

## State of the Meeting Report 2020

### Memphis Friends Meeting

#### *How fares the spirit among us?*

Coming out on the other side of what one Friend aptly called a tumultuous year, the spirit among us is that of gratitude for our community's commitment to strengthen our bonds from the collective trauma we are experiencing in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Memphis Friends took COVID-19 seriously in March of last year and spent considerable time developing substantive protocols for meeting online and for using the meetinghouse when necessary. We worked hard on this to protect ourselves and each other for sure, but also out of respect and care for the well-being of our neighbors and our larger community.

We are grateful that technology has helped foster bonds of community and divine connection. Since March of 2020, we have been largely holding our Meeting for Worship and all other activities by Zoom, with some weekly worship in a socially distanced outdoor setting in warmer weather. A significant number of Friends have taken fairly easily to the new medium; it has reunited us with some physically distant former Meeting members; and has even made it possible for local Friends to participate more deeply in the life of the Meeting as committee members and officers. But, some Friends have not come online: some video-conference a lot at work or at school already, others do not find it conducive to worship, and others have shaky technology.

In the pandemic, we have had to face our vulnerability, experience isolation and loneliness, and feel the exhaustion from the unwanted changes to all our personal and social norms. This has made hearing the joys and concerns expressed before the rise of worship all the more important. They have not just been heard but have prompted Friends to find inventive ways to be fully present, like paying visits from the distance of lawns or porches of those among us who are ill or finding online or socially distanced events we could attend to help maintain our commitment to social action. We seek to sustain relationships and convey news with cards, emails, phone calls, small socially-distanced silent worship, small dog walking occasions, and other ways of holding each other in the Light.

We celebrated the life on the passing of attender Carolyn Murray in 2020, and we continued our remembrance of Glenn Althoff, a member of the Memphis Meeting who passed away in 2019, by remembering him in both Meeting for Learning and with gifts to the Library in his name.

Members continue to reflect on how online worship has affected our individual spiritual lives as well as our sense of the spirit among us. Because we each attend with our home environment visible around us, our worship is further seasoned through the lens of how other Friends settle differently into worship from within their own home space, sometimes using it to further seed their thoughts and testimonies.

Time has been remarkably profound. Some Friends discovered new opportunities to spend their time in meaningful ways, attending virtual events and reconnecting with people. The

isolation and distancing have further revealed openings to the testimony of Simplicity: the joy of eating meals more slowly, for example, or not rushing to meet a scheduled demand.

The spirit of committee work has been enhanced and amplified over the past year, and we have been moved by the intentions of small groups in their creative efforts to keep the community alive and connected. We have sustained or introduced groups like Faith Stories, group meditations, regular First Day School by Zoom for both kids and young-at-heart, a book club, a daily lunchtime Zoom Meeting for Worship, movie nights hosted by the Racial Justice Working Group, and participated in the city's in-car Pride Parade.

Lockdown and isolation have illuminated the testimony of Stewardship. For example, the sign-in sheet for the purpose of COVID-19 contact tracing has unwittingly introduced us to the joy of knowing who has stopped by the Meetinghouse, and also reminded us that some stewards still attend to common chores like picking up trash on the property or weeding the garden.

Because the FGC gathering and related events and workshops were online June 27th - July 4th, we were pleased that eight Memphis Friends found it possible to attend, the most we've ever had at a Gathering. They attended workshops on climate change, early Quaker theology, Quaker 101, John Calvi's *Abandon All Weariness*; as well as the small worship sharing group, the teen program, and the evening programs.

Even though the FWCC's Worldwide Conference on Sustainability occurred just before the onset of the pandemic and related restrictions, several from our Meeting attended because it also was online, showing us that Zoom really does work for encouraging higher attendance to remote worship and learning events.

Beyond these larger gatherings, two Memphis Friends have also provided sustained representation on regular meetings of SAYMA Ministry & Nurture, Nominations Committee, and Representative Meeting.

*Seasoned in Meeting for Learning January 24<sup>th</sup>, emailed to Friends February 9<sup>th</sup>, reviewed in business meeting on February 14<sup>th</sup>, second draft emailed for review on February 15<sup>th</sup>, approved in business meeting on March 14<sup>th</sup>. Notes prepared by Kali Kucera with input from Friends, and with additional editing provided by Laura Helper.*