

State of the Meeting Report 2010-2011

Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting continued into its 31st year in 2010. We continue to honor our roots and regard our increasing numbers with gratitude and wonder. Our meeting added many new attenders this year and four members, 2 by convincement and 2 transfers. Two babies were born to attenders. No members were subtracted, and no marriages were witnessed under the care of the meeting. Attendance at meeting for worship is usually over 80 Friends. Attendance at our monthly meetings for business is typically more than 30 Friends.

REACHING WITHIN

Quality of Worship

A generous, rich silence usually characterizes much of our worship. A Friend reminded us recently that the purpose of vocal ministry is to “draw us into the fold of the divine.” Seeming to understand this, our vocal ministers usually avoid focusing on themselves or on the surface of world events; instead, they often usher us into deeper contact with the sacred. The quality of our worship may be what first attracts newcomers to our Meeting.

Valuing Silence

We take seriously the high value Friends place on silence. The deep appreciation of silence serves us well and illumines our strengths. A rich silence is an integral part of our practice. We revere the richness of silence in Meeting for Business, during committee meetings, and during Worship. Many of us find that silence is an important part of our individual spiritual growth and development as well. Some Strawberry Friends actively seek to bring Friends' ways of doing business into the world; we find that suggesting a brief period of silence during contentious meetings is both welcome and effective.

A Range of Beliefs in Our Meeting

Strawberry Friends use a wide range of words to describe the divine. Some choose words like those John Woolman sometimes chose (Divine Light, the Fountain), or terms like Spirit, or Great Love. Other vocal ministers may refer to God or Jesus. Both traditional and universalist expressions may be heard within one Meeting for Worship.

Despite this acceptance of one another's ways in worship, Strawberries have had increasing difficulty for the past few years in deciding how to conduct our annual

Twelfth Month party; we even have had trouble agreeing on what to call it. Some Universalist Friends comfortably acknowledge Quakerism's Christian roots and happily celebrate Christmas. Other Friends, whether Universalist or Christocentric, find that their unease with a Meeting Christmas program can make planning such an event challenging. We have not yet found a way to design a program that satisfies everyone, but we enjoyed getting together for a party.

Sense of Community and Spiritual Growth

Some Friends long for more spiritual enrichment and for ongoing spiritual community. They speak warmly of a Faith and Practice discussion and Bible study groups, and express a hunger for deeper understanding of Quakerism. While Adult Education programs, Quakerism 101 and Friendly 7's are valued, there is a longing for ongoing groups that provide opportunities for cumulative learning and sustained community building. A new sub-committee of Worship and Ministry has conducted a survey to help guide the planning of such programs. Several study groups are scheduled for this spring with varying topics and number of sessions.

Mutual Care

In a large meeting such as Strawberry Creek, there are smaller, stable communities within the larger community. Warm, deep connections have been made between individuals during this past year, and we have grown in our ability to be tender with one another. Spirit has brought us closer together, and our sense of community and groundedness has increased.

Many Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting members and attenders have coped with health challenges this year, calling on us to practice mutual care both in organized and informal ways. From a toddler with brain cancer to several adults with cancer, to older, aging adults, Friends have joined together to help these individuals and their families. We cooked meals, held support groups, and visited others. Children and adults made two beautiful quilts for the toddler with brain cancer and his brother. (Add more details?) One member offered her freezer for regularly holding food that might be needed.

Members and attenders have also been challenged by the economy this year, and some have felt held by Meeting and assisted in tangible ways. Some of us have had to learn to set limits on our own capacity to help.

During this past year our Worship and Ministry committee has worked carefully to discern the best way for us to support each other's personal concerns in a large community. We had a listening meeting on "How Meeting Corporately Holds Personal Concerns in the Light," followed by another listening meeting on "Friendly Care Within Meeting." After a six-month trial of sharing joys and sorrows after Meeting for Worship last year, we are embarking on a new process of holding loved ones in the Light. We will have a special Meeting for Worship for this purpose on the third First Day of the month, following the regular Meeting for Worship. In addition, at the end of each Meeting for Worship we will invite people to say the names of loved ones to be held by Meeting during a period of silence.

Electronic Communications Committee

Strawberry Creek Meeting has three different ways to access Meeting information via Internet from our computers. Many of us receive our Newsletter by e-mail or from an e-mail link to the online Newsletter in PDF format. We also post and view messages on our Yahoo group with restricted access. In addition, we support two public web sites, and we know that visitors often locate our Meeting using these tools. The Electronic Communications Committee has created an inventory of our varied ways to communicate electronically, and has begun to structure electronic communications to best serve the Meeting community. This continues as a work in progress into the new meeting year. This is an example of the way we experiment with solutions.

REACHING OUTWARD

Peace, Earthcare and Social Witness

Strawberry Creek Meeting strives to live the Earthcare Testimony, which we approved in April, 2010, and to bear witness to it within the wider Quaker community. Our meeting sponsored an interest group on the Earthcare Testimony at the January Quarterly Meeting in San Francisco. Several Strawberry Friends published an article in the Western Friends bulletin, describing the development of our Meeting's Earthcare Testimony. Another article is planned for the fall in Friends Journal.

We have updated the Dime-a-Gallon website, our initial plan to reduce energy use and raise awareness about it. Dime-A-Saur was a hit at Pacific Yearly Meeting and helped raised awareness about our Meeting's efforts in Earthcare. Our Peace Earthcare and Social Witness (PEAS) committee helped us focus on carbon

cutting more broadly. We continue to have locavore potlucks and to enjoy an annual meeting for worship outdoors in a wooded Berkeley park. While living the Earthcare Testimony is challenging, Strawberries appreciate being in a community that asks hard questions and challenges us to live our Earthcare witness.

Fifteen Strawberries participated in the conference at Ben Lomond Quaker Center on Social Fairness and Ecological Integrity, organized by several of our members. While in past years there has been some discontent because of a lack of corporate witness by our Meeting, Spirit is advancing an Earthcare Testimony within our Meeting and generating a greater level of interest and participation. Earthcare has become the central focus of the PEAS committee. We take pride in our Earthcare Testimony.

Some Friends continue to emphasize peace and social justice. Many Strawberries attended a Saturday session on cutting military spending with a speaker from FCNL, and others will be sending a "Pay Under Protest" letter to our senators with our taxes this spring. We raised over \$2,000 for FCL with our annual fundraising auction, held in September.

We continue to have active relationships with the Woolman Semester, Ben Lomond Quaker Center, and neighboring Friends meetings, both programmed and unprogrammed.

Our Service to Meeting

Truth advanced among us as we gained flexibility in our service to Meeting. Our large meeting size provides abundant ways for each to contribute. We have found ourselves challenged to find clerks and committee members. This spring, Friends have been more willing to help, and we are blessed with well seasoned clerks. Many Friends find that active participation on committees is a good way to nourish our hunger for connectedness, community, and spirituality in our daily practices.

We have reconsidered how to structure our committees to better meet the changing needs of Meeting as well as to recognize how we can each best contribute. Our ease in doing so reflects an awareness that we are not our committees, and that without committees we would still be a Meeting. We respond as Spirit leads us. This year, people set boundaries that made taking on new responsibilities possible. Our nominating process has been more flexible, and we have benefited from several clerks who have served for third years.

Worship Groups

The Oakland Worship Group continues in its fourth year under our care, and holds weekly worship meetings with frequent study groups (Faith and Practice this year) and monthly pot lucks. Worshipers are half to one dozen Friends, consisting of Strawberries, Quakers from other area meetings, and some who attend no other Quaker meetings. The Mount Diablo Worship Group also continues under our care, with monthly meetings for worship, occasional pot lucks, and a somewhat smaller size than the Oakland group. Both close knit groups are self-sustaining. They choose to meet in homes and many value the intimate setting.

Meeting for Business

Our Meetings for Worship on the occasion of business have been deeper and with a gathered presence. We have resumed our practice of having one or two Friends holding Meeting for Business in the Light, which has contributed to our sense of sprit led and tender working together to advance Meeting's business.

Retreats

We value retreat time together and are exploring how retreats fit within our active meeting community. Last May we had a relatively unstructured retreat at Ben Lomond Quaker Center. Our fall retreat took place one Saturday afternoon in El Cerrito, also without a theme but with yoga, art projects, and singing. This spring we have an ad hoc retreat committee for the Ben Lomond Retreat in May, with the title "Individual Spiritual Beliefs in Strawberry Creek Meeting: How Do We Differ From One Another and What Do We Share in Common?"

Children and the Meeting

Our First Day School has been rich and vital this past year, with a very strong nursery program, a new lower primary class, and new adults helping with the upper primary/young teens. There are some First Days when there are 14 babies in the nursery, which provides a welcome to young families and a way for parents to connect. Even the youngest children have a regular, brief period of silent worship at the end of the hour. We're glad that some of the teens stay connected to Meeting by providing paid child care in the nursery during Meeting for Worship and other meeting activities.

A small group of 4 to 7 year olds has begun to meet regularly, thanks to the commitment of one teacher who is leading the class. Several new adults are providing activities such as gardening, art projects, and music on a regular basis to children ages 8 to 13. One Friend is teaching a monthly session of Quakerism 101 for youth; the group joins the meeting for worship on the first First Day of the month for the first 15 minutes when the advices and queries are read. This upper primary/young teens group played an important musical role in the Twelfth Month party in December and are planning to participate in the May retreat.

Our few older teens are not meeting as a group at this time. The First Day School committee is seeking an adult to be involved with these teens on a regular basis, perhaps having one evening gathering each month. There hasn't been such a person for the past several years.

LOOKING FORWARD

This year has been a time of developing our strengths: we are grateful for the quality of our worship, and the way we value rich silence, in both Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business. We are grateful for our capacity to care for one another, and we take deep satisfaction in the ways we are able to nurture one another's strengths, including leadership skills. One Friend calls this our "Culture of Teachability."

We are proud of the deepening work of our Peace, Earthcare and Social Witness committee that, together with the Ecoberries study group, is advancing the Dime-A-Gallon program, linking peace, economy, and other issues with environmental concerns, and bringing forward an Earthcare Testimony.

Only a few years ago, we were taking serious steps toward having a site of our own. We conducted a feasibility study and found we could afford to proceed. Now we recognize the current state of the economy may affect what we are able to do; prices may have come down, but Friends' capacity to contribute may have decreased as well. How committed our meeting is at this time to having our own meeting house is unclear. Meanwhile, our Site Committee continues to explore possible sites. In the coming months, we will need renewed reflection on this big step, weighing both our personal and material resources, while knowing that our site speaks to who we are, what we are doing, and our truth.