

State of Society, 2023 Friends Meeting at Cambridge (FMC)

Everyone at FMC was invited to reflect on a set of queries and then create a small “canvas” (half an 8 ½ by 11 sheet of paper) that reflected their leadings. Opportunities to create together were provided; at the rise of Meeting over three Sundays, in two zoom gatherings, while at a Young Adult Friends Potluck, in First Day School, and over a Women’s Silent Retreat weekend. Together during Forum, held before Meeting for Worship, we compiled these canvases into one large mosaic mural and held Worship sharing to go deeper and make sense of what emerged. Space was also held during Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.

The images that follow are our report.

Our “Artists’ Statement,” drawn from Worship sharing as we created the larger mural and the Minute from Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, follow.



Descriptive text for accessibility: Arrayed on a white background are dozens of handcrafted images on rectangular paper in a rough spiral arrangement with empty space in the center. Starting in the center are the more abstract images, the outer spiral containing some with many words and images that range from landscapes to animals, flowers, both intact and broken hearts, happy faces, peace signs, and many personal messages.



Descriptive text for accessibility: Close up of the left side of rectangular paper with 11 “canvases” each with images. Some depict elements of nature, some with words on them, one with a home in a rural setting, a tile with “bored” on it has tiles on either side; a heart above and “change” below as explained in the “artists’ statement” to follow.



Descriptive text for accessibility: Close up of the left center which shows the first image of Light, some abstract canvases, some with nature images, some with words related to our values/source of strength (“strong roots,” “much that connects/supports is out of sight”), and a heart “sewn” with thick grey yarn around the heart’s edge and ending with a dangling tail, like a kite.



Descriptive text for accessibility: Close up of the right center with 11 tiles, with nature images including a bend/swirling river with words “ever beneath the river we want to hear and know you”, a long train-like tunnel with a small light at the end, a reminder to “slow down” and “learn(ing) to listen” coupled with an image of multiple hearts with ten plus words including frustration, hurt, love and connection.



Descriptive text for accessibility: Close up of the right side of rectangular paper, including tiles expressing gratitude for the FMC community, a sense of being found/finding community, a peace sign, and ending in the upper corner with an origami crane breaking through bars.

Artists' Statement

Worship Sharing, Forum, May 5, 2024

- Friends spoke of creating an image of a spiral and/or labyrinth with the individual “canvases.” The phrase “our meandering journey of the year” was spoken. The sense was that we did not want this to reflect a linear journey, but rather one of meandering with one another and the Spirit and, at the same time, we wanted to reflect that we as a Meeting have been on a spiritual journey (i.e., that we have a sense of purpose and are being guided by Spirit, the Divine, the Sacred, that which can't be named).
- We discerned to have abstract images at and toward the center and wanted those representing “THE LIGHT” at the beginning. Someone spoke of the Light as the source of our spiritual community.
- Early on we put aside some images we wanted to have toward the end, not as a fixed final point, but more with a sense of yearning, reaching for, journeying toward and that this journey is ongoing, never ends.
- The group talked about and lifted up leaving open space in the middle for what can't be named or drawn; the divine (movement) beyond words and images.
- We spoke about values and challenges; initially we thought of putting those canvases which depicted values first followed by those which depict our challenges. However, a Friend suggested we alternate, or mix them, because our values are what we call on to engage with our challenges. Thus, we alternated, more or less, our values and challenges, holding them in relationship to one another.
- Within one of the canvases is collaged the word “bored”. There were some who were confused and didn't know how to reconcile the word in relation to our meeting. They asked if we should put some image next to it in response. When it was clarified that the image came from a child in our meeting, the group gathered came clear that we neither wanted to respond to or try to fix in any way, but rather hold this image, its truth, along with all the others. An image of a heart, and a collage with the word “change”, were moved to surround it with the intention of holding it in love.
- Because of the space limits and working in a rectangle, we talked about how the spiral would look like it went off the page and then continue, even though not visible, and then would reappear back onto the page again.
- Some were particularly moved by how much we were working as a whole, within our hybrid set up and throughout this process, appreciating that we were all working to include everyone and listen to each other; i.e., when people in the room or on zoom would ask about specific images or for help seeing/hearing/understanding an image. Or further, when some people asked and then wondered aloud about the “meaning” of an image, people shared their interpretations which were not all the same.
- At one point we noted that this is part of the richness of the images, individually and as a whole, that we each make different meaning of the same image/images. That it is about hearing each other's different interpretations and truths that come through us individually and collectively. That, like in a Meeting for Worship, we each bring our own understanding, our piece of the light, but together we make the whole.

Minute, Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, May 5, 2024

The Clerk reminded Friends that each year we provide a State of Society report of our experience of the condition of our Meeting, to New England Yearly Meeting. The working group for the State of Society this year has been: Betsy Roper, Erin Bumgarner, Jan Nisenbaum, Kim West and Virginia Swain. This year, the report is in the form of a collage that was first created as individual “tiles” by members of our community. The collage was then developed into the full visual report in worship sharing at Forum this morning. This included the pattern of the collage (a spiral) and the order of the individual elements that were brought into a unified report. The Clerk asked that Friends take a few moments to view the full report and return to worship sharing. A video tour of the collage was highlighted on Zoom. Betsy Roper reported on the process of creating the spiral collage, starting with abstract concepts, and moving into more specific experience of our community life. Friends who had been present reported that this was a

very organic and uplifting process. Particularly noted was the intention of a keeping the open space between the tiles for letting in the Light and unspoken contributions. The presence of the tile with the origami crane breaking through bars as the last tile was noted by several Friends. The collage will be sent to the Yearly Meeting as our report for 2023 with this minute. It was noted that this spiral concludes in an upward direction with the final tiles. Betsy reports that Richard Wood will be taking high resolution photographs of the collage for the submission to the Yearly Meeting. Several Friends made suggestions regarding how to preserve and make the elements of the collage accessible to Friends. It was noted that one particular tile, the “bored” tile done by one of our children received good and thoughtful attention, as did the other tiles. The intent in working with all of the tiles was to receive the messages provided. Several Friends expressed interest in having the collage available in some way to view in detail over time.

Friends approved accepting the report and forwarding it to Yearly Meeting as our State of Society report for 2023. It was requested that visual accessibility issues be addressed.