

Morningside Monthly Meeting 2017 State of the Meeting Report

On December 17, 2017, Morningside Monthly Meeting gathered to discern the spiritual state of the meeting and to meditate on the past year.

One participant spoke of Meeting as a large rough rock that provides handholds to the larger meeting without requiring the inclusion in all parts. By not smoothing over the roughness, we allow individuals to give what they can give, even if they can't come to Meeting for Worship. Meeting is not "just Sunday," for there are so many ways to be part of Meeting, including "Bible study and its good wanderings," occasions of sharing, such as one member's art on the Psalms; the small group ARCH Meetings that "help build community," support and clearness committees, and spiritual nurture groups. There are so many ways to be part of Meeting and we need to let people who visit know of the many opportunities to get to know each other.

The fall and spring retreats were cited as important events by several people, and were appreciated for their communal nature where the "Spirit was present throughout the day." That communal nature was evident throughout the year, as individuals contributed their time and energy to Meeting. One person recognized the support of Meeting in preparation for the retreats; another spoke of how, unbidden, Friends took it upon themselves to do tasks large and small. "It is in the sharing of tasks that we witness the miracle of the loaves and fishes."

The many ways that keep people attached to Meeting are possible because of the spiritual core of Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business. In order to maintain the quality of worship and increase the number of people who remain for Business Meeting, Morningside has changed the flow of meetings, minimizing announcements and refreshment time. We begin and finish earlier, and the timing has increased participation. We recognize that we are all ministers and that anyone is able to call for a moment of silence. During a contentious meeting, one member reminded us that "We have all fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Concerns were expressed in how to maintain Afterwords as a solemn time. Although Meeting spoke fondly of watching and recording the growth of new children in the community and the joy in seeing little children entering at the end of Worship, concern was expressed that their presence might make the space feel less safe for attenders who need to share difficult things.

Inclusion into a safe space is an important concern of Meeting, which continues to express pride and joy in participating in Support and Clearness committees for Morningsiders in distress. One person questioned whether we communicate our care as individuals as a community, and queried, "Are we building the kinds of relationships that enable people to know when people need help and feel that they can ask for it?" One person responded that we need to learn to ask for help when we need it. Another added that as we are all ministers and all partake in different parts of Meeting, we should respond to the needs of the participants of our specific groups and communicate that to the larger meeting.

The conversation on inclusion extended to new people attending Meeting. "How can we better welcome people who drop in?" Suggestions included asking new people to help out with the immediate tasks of preparing for Meeting and refreshments, restoring the Welcoming Sign at the front desk, and inviting rather than requiring guests to introduce themselves after Meeting.

Inclusion requires an awareness of the language that we use, even if it has a long Quaker pedigree. One person expressed concern with the usage of "darkness" and "light" and its racial overtones. This is especially apt, for this year our retreat was on Deep Listening about Racism. One Friend

recommended that rather than the light vs. dark image, we consider an openness and expansion, vs. fear and contraction image. When the meeting is open to Spirit, it is capable of change, but when it contracts in fear, it can only seek to hold on to what it has always had. Further changes in the structure of Business and the ability to change traditions, such as the yearly “cookie swap,” are indications that the Meeting has been open to the Spirit this year. In the future we must continue to evaluate the various activities of the Meeting to see how they are working.

We continue to experience the necessary change of transitioning from older Friends. Although we have had losses, deaths, people moving away, we haven’t fallen apart. Our loss of longtime member Vince Buscemi was great, but his memorial meeting was a wonderful moment of humor and treasuring. We grieve but we also look forward, questioning how we can encourage children to come to Meeting when they are older. We remain an integral part of Quarterly Meeting and were pleased to receive recognition for our hospitality at NYQM. Although Peace & Social Concerns has not met as frequently as in previous years, the letter campaign “Write for Rights” for Amnesty International allowed Morningside to learn about problems in the world and the need for greater hospitality in the future. We use M&C to work on conflicts, although there are not really very many. We recognize the discipline of not gossiping, especially for revenge, as M&C helps us all grow in the spirit.

One Friend seemed to sum up future concerns, asking, “How do we maintain the content in the communication channels we have?” How do we communicate with members and attenders in crisis; how do we communicate with others outside of Meeting; what is the nature of the language we use and how is it heard by others This is and will always remain a challenge, for we are one family even when we don’t always like every family member. This year, in the current social political economic environment, we prayerfully ask “How does Morningside Monthly Meeting keep the channels of Love and Truth alive?”

In Friendship,

Pamela Wood
Clerk, Morningside Monthly Meeting