

Bridge City Friends Meeting State of the Society - March 2007

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Bridge City is no longer a new meeting. Our strengths and challenges are no longer those of a community establishing itself. Now our joys and our concerns are those of a meeting that is growing, developing and changing. The original group who founded the Bridge City Worship Group no longer makes up the majority of those who are members and attenders. This fact leads us to several observations.

There are no longer as many gatherings outside of Meeting for Worship and there are fewer all meeting social opportunities where new people can become known and to get to know others in the meeting. The meeting community has grown so that many of our homes are no longer large enough to host meeting events. As a result there is a tendency to have sub groups meet rather than the entire community. Two spiritual support groups are meeting on a regular basis. At the same time the meeting has successfully implemented a regular adult educational program. Like other events our annual camping trip is feeling growing pains, we no longer can use regular campsites, but need to plan ahead and get group facilities to accommodate the larger group. Having a "group meeting area" for this 3 day event has become an important factor in planning. Multnomah meeting is no longer in a parental role, rather we are siblings, who often share and work together on joint committees including, planning Quarterly Meeting, the Wednesday evening adult education program. We continue to open our Sunday mornings with singing as we settle into worship.

We are in our second long term meeting location and this year we have been reminded of the limitations of renting space. The space at the Portland French School works well for us most of the time, but we have been frustrated when the furnace was broken, and challenged that our priority for wheel chair access, is not being a priority for the school.

The calling to service in the meeting often challenges both nominating committee and members and attenders, as we all struggle with finding the time and energy for spiritual development through participation in the life of the meeting while maintaining ourselves and our families. Participation by nearly all of us is necessary to keep our committee rosters full. Since many of the "old timers" serve at the Quarterly, Yearly Meeting level, and beyond this leaves a bigger void to fill at the local level. We have yet to fully understand and utilize the gifts and potentialities of those who are new to the meeting. Our response to members and attenders in need of support has been both heroic and, in retrospect, inadequate for these same reason.

The children's program is smaller than at the beginning, as that generation of children has largely grown up and left home. Rather than eight to ten children per week, we now see three or four, and sometimes fewer. Yet the simplicity of the structure of the program, which calls upon members and attenders to participate regularly with the children, is popular and is seen as a strength.

Friends believe that our vocal ministry is strong, and there is appreciation of the variety of spiritual approaches and for the acceptance of this diversity. There is a comfort in the silence, at the same time, and there is not the feeling that ministry is forced to avoid the silence. Given this general satisfaction with vocal ministry, Friends are thankful that, because we live within easy reach of another meeting, a Friend who needed a different worship experience was able to find it close by.

In a world in which we often feel overwhelmed and inadequate to make a meaningful contribution, our peace and social concerns committee is narrowing our focus and organizing concrete opportunities for us to participate in specific projects that enable us to respond to our call to improve our own condition by improving the condition of the world in which we live.

Bridge City Friends Meeting is no longer a new meeting. We are a strong, vibrant, and changing faith community. The new members of the community create opportunities for change, sometimes at a rate that feels a bit overwhelming. Despite the challenges and growing pains we experience, we continue to feel that we are part of God's blessed community and that we are called to go forth and do good.

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