

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Hong Kong Monthly Meeting

State of the Meeting Report 2021

Hong Kong Monthly Meeting (HKMM) held a threshing session on 3 April 2021, with nine Friends in attendance. We considered two queries: *What changes did HKMM experience during the past year and how effectively did we respond to them?* and *How do we hope to see HKMM developing in the coming year?* Our State of the Meeting Report for 2020, which includes a summary of HKMM's history, had been circulated in advance.

One of the most significant changes over the past year has been to our membership. Two adults (our co-assistant clerk, Greg, and our librarian, Brian) and four children applied to become, and were accepted as, new Members of HKMM. At the request of the four children, we had a joyous welcome party on 21 June 2020. One of our core families—Coryn (our former Assistant Clerk), Wes (one of our two elders), and their daughter Maya—moved back to the USA later that week. Several other attenders have also either left Hong Kong or have been attending infrequently for other reasons. However, we welcomed various visitors throughout the year, and several have become attenders.

Like the rest of the world, the pandemic presented one of our greatest challenges throughout the past year. Due to changing government restrictions on gatherings, we experienced three periods, covering a total of 30 weeks (29 March through 3 May, 5 July through 20 September, and 29 November through 14 February), when face-to-face meetings were not feasible. During most of those weeks, we held Meeting for Worship online, via Zoom. Attendance at the Zoom-only Meetings was often lower than for in-person Meetings: usually fewer than five and often only one or two. However, near the end of the first period of Zoom-only Meetings for Worship, an inquirer joined from Shanghai. When we were able to resume our face-to-face Meetings for Worship, we continued broadcasting them via Zoom as well, so that Isaac, as well as any locals who preferred not to attend the in-person Meeting during the pandemic, could still join us. As a result of adopting this hybrid approach throughout the year, we had several visitors join us on Zoom without being present in Hong Kong.

Due to the pandemic, the plans announced in last year's Report, to hold regular activities to supplement our Sunday Meeting for Worship, were largely set aside. We did enjoy a well-attended walk in March 2020 and have had several gatherings for meals. But the government restrictions on public gatherings put a damper on our plans to begin service-oriented activities such as beach clean-ups or assisting in the work of other local charities. Friends agreed that we should move forward with those earlier plans as soon as the pandemic allows.

A major change occurred on 11 October 2020, when we began meeting at The Hive in Sheung Wan on Sundays. At first this was on a three-month, trial basis, as our monthly donations at the time were not sufficient to cover the monthly rental fee. However, The Hive has reduced the fee slightly and donations have increased. So in February 2021 Meeting agreed to regard The Hive as our permanent venue for the foreseeable future. It is more centrally located, more attractive, and much easier to enter and leave than was our previous venue at Hong Kong Baptist University. Meeting for Worship takes place in a conference room with eight chairs and sufficient space for several extra chairs to be brought in, as needed. The children meet in a carpeted area at the opposite corner on the same floor. When Friends wish to stay for Afterthoughts or for a Meeting for Business, we move to a set of comfortable sofas located on the third floor.

Friends expressed the hope that we as a Meeting can be more welcoming to newcomers in the coming year. As many Quaker Meetings do not have an Afterthoughts time following Meeting for Worship, some Friends expressed the concern that, if we move too seamlessly from the silence to a time of open sharing, then some who attend might feel awkward if they prefer to leave shortly after the silence. Also, some might decide not to share a Voice Ministry during the silence, knowing they can wait until the Afterthoughts. Friends agreed that we should henceforth treat the conversation time less formally: shortly after the children join us near the end of the silence, we will allow time to share concerns, with a view toward holding each other in the Light more effectively throughout the week; we will continue to allow time for brief announcements before we break for refreshments. Those who wish to continue in friendly group conversation will gradually move upstairs. Friends noted that the topics of our conversations during the Afterthoughts have been more wide-ranging in recent months and encouraged everyone to keep in mind that the conversation is not restricted to any one type of topic.

Since late August, we have had a rota for sharing a brief reading or other spiritual reflection during Meeting for Worship; although we remain an unprogrammed Meeting, Friends agreed that this minimal bit of structure is appropriate and has been helpful in various ways. At our February 2021 Meeting for Business, Friends agreed to set up a rota for bringing light refreshments to share at rise of Meeting. The more we can share in fulfilling such tasks, the stronger HKMM will be moving forward.

Friends expressed continued concern over HKMM's gender imbalance. Since this was raised during last year's threshing session, no women have been attending regularly. Friends expressed the hope that scheduling different types of activities to supplement the Meeting for Worship will address this concern. Activities that are likely to interest locals and/or families would be preferable. Walks, casual meals, midweek study groups, and talks given (perhaps once per quarter) on Sundays following Rise of Meeting were all suggested as possible activities that could help in this regard. Friends are welcomed to suggest any such activities when they see fit; for one-off events, prior approval at a Meeting for Business is not needed.

Since we began holding face-to-face meetings at The Hive, Greg has been organizing children's lessons and other activities almost singlehandedly. Recently the children have been learning about Jesus' parables. Through June 2020 three Friends took turns organizing a First Day School for the children. Friends expressed the hope that we can return to an arrangement where these duties are shared by several people in turn, so that no one person has to miss significant portions of the Meeting for Worship each week.

HKMM's financial situation is now stronger than this time last year. Motivated mainly by a desire to be able to afford a more suitable meeting venue, a number of Friends have been donating regularly throughout the past year and plan to continue doing so. We recently opened a new bank account that has no monthly fee, and this allowed us to close the old account, which was incurring a hefty monthly fee. With our monthly donations now greater than our expenditures, and an ample amount saved for more difficult times, Friends agreed that we should be starting to consider how best to employ our remaining finances for charitable purposes other than sponsoring Meeting for Worship every Sunday.