

SAN FRANCISCO MONTHLY MEETING
STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT
APPROVED 11 FIFTH MONTH 2014

(Twenty Friends, including two children, contributed to this crowd-sourced report, meeting together in small groups to reflect on selected queries from Faith and Practice. Their rich responses were combined and alas of necessity ruthlessly edited by the clerk.)

Attendance at worship on First Day varies from 40 to 70. In months with five First Days, we hold an approximately two-and-a-half-hour extended meeting for worship. Mid-week meeting at six pm draws anywhere from two or three to as many as a dozen worshipers.

Given our location in the center of a major city we get many visitors not necessarily familiar with our ways. We continue to offer an orientation before meeting for worship each First Day; and all Friends present at the rise of meeting are encouraged to greet newcomers and answer their questions. We strive to be welcoming to all. The meetinghouse is accessible and convenient to public transit.

There is a considerable diversity of beliefs, backgrounds and life experiences within our faith community. Because or in spite of this, we find we are often drawn together in our worship by the living presence of God in our midst, and nourished and strengthened in a deeply spiritual manner.

Our First Day School has drawn a number of new attenders. Each time they meet the children introduce themselves and welcome any newcomers. We are blessed with reliable and caring childcare workers and volunteers. A conversation is ongoing on how to provide more religious education for our children and young adults, and ways to encourage their consistent and active participation.

For adults, twice-a-month Bible Study, a weekly Quaker book group and a monthly Nonviolent Communication practice group all meet in the meetinghouse, which is also the site of our weekly food pantry program, involving a core of dedicated Meeting and non-Meeting volunteers of all ages. These regular activities, along with our monthly and seasonal potlucks, occasional Friendly-Eights dinners and yearly retreats, are essential to our treasured sense of community, which is not something you can create in fifteen minutes after meeting for worship. The women's retreat was not held last year, however it has been scheduled again for the fall and hopes are high.

Attendance at meeting for business has increased. In general, business meetings have felt worshipful and rightly ordered. We continue to live into our decision, reported last year, to accept, over the reservations of at least two longtime members, the bequest of a tenanted residential property in need of costly repairs. We are mindful to be tender to one another on these issues. We rejoiced in two marriages this year: one under our care, and the other under the care of, and celebrated at, Port Townsend Meeting in Washington state, for which there was a shared clearness process.

Concern among Friends for peace, social justice and environmental issues is high, and many are involved in one or another activity addressing them. To the frustration of some, it can be difficult to get everyone in the Meeting to support one effort, unless it is fairly discrete and short-term. The Food Pantry is a significant ongoing undertaking, very fulfilling for those involved. A child of the meeting writes: "We like to help out at our food bank because we like to assure ourselves that our community gets good, healthy food." There is always a need for more Friends with time

to help manage the project and provide a consistent Quaker presence. Our Meeting has members who are longtime war tax refusers, and we have a fund available to assist with the payment of penalties and interest occasioned by these acts of conscience. The weekly interfaith peace vigil we cosponsor is in its thirteenth year, though Meeting participation is light.

A significant development this year has been the emergence and taking under our care of the new Western Shore Worship Group, currently meeting in homes in San Francisco on First Day morning. It includes upwards of a half-dozen of our members, brought together variously by a desire for a different meeting time and an alternative worship experience for people with physical or spiritual needs better served in a smaller group environment with living plants and ready outdoor access. We are a large meeting, and *Faith and Practice* encourages the creation of worship groups as meetings expand. Still, some Friends note the existence of long-standing tensions or conflicts in the Meeting that may have inspired this separation from the main body, and are troubled. They suggest Meeting pose itself these queries: Do we work together in love to resolve conflict, or do we withdraw to avoid conflict? Is a degree of withdrawal a form of conflict resolution consistent with our faith and practice? Are we committed to addressing concerns that may divide us in a process of listening and plain speaking grounded in love?

The Nonviolent Communication practice group mentioned earlier was an outgrowth of a pair of workshops led by an invited Friend, as reported last year. As fruitful as these activities have been and continue to be, some are concerned that they have not extended to all parties to the conflicts that have at times challenged our sense of unity, and ask whether other forms of mediation might needs be sought. Still there are hopeful developments at the same time, including a conflict on one committee that its members were able to resolve with patience, love and grace.

There are other issues with which we struggle. How can we be proactive about protecting the space for worship from the disruptive behavior of troubled souls? How do we nurture our worker bees? What about transportation for elderly and infirm members? How might we best help individuals with no family support whose needs challenge our ability to serve? Do the busy-ness of our lives and the competing claims on our time keep us from being available to discerning the leadings to be nurtured in our Meeting? Do they deprive us of the time and energy necessary to sustain our Meeting organizationally? How can we better encourage the development of Quaker leaders? Questions of leadership and shared responsibility are especially alive for us as we enter the new committee year with no nominee for presiding clerk nor for clerk of Ministry & Oversight. Our Nominating Committee continues its dedicated labors.

We are challenged to take time to allow breathing space and to nurture deep ties and trust among us. Thanking God for the gifts we receive, we yearn for more robustness as a community, and to remain open to where the Spirit leads.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Matchett, Acting Clerk