

Spiritual State of the Meeting, 2018

Takoma Park Friends Meeting, Preparative

As heard in Quaker Discussion, 2/17/19

We are a small meeting that is made up of approximately 6-8 people per Friends Meeting. As a result we do not have the structure or separate committees of larger Friends meetings. This being said, our small size allows for simplicity and intimacy that creates a community in which people feel a sense of commitment to each other and Friends' values. The end of meeting sharing of spiritual messages, as well as social hours and business meetings, allows everyone the space and opportunity to express what is on his/her heart and feel supported.

Our participants are sorely aware of the political discord and violence in the world. During meeting sharing they have told of how this has negatively impacted their lives, including restless sleep and bad dreams. We are appreciative of the refuge provided by our meeting to connect with the spirit and to reinforce a discipline to not focus on negative broadcast news. Our meeting provides a supportive network to address the challenges that this political discord produces.

Participants are active in the larger social justice community of Montgomery County and DC and regularly bring these issues to the attention of others and offer opportunities for activism. We appreciate our meeting's support of Parents of Special Needs Adults to address the domestic discord our members may confront. Regarding internal political discord that larger Friends meetings may confront, our small, homogeneous community with shared values tends to avoid such problems.

Our Friends meeting engages in several activities to strengthen the Quaker 'roots' of our community. Our 'second hours' have focused on Quaker history and, in particular, a guest speaker on persecution of Quakers in Maryland history. We have made efforts to establish a closer connection with Adelphi Friends which has resulted in more Adelphi visitors to the Takoma Park meeting in the past year than in recent years. Other activities supporting our Quaker roots include our attention to groups [other Quaker groups? External groups? Probably best to provide a couple of examples] being supported financially and visits from representatives of other Quaker groups we support [again, probably best to provide more specifics]. Moreover, while it may be repetitive for regular participants, we assure that all newcomers to our worship meetings are given detailed explanations regarding Quaker business as well as political activity being undertaken by Quaker groups.

While we have been a shining light and healing presence in troubled times, we have also been unwelcoming to discordant voices. Participants have voiced that there has been attacks on Christianity, a lack of enthusiasm for music during worship, a felt need for inclusion of a diversity of people and a desire for a hybrid between unprogrammed and programmed meetings.

While our meeting is committed to the inclusiveness of our membership, we also recognize that being such a small group means there may be less diversity. Members felt that increasing diversity was a real challenge and that trying to recruit new members based on "what box they check" was not authentic partly due to the fact that individuals are not necessarily representative of certain categories. Moreover, regarding diversity that is less visible such as income and ability as compared to gender or race, these elements are often less known because people value their own privacy. Moving forward, our meeting will continue to have a welcoming spirit, and will try to have more opportunities for members to informally 'tell their stories' in order to learn about their diversity, similar to a past event in which people were able to discuss their spiritual biographies.

Our 2017 Takoma Park spiritual state of the meeting report raised concerns about the sustainability of our meeting. Various indicators demonstrate progress in this area: more people are involved in the work of the meeting and more people are donating financially. Members recognize that despite a persistent issue of viability, the group continues to exist due to members need for intimacy and to worship with a small group. Positive efforts are underway to address the viability issue. A 'half-page' flyer on the Takoma Park Friends Meeting has been designed and approved for hand distribution to others and for posting in local commercial establishments. In addition, efforts are being made to find a more suitable space (participants have had complaints of noise at the Dance Exchange and in adequate heat).