

Heartland Friends Meeting
State of Society Fifth Month, 2021

What is the ground and foundation of the gathered meeting? In the last analysis, it is, I am convinced, the Real Presence of God. Thomas R. Kelly, 1940

The year 2020 brought opportunities to expand our experience of the “gathered meeting” as we journeyed with and walked through the global pandemic. It would be easy to focus on the challenges that COVID-19 wrought. It would also be easy to gloss over the struggles and only share the positives. Focusing on one would only provide a partial view of our spiritual condition at Heartland Friends Meeting.

The year started much like any other year with an approved budget, people willing to serve on committees and take on leadership roles and responsibilities. Then Covid arrived, then it became serious, and was shortly followed by numerous weeks in lockdown. During the lockdown some of us continued to worship each Sunday at 11:00 am in our individual homes. At the close of meeting we would text one another with a love heart, praying hands or a smiling emoji. It was heartwarming and definitely brought a piece of joy for those participating.

When the restrictions started to lessen we began what we called “a scattered gathered meeting for worship” inviting people to worship anywhere in our building or on our grounds. Some of us worshipped inside. Others worshipped outside most of the year appreciating the sights and sounds of God's creation while tuning out the highway noise. A few did a combination of inside and outside worshipping. At the rise of meeting we would often share time together visiting outside. The beauty was how our small diverse community embraced an expanded vision of the “gathered meeting”, supporting people to come and worship wherever they felt most comfortable, even when it meant some were staying home.

In the fall we reconciled ourselves that Candlelight service on Christmas Eve probably wasn't going to happen. We have a tradition of gathering in early December to decorate the meetinghouse and share a simple meal. It is a fun evening with members, family and friends helping each other decorate. Then on Christmas Eve our building is aglow with candles everywhere and we worship together. A special time that we weren't ready to completely give up even during a pandemic.

A new plan was hatched and with the help of several we gathered for Christmas Eve. The Ternes' family provided leadership for the evening. Building and Grounds Committee decorated the back balcony with lights, greenery, and a wreath. With straw bales, patio heaters and scattered luminaries, twenty-six of us joined together to silently

worship, hear the Christmas story and sing a couple of Christmas hymns together. A few stayed in their cars for a 'drive-in' experience. It was joyful. It was a simple event that demonstrated our hope and our faithfulness in the midst of challenge and isolation. Some have expressed a desire to do it again in the future.

Trying to hold onto a sense of community during a pandemic has not been easy. We have not had education hour, meeting for healing, or Wednesday evening worship in over a year. The loss of those opportunities to share our lives, our thoughts, and simply be together is acutely felt. However, during this very difficult year we are grateful that our meetinghouse and outdoor meditation circle provided Wichita Friends School children with large, peaceful places for their weekly worship and outdoor learning. Another positive was seeing our grounds used during the week by friends and neighbors walking and playing in a safe space during our spring 2020 lock-down. Now that most of us are fully vaccinated, we are hopeful that numerous Heartland activities will be returning later this year and we will again be united with everyone connected with Heartland.

Even during this time of increased isolation we have enjoyed a few first time visitors and we have welcomed two new adult members to Heartland. We have also had the joy that comes with welcoming a new associate member. A new baby is life-giving.

As a meeting we have retained our commitment to be faithful and continue to conduct our business affairs and community care, although our processes have been temporarily altered. When needed, leadership has been present. Activities have been reduced, yet new discoveries and a deepening of the Spirit continues.

Reading Psalm 46:10 'Be still, and know that I am God', we are reminded to rest in God, and know that we are not in charge.

On behalf of Heartland Friends Meeting
Angela Young, presiding clerk