

TAMPA MONTHLY MEETING SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT 2010

Tampa Friends gathered on two separate First Days to reflect upon the spiritual state of our Meeting. We were guided by queries that asked us to consider our support of each other as members of a beloved community, our witness in the wider community, and our meetings for worship with a concern for business as a corporate search for truth. The quotations included in this report are statements made by Friends at those sessions. Once again, Tampa Monthly Meeting found that the practice of being called upon to report back to our Yearly Meeting on the state of our Meeting offered us an invaluable opportunity to consider not only where we have been but who we are and who we would like to be.

“Lots of support for each other within our community comes about simply because that’s who we are.” Friends affirmed this statement of a strength of our Meeting that arises almost automatically out of a natural concern for one another. We seek to recognize opportunities to be supportive, and we respond as a healthy extended family acting from a sense of commitment and obligation. Mid-week Worship Sharing contributes to our relationship building by offering a space for deeper sharing of our spiritual journeys. Adult First Day School has opened similar doors. Often the opportunity to support another’s concerns or leadings has led to the surprise and joy of finding that all involved in the process feel a strong sense of being supported. Our worship feels solidly grounded in this beloved community and for that we are grateful.

We are thankful to our Ministry and Counsel committee for the careful and loving way with which it seeks to offer our Meeting pastoral care; this is a gift, involving deep listening, looking for needs, and intentional thought and action. Ministry and Counsel has also facilitated clearness committees, a process that gives genuine support as those involved come to know each other better and feel a deeper level of relationship. We hope to encourage more use of the clearness process in the coming year.

Whether blessed with silence or with vocal ministry, Tampa Friends find our worship meeting our needs. Most often Friends cite how worship has fed and strengthened us in difficult times. We recognize the responsibility to come to worship prepared and open to where spirit might lead.

“In the past ten-years, the Meeting has grown up.”

A positive sign of our growth is our moving away from relying too much on the same few Friends. Even in a small Friends meeting, there is plenty of work and responsibility to go around. We are finding that more Friends are coming forward to help share in that part of the life of our community. With this growth has also come increasing movement to undertake action as a body, an understanding most visible in the work of the Peace and Social Concerns committee.

“Some see individual progress in steps in their personal life, others are addressing larger issues.” The call to work and witness in the wider community is a vital part of the life of Tampa Monthly Meeting. Many Friends do - and have done for years - serve our wider Tampa community as they have been spirit-led. We very much feel a part of that witness and gratefully offer our support as needed. Tampa Friends also serve our wider Quaker community by working on committees of Southeaster Yearly Meeting, Friends General Conference, Friends Peace Teams, and Friends Committee on National Legislation. We also seek to support our wider Quaker community by hosting Friends such as the Executive Committee of SEYM.

Our Peace and Social Concerns committee has led and pushed us to being more intentional in undertaking specific actions as a Meeting. This process was begun with a Saturday retreat in May in which we sought to discern how we might be led. As the list of concerns we wished to address was quite lengthy, we found ourselves gathered in a deep spiritual discernment which brought us to where we were called to act. We feel we are most strongly called to work and witness for Peace and that has guided our efforts and will continue to do so.

It was from this understanding that Tampa Friends undertook leading the FCNL “Our Nation’s Checkbook” campaign in Florida. Specifically, Tampa Friends, with the help and guidance of FCNL staff, gathered over 400 signatures of individuals and organizations on a sign-on letter to Senator Bill Nelson asking that as a member of the Senate budget committee, he take action to cut military spending. Two Tampa Friends traveled to Washington D.C. in October and with the Legislative Secretary of FCNL, met with members of Senator Nelson’s staff to deliver the sign-on letter and ask Senator Nelson to act. This is but one step in an ongoing effort that Tampa Friends will continue to work on in the coming year.

Tampa Meeting undertook a number of actions this year in seeking to be a more visible witness in our wider community. In reflecting on this work, Friends became clear that indeed, we did reap more than we did sow. Recognizing that there is no peace without economic justice, several Tampa Friends were led to a ten-mile march with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Tampa. The march was in support of the workers efforts to seek economic justice from Publix supermarkets. Friends also felt called to stand streetside and witness in opposition to a hate filled message brought to our community by a church that advocates violence toward gay brothers and sisters. Our annual Quaker presence at the People’s Fair - Circus McGurkis - in St. Petersburg was a chance to talk to all kinds of folks about Quakerism, FCNL, and Peace, of course. The International Day of Peace, September 21st, offered Tampa Friends the opportunity to host a public gathering for Peace at the meetinghouse. It was a joyful gathering and we reconnected with local peace folk we had not seen in a long time. It also proved to be a spirit-led evening which ended with a circle of candlelight and a time for reflection and rededication that fed the soul.

“At meeting for business I feel that my voice is heard, that I am really listened to, even when I disagree.”

In considering the spiritual state of our meeting for worship with a concern for business, we acknowledge the responsibility of each of us to bring and to share our measure of the Light in our decision making. We also recognize the difficulty of knowing what are genuine leadings. We know that we must remain open but are clear that it is essential to also prepare ourselves ahead of time. We were reminded that decisions are more than words, that our language must reflect where those words come from.

But how well do we do all this? Some months it seems that we deal mostly with routine details, staying on the surface. Perhaps we have not been challenged to go deep. This Meeting has not had to face a big, divisive issue. Perhaps we have not reflected that, underlying each decision, is the question: Is this decision who we really are? Do we accept the responsibility that everyone present has to help clerk? We cannot sit back and leave it to the clerk to set the pace while the rest of us just go along.

“We have addressed the weaknesses that we identified last year.”

Of major concern from our previous consideration of the state of our Meeting was the functioning of

our committees. We have worked to meet more regularly and to encourage attendance. Incoming clerks have provided new direction, while those who have served before have provided necessary continuity. We have encouraged more participation by all and continue to recognize the importance of fully functioning committees to the life of our Meeting.

We cannot reflect on the spiritual state of our Meeting without looking forward. We face challenges and see need for improvement in several areas. We are challenged by the economic depression both as a community with a mortgage and financial responsibilities and as a community that cares for it's members who are struggling. Included in this challenge is our strong desire to find ways to give more financial support to Quaker organizations. We see a need to do better at discerning and following leadings. We seek to continue growing and need to be careful that our efforts are not just directed toward maintaining the status quo. We need to affirm the importance of regular, not just sporadic, attendance at Meeting for Worship. We are challenged by the need for more families with children to provide a more vibrant First Day School community for our children. Tampa Monthly Meeting has no designated elders: Do we need to recognize elders? How do we regard our weighty Friends? Are their talents and abilities fully used?

Tampa Friends trust that way will open to address our challenges. We understand that the responsibility for fostering a vital Friends Meeting lies in our continued efforts to be faithful, to be open, to be loving, to be spirit-led.

In the Light,
Tampa Monthly Meeting