadings to help me move from "playing pastor" to allowing the simple *organicity* of being with Friends I visit.
- There is so much global change going on. Something is trying to be born. We need to listen well—especially to voices outside our comfort zones—to discern where the Spirit is taking us now. It's not business as usual. I think the changes in Meeting are part of these larger changes in ourselves and in our country.
- The previous Friend's words remind me of something I observed as an 18-year-old AFSC volunteer in Europe after World War II. Few of the volunteers were Quakers, but they were deep thinkers, trying to find themselves. They were *practicing* Quakers. I admire AFSC for sending people who were thoroughly dedicated to the work, ones who were not necessarily stuck in any philosophy, but who wished to get along and to consider all sides of a question.
- Here's what gives me hope. Those of us who were activists in the 60s-70s remember the "Crying Indian" ad that portrayed a Native American man devastated to see pollution and litter. Now, instead of just seeing ad images, people from all over the world have actually gone to Standing Rock to live *with* the native Waterkeepers waterkeeper.org—including vets from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan who went to protect the people from violence.

Submitted by
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1/29/2018