

## STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT

May 2008 - May 2009

A faithful Friend has described Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting as a group of real seekers — as a Meeting open to change, and to seeing strength and beauty in our differences. This year our seeking occurred within a context of nourishment and calm within our community and momentous change in the outer world. We followed three main threads of Meeting life this year—deepening our spiritual experience; strengthening our sense of community; and being effective in our witness in the world.

### **Deepening our Spiritual Experience**

At the heart of our community's spiritual life is Meeting for Worship. Many members and attenders say that Meeting for Worship provides an anchor for their life that gives them strength to act on Quaker values and concerns in the world. Our Meeting for Worship typically attracts 90-100 participants, often including visiting Friends and newcomers unfamiliar with Quaker Worship. Our size, openness, and diverse needs can present challenges for those who hunger for worship that provides the deep spiritual nourishment of a gathered meeting and spirit-led vocal ministry. We are aware of the importance of a gathered worship experience to Friends' faith and practice, and are continually discerning how best to nurture this experience.

We actively seek ways to make newcomers feel welcome at our Meeting for Worship and to encourage participation in the community. Our Worship and Ministry and Adult Education Committees provide ongoing opportunities to deepen our understanding and experience of Quaker worship and spirituality. Our Librarian regularly calls attention to material available for community use describing Quaker history, faith, and practice.

In addition to our First Day morning Meeting for Worship, an Oakland Worship Group meets weekly at a member's home on First Day evenings. A Mt Diablo Worship Group meets once a month for worship in private homes and holds a monthly potluck. A small, mid-week morning worship group meets in Berkeley. Occasional meetings for worship are organized for individuals who are confined due to illness or disability.

Beginning in August, 2008, Worship and Ministry introduced a practice of sharing Joys and Sorrows at the close of Meeting for Worship. The practice provided a space for individuals to share important events in their lives and to ask Meeting to hold their concerns in the Light. Many welcomed the practice, especially newcomers, and many felt it helped foster a greater sense of connection and community. Many others found it unsettling and thought it made for a difficult transition out of worship. After eight months, Worship and Ministry came to unity that, on balance, the practice did not deepen worship and will seek other ways for people to share joys and sorrows within the context of community support.

## **Strengthening our Sense of Community**

To meet the challenges to community-building posed by our size, our lack of our own space, and the fluid nature of our community, we offer many ways to participate in the life of the Meeting. We carefully tend the human infrastructure that helps hold our Meeting together. Sixteen standing committees with a total of 129 committee positions bring members and attenders together in small groups to do essential community work in the manner of Friends while getting to know each other better in the process. These positions, along with the positions of seven meeting officers and ten representatives to other organizations are filled through a spirit-led process that includes personal contact with each member and attender by our Nominating Committee. Several months of hard work is required each year to balance the needs of the Meeting with the needs and interests of our community members. Most important is the willingness of members and attenders to give generously of their time and talents to support the ongoing life of the Meeting.

Mutual Care Committee looks after a range of personal needs of community members and enlists others within Meeting in these efforts. This year we've responded to requests for a variety of clearness committees and provided one-on-one and small group support to individuals with particular needs. We continue to struggle with how best to match the needs for support with the available time and energy of members and attenders.

Two Meeting retreats this year provided a way to come together in community in a more spacious and informal way. Affinity groups occasionally coalesce around topics of interest such as the Advent reading group and the Koran discussion group that met this year. Young Adult Friends get together monthly for brunch after Meeting for Worship, and Friendly Sevens suppers are scheduled occasionally to provide additional ways for Strawberries to get to know each other. We continue to seek ways to strengthen our sense of community. Community-building and spiritual practice come together in our Meetings for Business. Strong bonds among Strawberry Creek members and attenders are forged, strengthened and occasionally tested in the crucible of Quaker decision-making. An average of 40 people meet to conduct business. Here we are challenged to apply our Quaker values to situations where there may be differences among us and where we experience the joy of bringing unity of spirit out of our diversity.

The First Day School program enriches our community as well. Attendance is up in both the Nursery and 5-12 year old groups. The Nursery has an average of 6 children each week with 12 nursery-age children all together. At least 2 adults are in the Nursery each week. The 5-12 year old group has been averaging 8 each week with 20 in the group all together. The 5-12 year group has been co-led by four adults, who continue to create projects that connect us to Quaker testimonies. The Summer Program went well again this past year and raised funds to buy trees in the Amazon. Teens known to Meeting, who are not otherwise involved in 1<sup>st</sup> Day School, receive training and a stipend to help staff the Nursery and provide after-Meeting childcare.

The teen group switched from Sunday morning to meeting less frequently in the evening. This has seemed to facilitate getting a larger group of teens in one place and to build more connections with

Berkeley Meeting and Berkeley Friends Church. Some members and attenders have expressed a desire for more connection with the young people. The adults who work with the children and teens enjoy this connection. Our monthly newsletter, our active Strawberry Creek Meeting list serve, and our website are essential community-building tools, supporting information sharing within our community.

## **Witness in the World**

Our members and attenders have typically sought a variety of avenues to witness for their Quaker concerns and values. This year political campaigns engaged the time, energy and money of many Strawberries. Election year events provoked feelings of anxiety alternating with hope. Some of the vocal ministry in Meeting for Worship reflected these feelings. After the national election the meeting seemed to breathe a sigh of relief with renewed hope for our country's future. This was tempered with the disappointment of many Friends with the passage of Prop 8.

Community members also witnessed to concerns for abolishing torture, promoting alternatives to violence, working for eco-justice, promoting marriage equality, ensuring local food distribution to the needy, and providing art jobs and art training to homeless and low income youth.

Several Friends worked with an interfaith group, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), in its campaign to change interrogation policies of the Bush administration. Strawberry Creek also donated money and approved a Minute in support of this effort.

A plenary session at one of our meeting retreats this year focused on Earthcare, and we learned there that most Strawberries are now taking significant steps to reduce their impact on Earth's resources. Some regional and national Quaker groups are considering the need for a new Quaker testimony related to Earthcare. Working with PYM Unity with Nature Committee, a group of Strawberry Creek Friends developed text for a draft testimony that was presented at a PYM interest group in August. Strawberry Creek approved a Minute to begin a discernment process considering the need for a written Quaker Testimony on Harmony with Nature. At an initial Listening Meeting held in April, 2009, we responded to queries about the relationship of humans to the natural world and the larger community of life. We intend to schedule a second Listening Meeting in a few months as part of our process of discernment. Our quarterly Locavore lunches continue to raise awareness within SCMM about the importance of eating seasonal and locally sourced foods.

Strawberries continue to be active in Quaker groups such as AFSC, FCL, FCNL, Quaker Earthcare Witness, Quaker Eco-Bulletin, and Quaker Institute for the Future.

## **Membership Statistics**

We added 1 new member, laid down 1 membership, and transferred 1 member to another Meeting. We were also delighted by one birth. Total membership now stands at 95.