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2023 State of the Meeting report for Birmingham Friends Meeting (corrected)

1 message

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Birmingham Friends Meeting

State of the Meeting Report to SAYMA

3/21/2023

Birmingham Friends missed gathering in community during the worst of the pandemic, though our decision to meet virtually has turned out to be a blessing. Our presence on Zoom has allowed members who have moved away to remain an active part of our Meeting, and it has allowed new attenders to check out our way of being in the world. We are particularly blessed to welcome several young adult new attenders who have become a beloved and active part of our community. As we have returned to meeting in person, they have drawn us into social fellowship outside the Meetinghouse, and our community feels more whole, more restored as a result.

The need to introduce our new Friends to Quaker practice and Testimonies has led us to a number of deep sharings, as has the need to reckon with the turmoil in SAYMA. Through a member's governance role in FCNL, we are also active in that organization's work to address injustice and turmoil in our country and the wider world. All of this has called us to mind how we live the Testimonies individually and together. We have felt called as a Meeting to support SAYMA in its struggles and its anti-racism work, and a larger number of Birmingham members and attenders are participating in SAYMA governance and activities than has been the case for some time. It is good to feel ourselves connected to our Yearly Meeting.

Like others, we also have had cause to mourn: we mourn losses (through death or relocation) of dear members whose testimonies and memories remain very present with us; we mourn the losses of lives and ways of living that COVID has taken from us; and we still mourn the loss of idealism and confidence that the insurrection inflicted upon us. We have used this time to grieve some losses together in worship sharing and in individual reflections. We have also continued, and even expanded, our advocacy for a better world by renewing our work with state organizations that seek justice. And we have had sensitive and deeply spiritual times of discernment over reproductive health care, abortion and women's equality led by FCNL's request for discernment on these issues.

We have supported one another, as well. A hospital chaplain expressed gratitude for the group of advisors who have supported his ministry. We have ministered to Friends through illness and major life changes. Finally, we all have supported each other through a major decision: whether to spend tens of thousands of dollars on critical foundation repairs to the Meetinghouse or to give up and look for another home for the Meeting. Our threshing session prior to the decision underscored the degree of deep commitment Birmingham Friends have to being together, in this very place, at this time and for the foreseeable future. The process has been long and difficult, but we have met it in unity that is touching, healing and inspiring. Many members of the Meeting have labored intensely to make this work, and the story ends well: the steel girder foundation work begins next week, but other foundations have been strengthened throughout this process.

Submitted with thanks and love,

Jane Hiles

Clerk of the Ministry & Nurture Committee

Birmingham Friends Meeting

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pronouns: she, her

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CHOOSE HOPE: WORK FOR JUSTICE