

State of the Meeting Report
Birmingham Friends Meeting
2020

Like the rest of the world, Birmingham Friends Meeting was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we reflected on how the Spirit moved among us over the past year, we saw the obvious challenges but also the gifts of the past year.

The year began with our usual activities. Second Hours focused on the Twelve Step program, Climate Change, and FCNL priorities. Adding a new family in 2019 brought three young boys to join our one girl in First Day School. This energized our children's programming and excited us for the future. The Meeting also hosted Burdock Book Collective at the Meetinghouse. This group brought new faces to the Meetinghouse and raised awareness about Quakers.

In late February, we grew concerned for one of our members now living in Italy. While he reported that he was safe, his community was shut down because of the virus. By early March, we were concerned about spread in our region. Friends raised the issue of discontinuing holding hands at rise of Meeting. On March 13th, we made the difficult decision not to hold Meeting for Worship on the 15th. Soon after, we began our year of Zoom.

Zoom was a response to our need to stay connected. For some of us, it was an important connection to the rest of the world. For others, the new format did not work and we have lost some regular attenders. Zoom is particularly difficult for our families with children and we have found no good way to hold First Day School. However, one of the interesting outcomes of the shift to virtual meetings has been the reconnection with Friends who cannot normally attend our Meetings in person. Their presence has added a great deal to our Meeting for Worship and 2nd Hour. One such attender joined the Meeting this year.

While we miss the fellowship of our in person worship, one friend put it best "half a loaf of bread is better than no loaf at all." Friends reflected on the ability to see everyone at once and hold people in the Light as they enter the Meeting. Friends also expressed their gratitude for the structure of a weekly Meeting for Worship.

Our 2nd Hour topics continue to attract members and attenders. We are particularly excited about a new member's presentations on climate change topics that have informed us and given us ways of addressing this issue. This Friend also led a workshop on the topic at FGC.

Friends continued to be involved in anti-racism, many of us attending local rallies and working to address our own bias along with systemic bias. Friends participated in a Social Justice Book Club facilitated by a member of the Meeting. This was in conjunction with the Jefferson County Memorial Project to document lynching in each Alabama county. The book club met at the Meetinghouse until the pandemic, continuing virtually after the pandemic

Between Meeting for Worship and 2nd Hour, we have a virtual social time which allows us to catch up on each other's lives. Like many people, our conversations in 2020 often turned to politics. Many Friends were engaged in campaigns in 2020. For some attenders, conversations at Meeting brought a feeling of comfort and community. For others, it was overload from an already political year.

We celebrate the transfer of one membership to our Meeting and another new member. As the new year begins, another long-time member is moving to NC to be near family. We hope that NC Friends will welcome him and we look forward to seeing him virtually. Friends recognize the challenge of continuing to engage our remote attenders when we return to in person worship. As we contemplate the return to our Meetinghouse, we are grateful for the strong leadership of 2020 which kept us connected during a difficult time.

In Peace,

Birmingham Friends Meeting