

## **Tampa Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends Spiritual State of the Meeting Report 2016**

- 1. How does the spirit of worship extend into our committee work and into Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business? How well do our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business lead to a corporate search for and revelation of God's truth?**

*Beginning committee meetings with worship and returning to worship to center down or hold concerns are good practices. Clerk begins Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business with quotes that reflect the purpose of the Meeting, that center and guide us, and remind us of our beliefs; this serves us well. We are of like mind and it shows in our approach to decisions. We consistently listen for God and to each other which helps us reach the sense of the Meeting. Intense listening and thoughtful sharing works for our Quaker process. We have faith in our practice. We are intentional about how we enter into the process which enables us to be open to the Spirit working in the Meeting community. We are grateful that we learn this process and adhere to it. The process helps us to be open to our "position" on a topic being changed and not hold on to our personal agenda, which allows for listening and for God's Truth to be revealed. Our best efforts are being made to trust in the wisdom of a group / committee regardless of the outcome.*

- 2. Has there been a deepening and strengthening of the sense of the Divine Presence in our midst during the past year? Do we leave our Meetings filled with a sense of love and peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit filled living?**

*The new building seems to call a deeper Spirit of worship out of us; the Spirit is alive and tangible. Friends look forward to coming to Meeting for Worship. The arrangement of the seating in the room engenders a deeper recognition of the Divine Presence, is conducive to the sense of community, and has brought forth feelings of peace and serenity. The sense of the Meeting is a reminder to treat those with whom we live and work with love. The Meeting and beliefs shared here help in difficult work, especially challenges of the week in a secular environment. Being at Meeting gives strength to do what needs to be done in order to "answer that of God in everyone" in daily life. The perspective of Quaker witness / testimony helps in the wider world. There is the knowledge in our community that a spirit of competition or animosity does not exist among us. The open house celebration brought forth a tangible witness to who we are and a more concrete understanding of our Meeting community. The Spirit is with us in Tampa and with Quakers in general, evident in seeing and hearing Friends who came to the open house.*

- 3. How has our Meeting given witness to love within our Meeting, in our communities, and in our world?**

*Our work extends beyond the job description through the Quaker values we espouse. This is at work within the Quaker world as well as without. In all that we do, we witness to the Quaker testimonies. Our community, beliefs, and worship help us extend love as witness. Pastoral care in Meeting happens organically in addition to the committee responsible for it. Collectively, as a Meeting, we witness to the local and global community by the building of the new Meeting house, but the hope is that we would grow in community involvement now that the building is finished. Many Tampa Friends*

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*are involved in the wider Quaker world through their work in FCNL, RSWR, Friends Peace Teams, and as Earthcare Field Secretary. Tampa Friends contribute their gifts to work within Yearly Meeting as well as through ministries such as teaching, end-of-life care for animals and assisting the family with that transition, and ministering to the broken hearts and minds of clients. The Spiritual Formation Groups still continue to influence and deepen connection and spiritual practice / awareness. The value of community is enriching when we hear about the involvement of others and events; even if we cannot always attend or join in, we feel a part of that joy. There has been community outreach and in-reach through Friendly Dinners, different performances of the various talents in the Meeting, and inviting people to share our space (ie. AA).*

#### **4. What other reflections do we have on the current condition of the Meeting: new life, joys, concerns, sorrows?**

*There is a desire for more Adult First Day School on a regular basis. Friends have the sense of needing more spiritual grounding to get through the current climate of hate, anger, and sorrow and to be prepared for challenging times. We need to be strong for us and strong for others. We need to learn how to deal with the idea of welcoming all to the table even those we'd rather not sit near, and work out how we can bring love to those situations. We seek to build a foundation for our efforts to face the fears and difficulties by standing in the shoes of Jesus as our model in "caring for the least of these" as well as relying on the inspiration of early Friends as the cloud of witnesses among us. We must dig into the ground of our Quaker Worship and testimonies rather than give in to despair. Our desire is to work toward love of our neighbor even when they hate and hurt ourselves or others. We find joy as new people come to our Meeting and grow more involved in the life of the Meeting.*