University Friends Meeting State of the Meeting Report

2018-2019

Our meeting recognized its limits this past year. It has been, at times, a painful process. With this recognition has come new energy and a quiet refocusing and revitalization of our programs.

After long consideration, we reached agreement that our meeting house needs a professional caretaker. The decision was made to eliminate the position of Quaker House Resident, long a key player in meeting activities and hospitality, replacing it with a Facilities Manager. Volunteers stepped into the hospitality roles. Committees rotate the responsibility for providing a “light lunch” on second Sundays, while on fourth Sundays lunch is potluck.

Occasionally, individual behavior has not lived up to the ideals of community and peace that are at the heart of Quaker life. Sometimes comments, ministry, and other communication have been aggressive, harsh or rambling. Some in our community may have misused the flexibility of Quaker process, speaking their minds without the full light of the Spirit. UFM has committed itself to engaging these Friends from a place of love and spiritual discernment. We are also resolved to hold these Friends accountable for their words and actions in the interest of protecting the integrity, process and spirit of our meeting. Facing these truths and acting in response has been difficult, and the work continues. Like a carefully cared for tree, though, we hope that this work will help us bear more abundant fruit in future seasons.

Our systems of filling committees were not working. After reducing the number of committee slots available across all committees, ongoing projects have found new vibrancy:

- Our Adult Religious Education program switched to a format which invites Quaker sharing, both of our own experiences and around articles in Quaker publications—listening beyond words, not just lecturing.
- Our monthly newsletter, Gleamings, underwent a cosmetic redesign under new editors and submissions have increased.
- A clearness committee is working to form an Ad-Hoc Committee on Disability.
- Volunteers modernized, organized, and decluttered our library, clearing away older volumes and making room for new light; in the words of one friend, “transforming our library into a 21st century spiritual resource.” A new project is underway now to create an electronic catalog of all library materials.
- QuEST reported on the completion of its 26th year and its work to create a spiritual core which embraces the fellows as they do their internships. Founded in 1992, QuEST has 161 alumni who have served in 56 agencies doing over 100,000 hours of service.

We recognized Nora Percival’s leading to train community health providers in Kenya as a new ministry. Nora visited Chwele, Kenya, in May 2018 to teach basic preventive health practices
and peer training techniques. It was a “train the trainer” class, with the goal of making these volunteers more effective in helping their clients. For many rural communities and urban communities living in poverty, these community health volunteers are the only available medical staff. In collaboration with Nairobi Monthly Meeting, Nora returned to Kenya in spring 2019, this time to Kibera, a large slum in Nairobi, as she continues to develop a training program suitable for use nationwide.

We continue to have a small but thriving first day school program. Typical attendance for preschool and primary grades is six to ten kids. We now have about 20 adults who assist our teachers as “second adults.” This helps adults and kids get to know each other and makes filling our volunteer slots easier. Junior Friends and Central Friends meet on the first Sunday of the month, with Central Friends from South Seattle Meeting joining us this year.

Friends active in Seattle’s No New Youth Jail movement worked with Peace and Social Concerns to draft a minute calling for a stop to the construction of a new youth jail. While unity was not reached, the minute informed UFM's planning for PNQM's fall session on the theme, "Racial Justice: Quaker Abolitionism for the 21st Century." A keynote presentation by Ellany Kayce, Tlingit activist, set the stage for interest group discussions of alternatives to police and prisons. This session was one response to Vanessa Julye's presence at NPYM's Annual Session, where she called on Friends to uproot racism and white supremacy in our Society. We have held one lightly-attended threshing session on responses to a proposed Minute on Uprooting Racism from NPYM and have planned a second, based on the radically revised proposed minute.

Thinking about the future, UFM completed an initial study of how best to steward our property and worship space as our neighborhood, the Meeting, Seattle, and the Society of Friends change. After a careful discernment process including two threshing sessions, interviews with other churches, and other research, the committee presented its report. Key ideas were the following: new construction is doable, particularly if we have a good partner to work with; planning should be for where we want to be in 20 to 50 years; changes should be made in tender consideration of the life and feelings of the community; and any new construction should be in line with our leadings, including sustainability. No actions are planned at this time.

The Meeting approved a Minute on "Mobility Planning and Addressing Climate Disruption," endorsing the principles and spirit of the University District Mobility Project. The Minute was sent to city and county elected officials, and to the Church Council of Greater Seattle.

We continue to come together on Sundays and Wednesdays in hope and fellowship. Our clerk reminds us that we meet on native land. We listen to the clack of crow’s feet overhead, feel the dappled sun and shade as tree boughs sway outside. We watch the sunlight, clouds and rain upon Lake Union. We wait upon the Divine. We listen.