

## **Live Oak Friends Meeting, Houston, Texas, built on Atakapa and Akokisa land 2022 State of the Meeting Report**

2022 was a year of returning, renewing, releasing and receiving, to quote the words on the logo for our annual retreat. We returned to enjoying fellowship over coffee after Meeting for Worship and monthly potlucks on the new Little House porch. We discovered that it was cool enough in the summer heat and warm enough in the winter cold for enjoyable gatherings where we get to know each other better. We welcomed a marriage under the care of the Meeting, two new members, and a number of new attenders who enthusiastically joined Sunday morning Meetings for Worship, the annual retreat in October, two Friendly Eights groups and several committees. There was a loss of a long-time active member and a long-time active attender, as well as two others whose lives touched the meeting at times.

Spiritual deepening was an emphasis this past year through Faithfulness Groups, attendance at a week-long spiritual deepening workshop at FGC for four members of Worship and Ministry, and the fall LOFM retreat, Tapping into Spirit: Transforming Stress to Manage Chaos. The wisdom of the outside presenter, Ange Finn, on Tapping, or Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and our own experts on Embodied Peacemaking and Alexander Technique gave us useful embodied tools to use as we move forward on our spiritual journeys. EFT connects mind and body through

tapping specific acupressure points while focusing on a concern, Alexander Technique focuses on posture and balance while moving, and Embodied Peacemaking connects Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) principles with self-regulation of body tension and movement.

Attendance at our three weekly Meetings for Worship and the Spring Quakers Worship Group has been stable or growing as new people find their way to us. Early Worship remains in person only, the others have hybrid options. Our monthly online Meeting for Worship with Attention to Healing has attracted attendance from as far away as California and is planning to invite attendance from across the Yearly Meeting.

Weekly adult religious education continues with online and in person attendance averaging in the teens. It has also contributed to spiritual deepening through a wide range of outside presenters and LOFM members on topics ranging from creation care to Quaker process to social justice with time for queries to direct us deeper into our own spiritual yearnings.

There was a lot of interest in Quakerism 101 (Q101) with two classes, the spring one entirely online with three attending from remote locations including Gadsden, Alabama, and Hill Country, Texas. The fall class was in person with eight participants. There is a waiting list with 6 people.

We did not forget the need for tangible physical care within and without the Meeting, including collecting donations to fully pay for surgery to repair a knee injury for a member's service dog as well as providing support to other members in completing needed activities. Four vaccine clinics were held at LOFM this year before Harris County Public Health funding for external clinics was used up.

The children's program went from 2nd and 4th Sunday programs to weekly programs in October with three regularly attending families in two age groups, early and later elementary. The children's garden was rebuilt and replanted in a new location in the spring and carefully tended and recently planted with new seeds for

a winter vegetable garden. After two years of not joining Meeting for Worship for the first 20 minutes, the first series of fall classes focused on what we do in Meeting for Worship using resources from the Quaker Religious Education Collaborative (QREC) website. The meeting has enjoyed having the children come in during introductions to share what they have been doing.

For three days in March, we hosted students from the Arthur Morgan School, a Quaker middle school in Burnsville NC on their annual cross country field trip. This group's focus was exploring trash and recycling. Their service project for us was sealing the railings on the Little House porch. We shared our first potluck since the pandemic with them, which inspired us to think through how to resume our regular monthly potlucks in a safe way.

Our two outreach barter fairs, Earth Day and Buy Nothing Day were well attended and we again enjoyed Jim Presley's original blues and Native American music. The children's program and their adult helpers built a new corn hole game. Additional connections with other Houston organizations like the Labyrinth Society helped to enrich the day. The annual Candlelighting in December with caroling beforehand was well attended by more than 35 people, including many of our new attenders. We continue to host outside groups including a girl scout troop, a home-schooling group and twelve step groups in the Little House and our grounds continue to be a green playground for local families with children and dogs.

Committee meetings, hybrid Meeting for Worship and adult First Day School continued with improved audio and video components. Thanks to the skills of various members, we have created our own friendshouston.org website and are making use of our Google Workspace to facilitate committee work and for safe document storage.

Property Committee facilitated planting and tending a Possumhaw Holly, a red oak, a red maple, and a Texas Sage hedge on 25th Street to mark that boundary with shelter and nourishment for wildlife. All are thriving in spite of an exceptionally dry hot summer except the red maple which was damaged by a lawn mower. Weekly work mornings continue, and the skill of the participants maintain and improve the

buildings. Outside rentals for weddings, memorial services, concerts and other community events have increased, although not yet to pre pandemic levels. Weekly Skyspace openings, weather permitting, continue to attract a varying number of people.

The Meeting's finances remain in a good state thanks to the care and generosity of F/friends and the mindful attention of the Finance Committee. Revenue from building rentals is increasing since we returned to the meeting house but are not yet as high as in the past. We will conclude the year making our regular contributions to Quaker and non-Quaker social justice organizations.

A worship sharing on queries on worship, community, religious education and living the testimonies brought out some concerns: how to more consistently experience beloved community and gathered meetings, how to better share how members and attenders are following their leadings on social justice issues and inspire others to do likewise, and how to share spiritual formation opportunities more broadly with seekers coming through our doors.