

Chico Friends Meeting State of the Meeting report
April 6, 2021

In reflecting on the state of our meeting. Chico Friends gathered to respond to the following queries:

Spiritual Condition of the Meeting:

What is the spiritual condition of our meeting? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

Our worship deepened and widened this year, even in the face of the pandemic and Zoom gatherings. Many came who had not attended previously. Some regulars were absent but we reached out to them, striving to remain connected. Our M&O Committee worked actively to maintain contact in the meeting. We sense our spiritual condition has strengthened and we respond to one another's spiritual needs more readily. Our more experienced members have been a valuable resource. Many joined "Faithfulness Groups," a sign of spiritual hunger among us and also of strength. It has been a long solitude, but gentleness and tenacity sustain us. Do we fear change—or not changing?

Meetings for Worship:

What is the quality of our shared silence in worship? Of our spoken ministry?

Many, though not all, have found good, grounded worship in the Zoom meeting. All seem eager, though, to return to in-person meetings. We have felt gathered in both worship and business meetings. Spoken ministry is strong though rare—for some, the technology is a constraint. When offered, though, words of ministry create connection in the face of our physical separation. Some have found that spiritual preparation in advance has deepened their experience of gathering. One Friend at a distance, has felt love flowing through this medium and senses herself among us in these times.

Meetings for Business:

Are our meetings for business held in good order and in a loving spirit? Are they well attended? Do we share well in the search for unity and in decision making? Are we faithful in carrying out decisions of action?

We are working to follow good order, though our human failings sometimes appear. Attendance has been high at both regular and called meetings for business. In some ways we have become more careful and prepared in our process, and many contributions seem to come from a deep place. We have grown better at talking to each other and our business meetings have benefitted from this. Our clerking, including self-clerking, has shaped increasing good order in our sessions. There seems less spirit of contention in our business meetings, and we are freer to address issues directly and to listen deeply.

Committees and Meeting practice:

Do our committees function to serve the meeting well? Do they nurture their members? Does religious education enrich our meeting? Do we extend pastoral care to those in our meeting who are in need during this difficult time?

Committee work is difficult on Zoom yet we have become more aware of the fragility of community during Covid, and feel an increased desire to meet and work together, to find meaning through sharing tasks in community. We need to develop clarity on what sorts

of actions our committees can undertake independently. Our Building and Grounds committee has been especially active. One Friend who has worshiped widely finds our religious education program especially strong and rich; he noted that if we could be as active in other areas of witness this would be a strength. Another Friend observed that these sessions are carried out with sensitivity and mutual respect. Our Faithfulness Groups include many in meeting and are important opportunities for spiritual nurture and connection. Pastoral care has continued during this period through the attention of Ministry and Oversight. For one Friend who experienced serious health difficulties during this year, we are a loving family in a time of many needs.

Witness:

How do our lives speak? Does the meeting offer corporate witness to the community? How do members support one another in individual witness?

Our lives speak through peaceful interaction and gentle advocacy. While not many of us attend the peace vigil, some are a regular presence there. The memorial for the unsheltered person who died on our porch, and our work with organizations serving the unsheltered, have been important opportunities for corporate witness. Our public activity has been difficult during this time of Covid, but some of us joined with a neighboring faith community to participate in a “run for food” fund raiser for a local shelter project. Our liaisons faithfully encourage and inform us. The presence of our meetinghouse is itself a corporate witness, announcing that Quakers are alive and active in this town. In Faithfulness Groups, we share our efforts to bear witness, and have found guidance and support from others in these sessions.

Living more faithfully:

What is needed to strengthen the spiritual life of our meeting and its witness to the world?

We have become more aware this year of the importance of listening to one another and respecting difference. There is a great deal of dedication to strengthening spiritual life and witness in our meeting. High participation in the Faithfulness Groups is one sign of this. One area to which we have been called is aid to unsheltered people, and we have offered use of our buildings for shelter programs. One newcomer noted she feels the strength of the spiritual life of this meeting. We have come to realize our separateness can be held more lightly, and our togetherness embraced. Yet we miss children and more young people. We have faced struggles in the past--they are not forgotten-- but we are growing. Like a photo in the developing tank, the vision of our meeting is becoming evident, though not yet fully clear.

In our monthly singing circle by Zoom, each sings alone but is able to hear others. We carry food to the homeless shelter but cannot serve them in person. In Zoom worship, we are at a distance but see one another's living spaces before us. We are separate but together in many ways, and even in our times of sensed separation, we hold to this awareness. We are a resilient community, returning even through difficulties to be and act together.