

Reno Friends State of the Meeting Report for 2009

2009 started off well as we welcomed several new members and a clearness committee was formed for someone who would soon become another new member. Nominating committee had, perhaps, more than the usual difficulties filling posts within the Meeting, especially the clerk role, yet creative approaches such as decoupling 'worship clerks' and 'business meeting clerks' allowed us to go forward. Some people stepped into several new posts at once and that even allowed us to revive Ministry and Peace and Social Committees, which we had laid down in previous years.

As the year wore on, we were tested and found wanting. Given the economic downturn, financial contributions decreased, and we were anxious about meeting our annual budget. Under this moderate pressure, the weaknesses of our Meeting started to show. A long series of suspicions, accusations, misunderstandings and miscommunications began to undermine our relationships with each other as we tried to make important decisions about the direction of our budget, first day school, and financial giving protocols. Prolific e-mailing seemed to exacerbate our communication difficulties. These problems resulted eventually in resignation letters from three Friends in year 2010, which we are still sitting with.

In hindsight, the weakness was there at the beginning of the year, hinted at by the struggle to find enough peoplepower to cover clerkship and other duties. We are not sure which comes first, a lack of spiritual strength or a lack of peoplepower and time and energy but we seem to lack in all. We are tired.

Amongst this turmoil, the subject of the homeless came up at almost every business meeting because the homeless were camping on our property. In the past, one member had taken a homeless person into his own home but paid dearly for it in terms of peace of mind, money and health so we knew we had to be practical and careful. Over a period of many months and much pondering we came up with a way to discourage the homeless camping on our property. But some felt that perhaps God was sending us a message about being more involved in our neighborhood and community and with these people. We did not find a way to do this. Was God calling us to an outward focus, while we sent all our energy inwards?

Our ministry to each other in sickness and trouble and in death is sometimes beautiful and of great comfort, but sometimes people fall through the cracks. Two deaths that occurred this past year seem to exemplify this.

We note amongst ourselves a wide variation in beliefs, from traditional Christianity to atheism. We are well-intentioned and want to be inclusive and are careful about how we speak of our experiences. The result may be that we do not have a common language for describing leadings or experiences of thanksgiving for the Light Within. We tend to retreat into a secular style of worship and business, rather than encouraging a deeper spiritual engagement and living out of our varied traditions. Several have felt that our Meeting does not usually expect or look for the Holy Spirit to be working in, through and among us. And though we strive to be inclusive sometimes Reno Friends can be surprisingly stubborn and opinionated and not as tolerant as we would like to suppose.

Yet it has not been an empty year. We have challenged ourselves in listening meetings about war tax resistance and earth care and religious education. We have persisted. We have tried doing things in new ways, even at a price. We have experimented. We have strengthened ties to Quarterly and Yearly Meeting. We have reached out and supported each other in community, even though there are tensions. People step forward to take on undone tasks. We have moments of Light and Clarity at our Worship Meeting and at other times too. We still have a sense of humor and a will to be better. We are humbled and broken by this difficult year. Yet we have hope that our brokenness might be preparation of the ground for the Seed to take root and grow.