

Friends Meeting Of Austin  
State Of The Meeting Report 2023-2024  
March 3, 2024

The following is the State of the Meeting report from Friends Meeting of Austin to be submitted at the South Central Yearly Meeting 2024 annual sessions. Answers to the queries are based on forums held on February 4, 2024, and February 25, 2024

### ***Worship:***

In our first forum considering the state of Friends Meeting of Austin, several friends noted that we are blessed with a growing community. New people come to Meeting regularly and some have become consistent attenders. We typically have 50 people participating in Meeting for Worship. We are pleased that these visitors often linger and talk after Meeting. We feel that we are an inviting community.

Having so many new people is both a blessing and a challenge. Friends noted that it takes a while for people to understand this form of worship. Fortunately, new and old people are learning from Quakerism 101 and using the library.

Friends noted that we are having more vocal ministry during Worship. Sometimes we get news of the day or psychological cries for help or long polemics. While we have put out some pamphlets and books about verbal ministry to help guide people, we need to continuously educate about vocal ministry and help people understand what ministry is about. The silence in community is important and needed – it feeds our souls.

The spirit seems present within us.

### ***Meeting Community:***

In responding to queries on community, Friends noted our monthly simple meals, each of which is focused on a specific cause. These meals help FMA to care for each other and raise money for important community causes.

FMA has expanded our engagement and consideration of our neighborhood and those who live there including several unhoused attenders. We also participate with other religious groups such as hosting the Red Bench interfaith dialogue sponsored by Interfaith Action of Central Texas.

We are now hosting the Martin Luther King Neighborhood Association (MLKNA) meeting in our space; this brings us into the life of the neighborhood in which we worship. We are also coalition members in Austin Sanctuary Network. We provide event space without charge for groups when we are members as a Meeting. We provide increased availability to other groups including schools and religious groups.

Our First Day School is bringing much joy to our Meeting. We have a very young First Day School and it is a solid, regular group. The First Day School kids enjoy the ritual of reporting on their work at the rise of Meeting. We are raising Quakers.

The ATX Free Fridge meal preparation has become an important part of our community. ATX Free Fridge Project exists to combat food insecurity and food waste in Austin through 24/7 freely available fridges in neighborhoods throughout the city. Many of the monthly food preparation events hosted by the Meeting are attended by children. It is good to see young families involved in the Meeting.

FMA continues an active death row ministry with multiple members visiting and/or corresponding with those incarnated there. Our death row ministry has a real effect on our spiritual life.

Our Care & Counsel committee provides ongoing support groups which care for several members and attenders. Our Benevolence fund enables us to help Friends in financial difficulties.

FMA members and attenders are very supportive of other Friend/Friends' needs. Some Friends provide rides for other Friends who need them.

We are happy that we have two weddings coming up in March, these are a spark of life and growth for the Meeting.

The Nominating committee has been doing good work.

## ***Religious Education:***

Friends responding to queries about religious education shared that the Adult Religious Education (ARE) committee holds 3-4 forums per month. Spiritual journey forums have been very valuable and are something we should do more of.

ARE also holds one or two Quakerism 101 classes per year. Each class consists of 6 sessions with each session devoted to a specific topic. A Friend remarked that Quakerism 101 is an excellent learning experience. We discovered this year that it works to hold Quakerism 101 at 9 am.

A Friend noted that one of the best ways to learn about Quakerism is to teach First Day School. Another Friend noted that religious education can also come to us in spontaneous conversation.

While participation in organizations with other Friends is a great way to learn, our Meeting tends to be self-sufficient. In 2023 six Friends from our Meeting went to FGC Gathering.

It would be great to get Worship & Ministry, Adult Religious Education and First Day School together on the topic of what people should know to be a Quaker.

There is a lot of confusion on the relationship between Quakerism and Christianity. We should not shy away from discussing that. Some of us feel very informed by other religious traditions.

## ***Decision Making:***

Speaking about decision making in our second forum, one new attender said, I understand we are not seeking majority rule, but all agreeing. We call that the sense of the Meeting. We do well at it. Asking the anti-racism query helps at business Meeting. We should recommend and encourage other Meetings to use it.

A recent example of using Quaker practice related to deciding whether to have a security system. Three Committees worked on it and then brought a proposal to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. We were able to come to a sense of the meeting that followed our testimonies deciding a security system would bring

the police into the situation which could be detrimental to the perpetrator because they might end up incarcerated. Our clerking is good.

I wish more people attended business Meeting. It is good to see some newer people are attending.

Having a new recording clerk (me) for the first time in maybe 15 years is a learning experience. I am grateful.

One challenge to Quaker good order occurs when we communicate by using email threads and when ad-hoc and long-standing groups gather rather than taking the issue to Meeting for Worship With Attention to Business. These practices make spirit led discussion harder to channel in Quaker practice. We need to be more consistent in using Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business (MWAB) when we have serious decisions to make.

A Friend was gratified with how we are dealing with issues including hiring a consultant, Windy Cooler, when we were not resolving them on our own.

There are times when an issue has no practical and definite answer, then we do not speak with one voice.

### ***Membership Changes:***

We have grown. We have new People, new families with children. Many more people are taking part in Worship and community. This has a good effect on worship. And we have lost people who moved away, such as Ted and Mary Ellen.

Nominating committee has struggled since Covid-19. They got behind on recruiting and filing committees. However, we now have outreach and invitations to consider being on committees in announcements. Recently we have had first and second readings for new committee members every month in MWAB.

A Friend was asked in person to join a committee which gave them permission. That Friend recommends explicit recruitment.

Another Friend was asked to serve on Nominating Committee when they were quite new in Meeting. While feeling unsure, it proved a good way to know other people in Meeting.

A Friend shared that for the past 20 years they have been a member or clerk of Adult Religious Education and/or Worship and Ministry committees. Both have specific Sunday morning roles. They would like to be able to attend as just a member of the worshipping community. For committees to function in health, new membership is important. Each of the two, ARE and W&M, currently has 3 members. This Friend feels that they cannot resign or lay down memberships without burdening the other two.

The topic of remote membership was discussed. One Friend stated that they live 6 hours away and participate on Zoom. Can they become a member? They have been able to participate since Covid made remote attendance possible.

One Friend spoke in favor of remote membership and finds it consistent with what membership means. Membership is changing in the Religious Society of Friends. Some are directly members of Yearly Meetings. Others are uncomfortable considering membership of a Meeting, whether monthly or yearly. Is there an impediment to accepting a member who lives six hours away? We have members who move and remain members. Membership of anyone who worships with us seems appropriate. Remote attenders are encouraged to reach out to the Clerk of Care and Counsel if you are interested in membership.

A Friend noted that some Quaker organizations have restricted participation to members. For example, a long time attender volunteered to review books for a Quaker publication— and was told they were not eligible.

**New Members:** We are pleased to have two new members join during the past year: Kurt Cadena-Mitchell and Irene Muzet.

**Transfers of membership:** Ted Dix and Mary Ellen Issacs who have moved to Evanston Illinois;

**Deaths:** Sarah Bishop Merrill and Thomas Bauer

**Births:** Fritz Cummins 4/1/2023 and Ellis Smith 2/24/2024