

Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting: State of the Meeting, Spring 2012

Friends who worship with Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting experience us as a vibrant spirit-filled community. It is not uncommon for 60 Friends to gather for Meeting for Worship on First Day mornings. The depth of our tenderness toward each other is fostered by worship that is a source of our strength and spiritual growth. Messages come from an authentic place and our worship often feels fully gathered. Our tenderness helped many of us to offer our spiritual gifts during a year of hardship in which we were touched by a number of deaths and serious illnesses. These brought a large number of Friends into active service to those who were in need of practical and emotional support. Spiritual wisdom flowed both from helpers and from those we helped. We were strengthened in community, both in service and in shared fears, hopes, grief, and consolation.

Strawberry Creek Meeting has 98 members. Since our last report two members laid down their membership, and one member transferred her membership to another Monthly Meeting. We lost three members to death.

Our First Day School is thriving with a full nursery, consistent adults and several youth helping out with the young ones. Older groups vary in size one week to the next but are nevertheless strong, vibrant parts of our Meeting community, offering us much joy and hope. Produce from the garden contributed to a locavore potluck and bean soup mixes prepared by children fed Friends and food bank recipients. PYM's youth program coordinator offered inspiration toward more intergenerational activities in our community.

In spite of last year's scaling back and restructuring of committees, Nominating Committee had a full time year-round job in matching our gifts and talents to the needs of our community. Restructuring left in limbo some tasks, like organizing retreats. We are mindful that work remains to be done to foster a manageable structure and offer niches of participation that fully welcome all who worship with us.

Individuals found meaningful involvement in the Occupy movement, particularly in supporting an ongoing commitment to non-violence. Peace, Earthcare and Social Witness keeps us conscious of many concerns, in particular, through the Dime-a-Gallon fund, to be mindful of our consumption of fossil fuels. Many individuals have felt called well beyond the involvement of the Meeting in local, national and international Quaker concerns.

We had several opportunities for corporate discernment. Whether or not to acquire a more permanent site for our Meeting asked us to weigh the question in terms of our ability to be of service to the community at large. We came to unity about accepting donations of stock for immediate sale. Our corporate body was led to consider not participating in the civil registration of marriages until all can marry under state law; we did not reach unity to change our current practice.

The depth of our corporate spiritual life was reflected not only in our weekly worship but also by individuals in our Meeting who have particular calls to ministry in the wider world. Several of these Friends have spoken of the support of individuals and the Meeting at large, through anchoring committees, as being central to their call to ministry.

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Strawberry Creek Meeting has 98 members. Since our last report two members laid down their membership, and one member transferred her membership to another Monthly Meeting. We lost three members to death.

Our First Day School is thriving with a full nursery of five to fourteen children, consistent service from various adults and several youth helping out with the young ones. We conclude each week with a silent circle of gratitude preparing our children to participate in Meeting for Worship. The primary group has focused on food and produce from the garden contributed to one locavore potluck. The teen group, consisting of four to five young teens has been focusing on issues of difference and disability. Children of all ages came together for the 12th month gathering to share music and the stone soup story. This year First Day School children packed bean soup mixes to feed Friends and food bank recipients. A visit from Pacific Yearly Meeting's youth program coordinator offered inspiration for intergenerational activities. Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting has, since its earliest days, provided a warm community for families. As we conclude Meeting for Worship we welcome the children to our circle with joy and affection.

Last year we undertook an ongoing process to discern how to reduce the number of committees. 2011-2012 was our first opportunity to witness the life of the Meeting with fewer committees. In spite of restructuring, our Nominating Committee continued to have a year-round job in matching our gifts and talents to the needs of our community. Restructuring left in limbo some tasks like organizing retreats, spiritual education, our year-end celebration, and other gatherings. These were taken up by representatives of other standing committees and by ad-hoc committees. We are mindful that work remains to be done to foster a manageable structure and offer niches of participation that fully welcome all who worship with us.

With a large and widely distributed faith community we have been challenged to create ways for us to stay in touch with each other. Over a number of years we developed

both a listserv for email announcements, and an evolving web presence. Several of our committees now find email and other computer tools essential to carry out their work.

A wide variety of social concerns drew the attention of our members and attenders. Some arose from within our own Meeting. Our Peace, Earthcare and Social Witness Committee keeps us conscious of many concerns, in particular, through the Dime-a-Gallon fund, to be mindful of our consumption of fossil fuels. The process and the proceeds help educate people concerning ecological matters. First Day School children help to maintain a garden at our meeting site, the Berkeley Technology Academy, a campus of the Berkeley School District. Individuals in our Meeting serve on the boards of institutions that are under the care of College Park Quarterly Meeting. These include Friends House, the Ben Lomond Quaker Center, and the Sierra Friends Center. The Woolman Semester, overseen by Sierra Friends Center, offers educational programs for teens and young adults and has had a special place in the lives of several among us. Many individuals have felt called beyond the Meeting's involvement in local, national and international Quaker concerns. We are actively involved both as staff and as volunteers with the American Friends Service Committee Northern California Regional Office and have representatives to both the California and the National Friends Committees on Legislation. College Park Quarterly Meeting, Pacific Yearly Meeting, Quaker Earthcare Witness, Quaker Institute for the Future, and Friends General Conference are places of Quaker service and enrichment for those in our midst.

Individuals from our Meeting found meaningful involvement in social justice concerns in the wider world, including the Occupy movement. Several Strawberries were active in the interfaith group that supported our local Occupy groups in their commitment to non-violence. Others are involved with the Metaphor Project which helps progressive organizations to frame and deliver their messages. We have an active group who participate in and present programs for the Alternatives to Violence Project. This organization addresses violence primarily in prisons but also in individual lives, in families, and in communities. Several individuals take an active role in the Berkeley Food Pantry.

We had several opportunities for corporate discernment. An active Site Committee has evaluated several properties and engaged the Meeting, through both a survey and a listening meeting, to help us determine our readiness for the financial and corporate commitment called for in a permanent site. As we explore options Friends have begun to see how a permanent site could enable the Meeting to be of service to our local community. We came to unity about accepting donations of stock for immediate sale. We bore witness, in the larger community, to our testimonies of simplicity and equality, integrity and peace. We considered not participating in the civil registration of marriages until all can marry under state law. However, we did not reach unity to change our current practice.

The depth of our corporate spiritual life was felt by individuals in our Meeting who have particular calls to ministry in the wider world. Several of these Friends have spoken of

the support of individuals and the Meeting at large, through anchoring committees, as furthering their call to ministry. Two of our members are completing training as hospital chaplains. One of our members has been invited to offer training in eldering. One member serves as clerk of Quaker Earthcare Witness and three serve on the board of the Quaker Institute for the Future. Both organizations are helping to shape the dialogue about earth care, climate change, and contemporary Quaker witness for economic and environmental justice.

Our Worship and Ministry Committee continued this year to explore ways for individuals and the Meeting to hold people in the light. We settle into the silence again after the rise of Meeting and people speak the names. We also continue to offer a Meeting for Worship for Concerns after rise of Meeting on one First Day each month. One family, in particular, shared their hope and perseverance in a year-long challenge to save their young child from cancer. They shared this trial with our community on their blog, and they were never far from our thoughts and prayers.

As we consider this year of challenge and healing, we think of dear F/friends who died since our last report. Our Mutual Care Committee was particularly tested by the care needs of these and other F/friends but found Strawberries willing, and sometimes even honored, to care for those in our midst. Many remember the peace ministry of Carolyn Marks expressed particularly through tile walls in public places. Dee Rossman was actively engaged in social justice issues for her decade with us and earlier as a member of Montclair Monthly Meeting in New Jersey. She and Sandra Lewis served on Pacific Yearly Meeting's Unity with Nature committee and worked closely with Earthlight Magazine. Sandra shared her earth care ministry with us for 12 years and served as clerk of many committees. She wrote part of the publication titled *How on Earth Do We Live Now*, expressing the idea that cooperation is a natural evolutionary trait of human beings. Rich Tittle, who was with us for over 25 years, was dedicated to a medical practice of primary care and was passionate about exploring the natural world. Each of these F/friends left us with an empty place at our table and unlimited memories of their gifts to our beloved community.