

State of the Meeting 2021.

The Covid 19 Pandemic over the past calendar year has brought Bloomington Normal Friends Meeting both great difficulty and some surprise advantages. We have had to adjust, and adjust we have. Since March 2020, we have met weekly on Zoom. Members have met from their own homes. This has resulted in both negative and positive outcomes.

On the down side, we miss the physical presence of other Quakers and the informal interactions that occur before and after meeting. We have had to learn new technology and norms to make meeting happen. The comfort and ability to do that varies among members. Meeting on Zoom can be awkward and cumbersome in some ways- fumbling with the mute/unmute and a very different overall feel in our worship. For some, the discomfort with Zoom has prevented attendance altogether.

Our women's group, Meeting for Eating, has not met and has been sorely missed. The one exception was when Beth Schobernd Carpenter hosted an outdoor gathering for Barbara Burke who was moving to North Carolina. Everyone brought their own food, and seats were in a circle at least six feet apart.

One unexpected positive thing that has happened is that Quakers from meetings in other parts of the country have been able to join us. For example we were visited via Zoom by the new ILYM Field Secretary Brad Laird. Steve Tamari from St.Louis joined us several times. In addition, Barbara Burke, who left Illinois last summer to move to North Carolina, has been able to continue meeting with us. Weekly attendance has been higher than in-person, possibly because of the convenience being able to meet without having to leave home.

Children have joined us several times. Although we haven't managed First Day School or connected with other meetings who offered help, there has been some meaningful intergenerational contact. We held some family events on Zoom that have included children. We had our usual August picnic where we all ate simultaneously with word games to follow. Later in the year, Fariba Murray led a lively on-line Bingo game that lasted well past our youngest participant's bedtime. At Christmastime, we had a Christmas music "talent show" where several members showed off their musical skills. Fun was had by all... but we discovered that singing along unmuted doesn't really work.

Chris Jocius of the Urbana Meeting generously donated his Quaker library and a bookcase to our meeting. As soon as we can meet in person, they will be stored at Normandy Village. We look forward to using them for enhancing spiritual quests and learning more about Quaker history. We are grateful for this gift and recognize the generosity and spiritual depth of the original owner.

Our times bring much concern about racial justice. Over the summer, many of us ventured out to attend rallies and protests in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. During the fall and winter months, our members reflected deeply on the topic of racism and racial justice

through on-line discussions of two books: White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo and How to be an Antiracist by Ibram Kendi. The discussion sessions were led by Heather Evert, Leader of Adult Education. Through these books, and thanks to Heather's guidance, we worked together to take an honest look at our own racial biases and how we can shift our thinking to move from racism to anti-racism.

For a second year in a row, B-N Friends Meeting wanted to focus on the needs of a family in need at Christmas time. We raised over \$600 dollars for a family we have become aware of. Since shopping was difficult during the pandemic, we gave \$300 in cash to the family and bought clothing gift cards for the children. Because of ongoing hardship experienced by this family, some members have continued to assist this family.

Overall, we have gained strength and comfort from each other during this time of stress. Together, we adjusted to a new way of life in isolation. And in isolation, we have felt the loving presence of Friends from within our meeting and beyond.

Burlington Worship Group

2021 State of Society

The Burlington Worship Group is alive and well despite the challenges of Covid 19. From April 2020 we've met via the miracle of Zoom which allowed us to participate even when we were not at home! However, because of internet problems, two of our members decided to opt out of worship until we could meet in person again which we hope will be very soon.

Deborah C. Walz

Clear Creek Monthly Meeting

State of Society 2021

When Clear Creek met for meeting for worship with a concern for business on the third Sunday in March 2020, where we approved our last State of Society report, little did we know it would be over a year before many of us saw each other again. Our small but tightly knit community has suffered during this time, but persevered and in ways gotten stronger.

From mid-March until May, we did not meet. Given hardware limitations of many members, we could not meet via Zoom. Some of us participated in Zoom worship with other meetings, but most of us had no worship option. In May, we took advantage of the spacious meetinghouse and began holding in person worship there. While Putnam County at that point had very few cases of the virus, the surrounding counties fared much worse and those living elsewhere remained at home rather than risk carrying the virus to others. Our wonderful weekly potlucks morphed into brown bag lunches during which we were able to have our valued fellowship time. We found that with fewer people to share Dick Ashdown's ever-present contribution of Pringles, we gained weight. When the weather began to cool, we moved worship to Clear Creek House where social distancing is more difficult but we wear masks and sit as far apart as we are able.

We have attempted to have business meeting via Zoom, sometimes with more success than others. With only one computer for the five or six people on site, there are issues with the remote attenders not being able to hear the discussion. The months we are able to meet via Zoom, we are glad to see the faces of our otherwise absent members and we may continue to use Zoom for business meeting post-pandemic, thus allowing our snowbirds to attend in the winter months.

In October we were blessed with the arrival of the ILYM caretaker, Judy Reese, her dog Shakespeare, and her cat Angelou who now reside in Clear Creek House. She has quickly become an integral part of our meeting, although given the pandemic restrictions is having difficulty getting as acquainted in the wider community as she had hoped. Her only real interaction is with Clear Creek Friends on Sundays.

The past year has been hard for the spiritual well-being of the meeting. With fewer people present, there has been less vocal ministry. Those who have not been able to be present feel disconnected from Clear Creek and miss their meeting family. We have

missed those celebrations and occasions which normally bring more people to the grounds – our annual Easter lunch, Women’s Weekend, Yearly Meeting, our fall Homecoming – and look forward to a time when we will be able to have others with us on the grounds.

On the positive side, those of us who have been able to gather together since May feel like we have gotten to know each other better, as we still enjoy fellowship before and after worship. We are grateful for the technology that allows us to see the faces of those who are typically regular attenders as well as not-so-regular attenders who are able to join us from afar.

In spite of the pandemic, we have continued our Clear Creek ministry of picking up sticks on the grounds after every storm, as well as our attempts to convert the local raccoons to a less destructive lifestyle.

Most of us have now had our vaccinations so we hope that once we are all vaccinated and can move back to the more spacious meetinghouse, we can feel more comfortable meeting together in person.

Approved 3-21-2021

Saint Louis Monthly Meeting is using technology to keep our Meeting together in 2020. Though we grieve the loss of connection to Spirit we feel with gathering in person, we have been using technology to continue the types of activities that are meaningful to us like Sale for Service, The Retreat, Zoom coffee hour and adult education gatherings after worship, Talent and Sharing nights, etc. Friends have pulled together so much which has helped strengthen and deepen our worship.

Many Friends are refreshed and sustained by the Midweek Meeting. Those attending report it is smaller and feels more intimate. We plan to continue having the Midweek Meeting even after we are able to safely return to our Meetinghouse.

Ministry means what we offer to each other from our Spirit to another person's spirit. That might be the words that we speak in Meeting for Worship or it might be the depth of our silence. Connecting with each other through cards, emails, phone calls and texts are nourishing our ministry. Many Friends feel that the teaching of the Bible to the older children has been a valuable ministry. We have story hour with our younger children before worship to stay connected.

During the pandemic SLFM had three adults and three children joined as members.

Our Meeting has always been open to a diversity of messages. We have used workshops and introductory messages by our clerk to help Friends understand what vocal ministry is. Because of these things, we believe Friends feel safe to speak as they are led.

State of Society Report - DRAFT April 1st, 2021

Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting has faced major challenges this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we have not been able to hold Meeting for Worship in the meetinghouse for more than a year, we have found other ways to join together for worship and fellowship and to follow the leadings of the Spirit.

Since March 2020, our Meetings for Worship via Zoom have provided a reliable space for Friends to worship together and to feel a sense of connection. Friends have been able to join in worship without risking their health, including those who live in assisted living facilities and in other parts of the country. One Friend described the Zoom Meetings as a lifeline for her during the pandemic.

We have changed some of our usual practices during worship to accommodate the needs of Friends during this time when many have felt isolated. Silent worship is now thirty minutes instead of one hour. The period following worship, when we share announcements, joys, and concerns, is much longer than it was when we met in the meetinghouse. Our facilitator sets the tone with an unhurried pace, calling on one person at a time and inviting them to share as much or as little as they choose. Many Friends feel that they have grown closer to others in the meeting as a result of this extended sharing time.

Some Friends find that the thirty minutes given for silent worship does not provide enough time for them to center and attend to the Spirit Within. Spoken ministry seems to be less frequent. Others observe that the spirit of worship often

continues into our sharing time when Friends reflect on their personal experiences and spiritual insights. At one meeting, a Friend spoke out of the silence to the query, “How do I practice patience?” Others continued to speak on this theme during the sharing of joys and concerns.

Clearly, the Zoom meetings do not meet the needs or desires of every Friend. Some are not comfortable with the technology, and others don’t find the Zoom meetings conducive to worship. In the summer and fall of 2020, we provided the option of Meeting for Worship outdoors. Several Friends enjoyed sitting in silence among the lovely trees on the well-tended grounds of the meetinghouse and attending to the Spirit that is present in nature. We cherished seeing each other in person.

Our First Day School has met regularly each Sunday via Zoom. The virtual platform has presented new challenges for engaging our group of children, who range in age from four to thirteen. We are grateful that the group meets consistently and continues to explore our Quaker values.

During the pandemic, Friends have cared for one another in many ways. Several Friends organized our Wednesday Check-ins via Zoom, providing spiritual and emotional support during this time when many have felt isolated. Friends have assisted each other with their physical needs and lifted each other’s spirits through phone calls and safe in-person encounters.

During the past year, Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting has responded to the needs of others in our community, nation, and

world, chiefly spurred on by our very active Peace and Service Committee. Following the violent arrest of a local Black woman and the death of George Floyd, we approved a statement on police violence, which we sent to the mayors, police chiefs, and city council members of the twin cities. The statement was also published in the News-Gazette. We collected funds and twenty-four boxes of books for Books to Prisoners, a local organization which mails donated books to people who are incarcerated in our local jail and state prisons. We undertook a very successful fundraiser to support local immigrants and low-income residents. This year we are additionally supporting two small agencies in Central America with close, long-standing ties to our Meeting, and we held a talent show via Zoom. Inspired by Northside Friends Meeting, we wrote a letter to our local newspaper, inviting all to join us in mourning the world's losses due to the pandemic by lighting a candle and holding a moment of silence at sundown on Memorial Day 2020.