The State of the Meeting Report is a yearly self-examination by the Meeting and its members of our spiritual strengths and weaknesses, and of our efforts to foster growth in the spiritual life. It is meant to take the measure of the spiritual health of the Meeting.

In opening the December 2018 Meeting for Business, the clerk read the words of Isaac Penington, written from prison, to Friends in Amersham, in 1667: *Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand, if there has been any slip or fall...*

The clerk then invited all to share briefly their sense, at year’s end, of the life of our meeting. Several Friends spoke out of the silence:

*We worship together on Sundays and practice in our individual ways all week. This is the warp and weave of our community. We persevere. Energy flows into the Meeting as people come seeking a way and a place for centering. Many have thanked us for being here.*

*We have noticed the strains that can occur when attempting to be an inclusive Meeting. Many threshing sessions, workshops, and trainings have helped us deal with these tensions.*

*We have expended a great deal of effort to provide outreach and care to the larger community.*

*The challenges we have been presented with have provided opportunities to learn and grow. We know that discord can give birth to greater harmony.*

*We have a core of F/friends who sustain us. Some have been with us for many years, and others, in a short time, have woven themselves quickly into the fabric of the Meeting.*

Olympia Friends have had many challenges during the past year, and many opportunities to test our strengths and weaknesses. We have certainly found great vitality and inspiration in our revolving and seasonal Meeting community events: monthly potlucks for all, and for the women, and for the men, and annually, in conjunction with a meeting for worship, at Thanksgiving and Christmas. A Friendly Book Group has explored Quakers and undoing racism, and we have held a series of Quakerism 101 classes for newcomers. There have been a number of Quaker education events, including Spiritual Journey presentations by members and attenders, and reports on attendance at Annual Sessions of Yearly Meeting, Friends General Conference, and the Men’s Retreat and Women’s Theology Conference of programmed and unprogrammed Friends. Annual weekend outings—the winter Ski Trip in January and the summer Campout in June, were not as well attended as in the past. Several work parties have enhanced both the meetinghouse and grounds and our sense of community and harmonic convergence. That sense is also to be
found before meeting on First Day, when Friends gather around the piano for Worship Singing.

A particular challenge over the course of the past year has been the ongoing effort to find unity around the presence of a man with a record as a registered sex offender. He has worshipped with Friends for many years, and when he and his wife, a Quaker, moved to Olympia in 2017, they intended to do so with Olympia Friends. An immediate consequence of their intention was the development of a Sex Offender Policy covering the participation of registered sex offenders in Meeting activities. After an incident took place mid-year, one that was experienced very differently by the parties involved, a revision of the policy was undertaken to make it clearer for everyone. At the same time, we have begun a process of better understanding that differing concerns, for welcoming on the part of some, and for a sense of safety on the part of others, are grounded in our transcendent unity as seekers of truth. Our work on this has led us to look more deeply into our fears and our faith, our shared values, and how we handle conflict within our community.

The numbers of children attending First Day School decreased from as many as 10 children ages 4 to 15 at the beginning of the year to as few as one or two by year’s end. The Children's Coordinator stepped down from her paid position in August.

Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business have consistently had a high number in attendance, averaging 30 F/friends throughout the year. Rose Kellogg, Durdaana Rinderknecht, Stewart Henderson, and Suzanne Simons were welcomed into membership, and the transfer of Deborah Lewis's membership from Port Townsend Monthly Meeting was approved. Retreats were offered on “Forgiveness” and on “Belonging,” and threshing sessions on the OFM Sex Offender Policy, on creating a Minute of Inclusion Welcoming Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People, and on reaching unity on political actions and political endorsements. Bible Study and a seminar on Vocal Ministry were led by Joe Snyder, a Visiting Friend under the auspices of North Pacific Yearly Meeting, and a presentation on The History of Sexism was given by a professor from Evergreen State College. An ad hoc committee was created to revise the Sex Offender Policy, and to develop resources for a deeper understanding of the need for equal respect amidst the ubiquitous threats in the larger culture of sexual harassment, violence, and abuse. Both women and men of the Meeting have been led to consider what it means to live out the consequences for our relationships in what is still a patriarchal culture. A workshop for elementary age kids on personal boundaries and related safety topics was led by First Day School staff, and a person from Gender Odyssey gave a workshop for the Children's Committee and others on working with children without assigning too much significance to gender. In April, the OMM Sanctuary Minute was approved, supporting the position of other faith communities and the South Sound Network for Immigration and Refugee Support. Many F/friends took part in volunteer trainings at Temple Beth Hatfiloh, which has declared itself a Sanctuary Congregation.
A part-time Hearthkeeper was hired to be responsible for managing the meetinghouse and its various uses, including rentals for meetings, weddings, and celebrations, and to provide a Friendly presence and Quakerly outreach. We hosted several gatherings of Learning Right Relations, a community program that promotes solidarity with tribes of the South Salish Sea. Quaker Lobby Day, organized annually by Quaker Voice, uses the meetinghouse to provide hospitality and orientation to Friends as they prepare to visit State legislators at the Capitol. Following up on a previously recorded Minute, a banner was hung on the street side of the meetinghouse saying “Olympia Meeting (Quakers) Stands With Our Muslim Neighbors.” Many members of the OFM community have attended services at the Masjid Al-Nur mosque, and friends from the mosque came to the meetinghouse to celebrate the end of Ramadan and break their fast with a meal we prepared. The meeting is closely involved with Interfaith Works, a coalition of religious organizations dedicated to those whose needs are underserved. Two organizations with strong roots and active support in the Meeting are Friendly Water for the World, which brings low-cost clean water technologies and empowerment to communities across the globe lacking both, and Enterprise for Equity, which helps people with limited-incomes (and others) start small businesses. A panel was convened at the meetinghouse with Thurston Housing Land Trust, Interfaith Works, SideWalk, and Just Housing discussing their work on behalf of those without affordable housing. With attention focused on police brutality both locally and nationwide, the Meeting minuted its support for State Initiative 940, calling for police accountability.

In late summer the Meeting was asked to take under its care the Lower Columbia Worship Group, located in southwest Washington but under the care of Multnomah Monthly Meeting, in Portland, Oregon. After visitation, consultation, and seasoning, a minute to this effect was approved at September’s business meeting.

It has been the Meeting’s practice to have a monthly Query, culled from a number of sources, including the creativity of members of Worship and Ministry. The queries are often meant to speak to immediate concerns and conditions, and at the third First Day of the month, F/friends are invited to share thoughts inspired by that month’s Query, often resulting in a rich harvest of ministry. An earlier meeting time was made available for those preferring to worship without the Query. Another occasion for ministry takes place on the First Sunday of the month, with a Prayer Circle that happens before worship begins.

Finally, the active and enthusiastic engagement of our many committees and sub-committees in the care of both the Meeting and the local and global communities of which we are a part is itself an essential ministry. The work of our members and attenders that keeps Olympia Friends Meeting alive and thriving is love made visible.

Deborah Lewis, Jack Zeiger, Co-Clerks, OMM