

## West Knoxville Friends State of the Meeting report 2020

West Knoxville Friends (WKFM) have considered the following queries to explore the state of our meeting. These reflections are from January 2020 through March 2021.

*In what ways is your meeting answering the call to become an anti-racist faith community?*

WKFM has responded more intensely to issues of social justice this year and been sensitized to the reality of racism. We examined these issues in committee meetings, through second hours, worship sharing, book groups studying "Me and White Supremacy" and other titles, peaceful public demonstrations, letter writing campaigns, and funding groups which engage racial issues locally and across the Quaker world. In June we reached consensus on a Minute of Racial Justice which we widely shared and was published in local newspapers.

We asked our Religious Education Committee to address the question of reparations. They convened two worship sharings, a second hour, and continue to schedule gatherings to inform ourselves and map out strategies to address these issues. A new attender described the value of the Religious Education committee in its discussions and decision making as a good introduction to Quaker Process. The work of this committee is timely and vital as our nation continues to awaken to racism and racial violence.

*What are ways you and your meeting responded to the environmental impact of COVID*

More Friends have attended virtually, which is something we hope to continue into the future. However some members are "zoomed out" and choose not to attend virtual meetings. As one member put it "We have felt safe and welcome and look forward to meeting in person."We have had a limited number of inperson meetings outside when weather permits.

*How have we comforted one another during times of grief, loss, and isolation; and checked in on the emotional and financial health of Friends?*

We have missed seeing one another in person but have worked to stay connected. One member has taken care to acknowledge the birthdays of Friends and Attenders each month. We have stayed connected through phone calls, digital media and occasional outdoor visits and work days. A former member of WKFM, who now lives in Ohio led a book group on The Power of Now which would not have happened without zoom.

The Ministry and Nurture Committee continues to support members and is aware that Friends have taken initiative to reach out individually and to offer support to others.

Socializing in person before and after meeting had been a way to check in with one another, to understand the stresses we face and share little joys. This declined and has been entirely altered by virtual meetings. But zoom is still a way to share and check in on each other.

The Meeting grieved the loss of long-time member Lee Hoefer. Many remembrances were shared and recorded via email. The impact was doubled as we have not been able to meet in person to grieve and share memories of Lee. We hope to have an in-person celebration of Lee's life in May.

*How has your meeting approached the sense of grief, loss, and the emotional health of the children, including the lack of regular physical interaction?*

This has been one of the greatest challenges. Our children's group had been small but consistent before the plague. Children have not attended Meeting for Worship virtually for the most part, just popping in to say "Hello." We have not set up any virtual children's meeting or First Day School, parents have not requested this. Children have been enthusiastically welcomed during our in person outdoor workdays.

We so look forward to reconvening in our Meeting House, particularly to provide an opportunity for the children to join us.

*What growth has happened in your meeting in response to the stresses of this year?*

WKFM struggled to find ways to maintain and nurture our community. We went virtual early on for worship, book groups, and committee meetings. This has allowed us to reconnect with some friends who can't readily attend in person meetings in West Knoxville.

Some Friends have not been drawn to participate by Zoom. We have reached out to offer support, while respecting the sensibilities at play. We look forward to meeting in person when these folks will rejoin us. Setting up continued virtual meetings, in parallel with in person meetings, is being discussed and may be an opportunity for growth. The pandemic has allowed comfortable new avenues of participation for Friends more inclined to introversion.

The Exploring Quakerism course, led by a member of our Meeting, revisited the essence of Quakerism and Quaker process. We noted that digging deeply into the essence of our Quaker spirit could help us to reduce institutional racism.

Meeting has welcomed some new attenders, starting with mid-week meetings, as a means to explore Quaker traditions.

The Meeting was in unity on continuing employment for our Meeting House caretaker even though we are not using the meeting house regularly. And we have continued our participation in Family Promise reaching out with what resources we can share to bring some stability to these families.

Several Friends meet monthly as an FCNL letter writing group, developing ongoing relationships with our Congressional delegation and the media and bringing key policy concerns to their attention.

Friends held a weekly peaceful witness in the downtown Market Square for several months, with the banner: "Love Thy Neighbors, No Exceptions."