

Visalia Friends Meeting 2017 State of the Meeting Report (submitted May 2018)

Three queries were distributed to Friends. Summaries of about a dozen responses are collected below. Friends responding included children and adults, members and attenders, new Friends and seasoned ones.

#1 “Why do I come to Meeting?”

Friends come to Meeting for the community they find. In responding to the query, “Why?” responses repeatedly identified the love, friendship, connection and laughter they share with each other. We are a strong community of people who care deeply for each other. Newer visitors were drawn in by their desire to find like-minded people, or as one person put it, “Community of spirits in an otherwise spirit-demeaning region.” Our community is a beacon of love, peace and progressive values amid a conservative landscape rife with tension and anger. Our beautiful Meetinghouse is enough to bring some people back week after week. Another simply said, “It’s necessary.”

Friends cited their reliance on the weekly respite of silence, centering down, seeking spiritual guidance and to “silence the noise of the world” in a peaceful, natural setting. Our Meeting is a shared home and a place of comfort.

#2 “What spiritual/religious strengths do I gain from Meeting?”

Again, Friends responded to their love for each other and the benefits of community. One Friend said, “[I’m] not a saint or even a very good Quaker, but I think my behavior has been influenced by others in the meeting in many ways from prison visitation to a better concept of integrity and service to others.” Several people mentioned being influenced to lead better lives by the examples they see in Friends. We learn faith through acceptance of persons with whom we disagree, “with a common nonviolent commitment.”

Friends find comfort in the silence, and in returning each week to refresh the spirit, close the week behind and begin the week ahead. Our Meeting is, as one Friend put it, “a touchstone for spiritual growth.”

#3 “How can I better serve the Meeting? -or- How can the Meeting serve me better? ”

Friends expressed that the Meeting does meet their needs, even as they shared ideas for how to become an even deeper community. There is a desire for more frequent vocal ministry, both as an opportunity to listen deeply to the truth that others speak, and as an example to develop one’s own confidence to share vocal ministry. Another Friend encouraged us to con-

sider the effects of speaking worriedly about our “shrinking” numbers, because “we are growing in diversity. Giving voice to a negative can empower it.”

Some Friends offered that they could better serve the Meeting by contributing more of their time or financial resources, but most seemed satisfied with their personal relationship with the Meeting. Showing up for work days and for business meeting were mentioned as other ways Friends could contribute to the health of our community.

And in closing, one Friend offered the following:

“Love you all. You are the finest people I have ever met.”

Visalia Friends Meeting
Visalia, California
May, 2018

One word:

Community

Peace. Sanctuary

A place to center down.

Love

Peace

Nature

Friends

Acceptance

Closeness & caring

Love

Great Building

Necessary

1.

The wonderful people and the spirituality

To be part of Community

Community of spirits in an otherwise spirit-demeaning region. .

I pretty much don't. Driving problems. I try to make it once a month.

To complete my week; to start my week.

To silence the noise of the world

To meet with my Meeting family

To check in with that inner light/voice

Custom & personal friends

Spiritual fulfillment

Habit, friends

I came here seeking like-minded people.

To have fellowship, seek like-minded community.

For the serenity.

To find spiritual guidance and community.

2.

Community

Faith through acceptance of persons with whom I have different opinions within a common non-violent commitment

I guess Meeting has changed my life in many ways. The Friends I have known have inspired me to become a better person. ,

Not a saint or even very good Quaker, but I think my behaviour has been influenced by others in the meeting in many ways from prison visitation to a better concept of integrity and service to others.

This is the time I reflect on my actions, seek support for renewal of the spirit of love in future activity, and listen for whatever insights may be possible.

Closeness and caring

Honoring the Creator directly

Knowing there are caring people available, should I need guidance, encouragement or company is good. Spiritual? Maybe.

The moments of silence.
Recentering for the week.
A touchstone for spiritual growth.

3.

Within the realm of possibility, nothing more to ask (My moving to Visalia is not in the cards, and neither is moving the meeting house to Porterville).

I can reaffirm my continuing presence and support, in action and financial areas. I can do more to reach the wider community— blow the Friends' horn a bit more.
How can meeting serve me? My plate is already full.

I would like it if more people spoke in meeting. I think I would speak more if I had more examples.

When able, I could serve the meeting better by giving more monetarily.

More of the same.
I'm new, still learning.

I better serve: striving to hear each testimony in Meeting and Meeting for Business as always spoken through faith.

The Meeting better serve me: consider not talking about shrinking because we are growing in diversity. Giving voice to a negative can empower it, which I experience as a bad way to move forward.

I suppose being there every Sunday might help. Most of the ways to serve the Meeting involve driving to Sunday worship, work days, getting involved with what the Meeting is doing. Were I closer, and had someone to go with, I might even attend business meeting.

At the moment I feel that I'm serving the Meeting as best I can.

By being a regular attender, joining efforts. The Meeting provides me all I need, spiritually.

As it is, I am pretty much a de facto Unitarian now, as they are in Porterville, and pretty much share all the Quaker values. Being able to participate in discussions and discuss challenging ideas during the Sunday service fits my personality better than silent meeting. I think.

Love you all. You are the finest people I have ever met.