

## State of HAFM 2022

The state of Huntsville Area Friends Meeting (HAFM) is positive but concerned with the changes of how we meet now. We have continued to stay virtual even though the effects of the pandemic have lessened. Our distance and energy greatly are ameliorated by the convenience of virtual meeting. We have had a couple of in-person meetings to connect during the year and some Friends meet, well as friends. The meeting is moved to share a bit of their personal lives, their silent worship and then any joys and concerns. But for the most part it is done over a Zoom screen interface, and I think many miss the closeness of spirit when we met in an annex of a local church in the past.

One member stated: Friends met this year on Zoom exclusively Sharing our deeper personal experiences with each other is how I have felt my needs were met on all fronts. However, I feel a great need for more real, honest & deeper personal sharing. Silence worship is good for connection with God but I really feel a lack of involvement with each other. I feel we are in dire need of more heart felt personal expression. The Meeting needs more time building community and using HAFMS old worship sharing method of "passing the fish". HAFM is a dear group but needs to maintain our growth and spiritual community for survival.

### *What challenges did our meeting face during the last year?*

Some of us miss regular face-to-face meetings. However, we have met intermittently outside at COVID-safe places, e.g., peoples' homes and parks, etc. Zoom has worked well for us for meeting for worship, as well as meeting for worship with attention to business. Also, Zoom has enabled us to have attenders and members from other geographical locations join in our meetings for worship, e.g., from the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as from distant locations here in Alabama.

We have continued to meet on ZOOM. Since we left the church, we are more loosely organized than before. We don't have some of our once functioning committees and resources: ministry and nurture committees; environmental committees (Earth-care Witness); the library and ability to pass out Quaker pamphlets and journals; the sign-up sheet for Worship Guiding Words and Queries; young people to add to our Second Hour from what they did during their worship hour; a set time to have fellowship.

### *How did we support and lift each other up?*

Some social/spiritual gatherings have included family members of regular attenders, including "4-footeds." Also, we have stood beside one another via email/telephone, etc., during times of loss, particularly, with Friends who's ill and/or dying family members have been far away.

We have used second hours, for book studies, e.g. *Life Lessons from a Bad Quaker* and *Me and White Supremacy*, as well as sharing about our spiritual journeys.

The leadership and humor amidst our group has enriched our Meeting.

The first few minutes of Worship we have informal check-ins about what we are doing. The advantage of this is that all members can hear about each other's lives, everyone may not contribute but all can listen to those who do share. Also, in Joys and Concerns, our sharing brings us closer together. Anyone wanting to follow up during the week can do so individually

*How did we breathe new life into our testimonies and responses to turmoil in our community and the world?*

Several of our members/attenders are active in the Friends Committee on National Legislation's Huntsville Advocacy Team (HAT). One of our members has provided HAT a ZOOM link for HAT's monthly meetings.

HAFM is represented on the Interfaith Mission Services (IMS) Leadership Council. Through IMS, we've provided financial and emotional support to refugees arriving in Huntsville from Afghanistan and Ukraine. Some members worked with another community organization, Global Ties Alabama, to share information with a Ukrainian and Polish delegation about their refugee work and Friends' historical and current work to benefit immigrants at the US/Mexico border. A Friend representing Voices from the Border Zoomed in to give a personal testimony of Voice's work with refugees. One of our members serves Huntsville as a member of the advisory council for the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

The meeting often discusses the turmoil around world events, political crisis in U.S.A. during pre-meeting discussion or when the meeting closes with any joys or concerns. The meeting is fairly communicative even if it is from our home offices, bedrooms, living rooms. The meeting tries to share and assuage concerns of the group.

*How did we deepen together spiritually over the past year?*

During meeting for worship, we have often benefited from queries offered from SAYMA Faith and Practice (and other sources) and subsequent vocal ministry. As we have learned more about each individual's views of the world, stories, joys, and concerns, our bonds strengthen for our growth, individually and as HAFM, to witness to one another and our community, our nation, our world community, our Earth.

HAFM keeps rolling along like a well sourced Appalachian creek. Each of the members and attenders share their worship and thoughts and this energy streams together making our little community flow in the present. The Meeting will continue to share spiritual discovery during silent worship, additional items of interest, joys and concerns, a helping hand, and the ways of the Society of Friends that we have learned with each other and those that join us. HAFM will continue to build a better world around us and with those we encounter.