

Bellingham Friends Meeting, State of the Meeting Report

Our Meeting met the challenges of 2022, the third year of the Covid pandemic, with creativity, commitment, and faith. Hybrid worship (in person at The Majestic building and simultaneously on Zoom) enabled us to maintain a sense of community while protecting members from contagion. Hybrid memorial services after the deaths of two beloved members—Steve Hutchens in February and Larry Thompson in May—were well attended in person as well as online; they were warm, tender instances of how the technology both worked and mattered.

Holding weekly meetings for worship and events at the Majestic has enhanced the visibility of our meeting in the community, with several new people joining us through the year, some only once, some episodically, some regularly. We are delighted our children's program has resumed in person, as a family with young children now attends regularly. Our screening of the film *Mission Joy* attracted many attenders from outside our Meeting.

Yet questions persist. Attendance at this beautiful venue has remained quite low, apart from the film and memorials. In general, even the combined attendance online and in person has been less than half of pre-pandemic levels. The impact of lower attendance on the financial health of the Meeting has been significant, with reduced donations and the increasing cost of leasing the Majestic. Yet a number of generous donations near the end of the year did cover the Meeting's expenses. We continue to discern the rightness of renting the Majestic and how we are led, including considerations of visibility, inclusivity, the need for meditative space, our financial priorities, the safety of participants, and the value of meeting in person.

Social and Environmental Action Committee and Racial Justice Working Group events included organizing an online antiracist presentation by the Oregon Remembrance Project in collaboration with the Whatcom Peace and Justice Center and NPYM, with live, BIPOC ASL translation; the *Mission Joy* film screening; and second hour programs on facts about LGBTQ people, Quaker involvement in the Indian Boarding Schools, racial microaggressions, and the work of HomesNOW in creating tiny home villages for formerly unhoused people. We expressed support for our indigenous neighbors in advocacy letters regarding local pipeline and waterfront development projects, and through adopting our own version of the NPYM Minute of Support for Indigenous People.

Overall, there are many signs of new life. The work of the Meeting is getting done, thanks in part to some new folks who began attending during the pandemic, as well as to generous involvement of longtime members and attenders. The newsletter readership has nearly doubled. Creative collaborative efforts provided vibrant special events, including a summer meeting for worship in the park; informal walks in fall and winter; winter story-telling; and holiday candlelight services online and in person. A new Faithfulness Group started to meet monthly; a few Friends hope to start another. We continue to "see what love can do" as we move into the next phase of our shared journey.