

## Westport Friends Meeting State of Society 2024

In recent years, Westport Monthly Meeting has been blessed by a number of new members and attenders that have brought new voices, perspectives, and extra hands to the work and life of the Meeting. These new voices deepen our experience as a faith community. Friends speak to the care and comfort that we give each other that makes us feel nurtured and held up at all levels; interpersonally, spiritually, and as seekers. Our strength is being tender to people and fostering a sense of belonging in our Meeting. We are open to whatever a person may need and find ways to take care of each other. We are grateful for our connection and the comfort and peace that it brings to our community.

We still seek closer connection with families in the hope that they may be present at worship more often. Our Fun for Everyone committee plans intergenerational events and activities that have been successful in maintaining connection to several families. In addition, we are prepared to provide childcare as needed with plans for offering First Day School once a month in order to be as welcoming and supportive as possible of families that attend worship.

We have trust that the work of our committees is grounded in the Spirit and Friends testimonies. We are especially grateful for the Peace & Social Justice work and the Meeting's ongoing discernment on faithfully witnessing for peace and racial justice.

We are a spiritually diverse community that encompasses a range of experiences and perspectives. There are some who embrace the religious structure and foundation of Friends, others who find freedom from their past experiences with more formal and hierarchical denominations, and still others who may best describe themselves as agnostic, without deity attachments. Together we experience the joy in being with the Spirit as we understand it. Some may describe our experience together as worship and others as meditation, but we intersect somewhere in the gentleness of this Meeting, trusting in each other as Seekers.

We affirm our deep gratitude for the gift of our unprogrammed worship that provides the spaciousness in its silence to listen for that still, small voice within each of us as we experience it. We are grateful that our worshiping community can hold the silence and wait upon the presence of God to rise up among us. For some of us the silence is extremely powerful while we are also aware that the silence can be challenging to those who are new to our form of worship. How we can support those who may find it difficult to settle into silent worship?

While we value the gathered silence, we also feel our worship can be deepened by more vocal ministry. We find that we learn and are inspired by vocal ministry in worship. Silence and vocal ministry in worship are connected. The silence is like the soil in the garden from which our vocal ministry grows.

Many of us yearn for the experience of being connected in a covered meeting. We are open and yearn for what others in our faith community can teach us. As seekers, we have an opportunity to be present to the Light in each other and to walk each other "home" to our spiritual center. How can we then nurture more vocal ministry, including singing as a form of vocal ministry, to spring forth from the Spirit that moves within us? How can the Meeting nurture our community to be open to the movements of the spirit and be faithful to them in worship and in our daily lives?

We find joy in being with each other in spirit as Seekers. We feel the gentleness of the spirit at work in our life. As one Friend offered, Meeting is like the waves hitting and washing over the rocks, gradually and gently wearing down the hardness of the world; gently teaching us, smoothing us out.

Approved, April 21, 2024