

VISALIA MONTHLY MEETING

Chronicle of the Year 2006

January

- A group of Chinese students from UC Berkeley and Los Angeles stayed at our Meetinghouse while they worked at various projects in the area. The students hosted a dinner for a group from our Meeting who visited China recently.
- The Outreach Committee chose "GOT PEACE?" as a slogan for our billboard.
- David Chandler counseled a young woman who had signed up in the Navy's Delayed Enlistment Program but changed her mind before having to report.
- \$1929.50, that was raised by Bill Warner's Toy Auction and the sales of Beth Lovett's Christmas wreaths, was sent to the Heifer Project.
- Mallory Marshall reported to the Meeting about her experience in the Woolman Semester in the Fall, which she called "incredible."
- Members of the Meeting reported on efforts to support the Pankey family of Visalia, who had been victims of racial harassment.
- Fifth Sunday joint Meeting for Worship with Fresno Friends Meeting was held at Mildred Lohan's home in Reedley.

February

- Klara East began a group to study and discuss Howard Brinton's "Friends for 350 Years."
- Mark Koenig participated in a basic workshop of the Alternatives to Violence Program at Chowchilla Prison for Women.
- We held a building and grounds workday.

March

- We held a discussion about the quality of our vocal ministry.
- Members and attenders, including many children, walked in Crop Walk, raising money to provide food to the hungry.
- Sharlene Roberts-Caudle attended Representative Committee Meeting of Pacific Yearly Meeting. In her report to our Meeting she mentioned concerns about sexual harassment policies and liability insurance for volunteers who work with our children and youth. In subsequent months we discussed the issue at some length but took no action.
- At the suggestion of Ginger Curtis, groups of four Meeting families each were set up, who would dine together periodically in each other's homes.

April

- Our annual Easter Worship and Potluck was held on the Lovett's lawn beneath the giant valley oak tree. As usual it was well-attended with some folks traveling a distance to be here.
- Planning for our bi-yearly retreat began.
- A photography exhibit by Sandra Sturdevant depicting migrant workers was displayed in our solarium, which would be its home until the next exhibition.
- Sharlene Roberts-Caudle brought and exhibited cloth grocery bags which can be used as a recycling measure.

May

- Visitors from the Quaker Bolivia Project made a presentation about the work they are doing in Bolivia building greenhouses for impoverished families in the Andes. We decided to make donations and sponsor a greenhouse.
- Some members and attenders participated in a two-day Alternatives to Violence Program Basic Workshop, held in our solarium.
- We held a building and grounds workday.

June

- Trudy Wischemann presented the results of a Building and Grounds Appreciation Survey, which we filled out so we might have input into decisions about Bill and Beth's property.
- Sarah Shena, attorney for the Agency on Aging for Tulare County, visited to discuss end-of-life issues and leave copies of the pamphlet "What Happens Next?"

July

- Mark Koenig led two discussion sessions based on the films "The End of Suburbia" and "Cuba's Solution" to prepare us for our retreat.
- We decided to skip Meeting for Business in July.
- The East and Chandler families attended Friends General Conference in Tacoma, WA.

August

--Bill Lovett, Dave and Michael Roberts, Mallory, Erin, and Nolan Marshall, and Klara East attended Pacific Yearly Meeting. Erin Marshall was Clerk of the Junior Yearly Meeting, and Klara East was nominated for PYM Children's Committee. Nolan Marshall reported on the Junior Meeting.

September

--Under the direction of co-clerks Klara East and Mark Koenig, the Retreat Planning Committee met to plan the October retreat.

--Bill and Beth Lovett presented a proposal that the Meeting assume ownership of their property and lease it to a non-profit organization to operate a farm and educational center under the oversight of the Meeting.

--We co-sponsored a showing of the film "Arlington West," produced by Veterans for Peace, at Bakersfield College.

--We had a building and grounds workday.

October

--Receiving much advice and oversight, Mark Koenig built an adobe oven in back of the meetinghouse.

--We opened our Retreat by attending a panel discussion at College of the Sequoias on immigration issues. A featured panelist was Graciela Martinez of American Friends Service Committee and our Meeting.

--For two days, directed by Karen Street and Mark Koenig, we discussed Global Warming and Peak Oil and what we might do about those problems. We also conversed, dined, cleaned up, played, and in many ways strengthened our bond.

November

--Responding to a proposal by Southern California Edison Company to build a power line within 100 yards of our meetinghouse, members of our Meeting community educated themselves about the project and joined with other affected parties to influence a change in those plans. A number of meetings were held at our meetinghouse which included representatives from the Edison Company, neighbors, and people from other neighborhoods. An organization was created to monitor and respond as the project develops. This had the effect of improving relations among the neighbors of our Meeting.

--Klara East reported on Quarterly Meeting which she attended with Mark Koenig, Niko and Jesse East, and Mallory and Nolan Marshall.

--We began a conversation about receiving the Lovett property, which revealed some of the issues we face. The discussion funneled into how to proceed, which resulted in a decision to hold one or more threshing sessions beginning on January 6, 2007. Trudy Wischemann prepared and distributed a paper entitled "Some thoughts in preparation for the threshing session on the future of Quaker Oaks Farm."

--Warm thanks were given to Shirley Dackawich for many years of loyal service as she retired from her job as Meeting Host Coordinator.

--We presented a bonus to Erin Vincent in appreciation for her outstanding work cleaning our meetinghouse. She is moving on to further her education. We hired Kay Salgado to replace her.

--The Nominating Committee submitted a recommended list of officers and committees for 2007 to be reviewed and then accepted at the December Meeting for Business.

December

--Ginger Curtis made available an up-dated directory and mailing list for the convenience of our members and attenders.

--When in Meeting for Business we considered the report of the Nominating Committee, questions were raised about the lack of thoroughness in the process we have been following for a long time. Some felt we don't give enough consideration to the qualities needed for the positions and that we don't adhere closely enough to the process described in "Faith and Practice of the Pacific Yearly Meeting." We decided to accept the slate recommended for 2007, to express appreciation to the current committee, and to continue discussion of the issue in the coming year. We specifically decided to form a Naming Committee next June to recommend a Nominating Committee.

On-going

--On the first Sunday of each month, rain or shine, members and attenders of our Meeting joined others to witness for peace on one of two busy Mooney Boulevard corners.

**VISALIA MONTHLY MEETING
OF THE
RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

State of the Meeting Report—2006

Each spring we members and attenders of Visalia Monthly Meeting take time to reflect on the previous year and the general condition of our Meeting. We feel this is more important as a process than it is as a written document.

On Sunday, March 18, 2007, we met and discussed our strengths and our concerns, working toward a sense of how we are faring. Open and honest discussion helped us gain clarity about the state of our Meeting.

Our Strengths

Again this year, we unanimously feel that our greatest strength is that we are a loving community, supporting and nurturing each other even if we have divisive issues. Statements such as “we’re still talking to each other” and “we’re still a loving family” reflect that in spite of disagreements (more about these later), we are able to transcend them and remain good friends. We feel joy that two new families have begun to attend this year, increasing the number of children in our midst. One new attender is the director of our local American Friends Service Committee, which strengthens an important link while bringing us a wonderful person. Dinner groups of four couples each have been meeting periodically in each other’s homes for dinner and fellowship. On Sundays after worship we sit together and share wonderful food prepared by our folks, and as one participant said, our special-occasion potlucks are “legendary.” The highpoint is Easter Sunday, when friends and relatives travel from all over the West to join us and our guests, The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, in a potluck and meeting for worship under the Lovett’s large oak tree. Each of us values this sense of family and feels it is the strongest quality of our Meeting.

Our Meetinghouse in a rustic, peaceful setting and our people, who care truly about peace create a spiritual community that engenders the commitment and energy for our members and attenders to engage in peace and social justice work locally and globally. Although we are small in number, we are involved in many things.

We donate money, individually and collectively, to organizations such as Quaker Bolivia Link, a scholarship in El Salvador, the Ivanhoe Youth Center, Earlham School of Religion, and Habitat for Humanity, and we participate in fund-raising activities such as Crop Walk and the Heifer Project. Members and attenders participate in many projects, such as the Alternatives to Violence Project, counseling for young people regarding the military and CO status, Health Care for All Californians, volunteer mediation at Sequoia Community Mediation Center, and bi-monthly food distribution to the needy. When our area was hit with a devastating freeze this January and many people were without employment, Visalia Friends more than once collected money, bought food and supplies, and delivered them to Tuleville, a neighboring barrio.

Witnessing for peace and justice has always been a strength of our Meeting. Each first Sunday of the month, many of us stand on the corner of Mooney Boulevard and Walnut Avenue joining in a peace vigil with other members of the South Valley Peace Center (an organization we helped start when war with Iraq seemed imminent). Some travel to larger peace demonstrations in other parts of the state. We joined in demonstrations for immigrants’ rights. Sandra Sturdevant, an attender of our Meeting, traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico, to document in photographs the source side of our immigration problem, taking a great risk. Members and attenders frequently contribute letters-to-the-editor and op-ed pieces to local newspapers on issues of peace and social justice. We maintain a billboard next to Route 198 with timely messages, and our Meeting has a frequently up-dated website with information, articles, pictures, and links, including one to Sandra Sturdevant’s gallery.

We were involved in three special projects during the year. When Southern California Edison Company announced the building of a new power line within 100 yards of our Meetinghouse, members and attenders joined other affected parties to become educated and lobby for an alternate route, a move which enhanced good feelings between the Meeting and its neighbors. Secondly, two Meeting families attended Friends General Conference last summer where they studied the problem of global warming. They suggested we spend our

retreat studying and discussing that issue. Planning had been underway to focus on the peak oil problem, so we spent our retreat weekend studying and discussing both issues. Karen Street, a global-warming activist, was invited and led our session. Growing out of this was a decision to make sustaining our environment a major concern for our Meeting. Finally, in June we completed a survey of attitudes about our meetinghouse and grounds, by which we indicated a desire to be included in discussions about the uses of Bill and Beth Lovett's farm as they decide what to do with it. Subsequently Bill and Beth stated a wish to bequeath it to Visalia Friends Meeting who would lease it to a non-profit organization which would use the land in ways consistent with Quaker values. The Meeting would be responsible for oversight.

In looking over all these activities we recognize that we practice well our Quaker faith, but we also are determined not to be comfortable with what we've done and to continue seeking ways to work for peace and justice.

Our Concerns

When we completed a discussion of our strengths, we addressed items of concern. Some of these were specific and practical. Why don't we have toner in our copy machine? Do we have enough brochures out for visitors? How do we communicate to parents not to be uncomfortable when their children are restive during worship? (We love and welcome little children.) Problems of this nature have obvious solutions.

Other concerns reappear each year. A major one is lack of direction and continuity in our children's and youth programs. We have members and attenders who have the gift of working with children and they do a wonderful job; however, because of our small size, we never know how many or if any children will show up on a Sunday, so we can't set up a sequential curriculum. We have lost families who wanted their children exposed to Quaker values and didn't find here an organized program. This troubles us greatly and we continue discussing what to do about it.

Each year we have seekers who visit for awhile and then go away. We wonder if we are in some ways inhospitable, aware that if a group feels a strong bond, they might project an attitude of exclusiveness. On the other hand, trying too hard to "convince" guests might drive them away. Because many members and attenders are growing older, we want to draw younger people and families into our Meeting. Do we help guests feel included in our group?

During the past year we addressed a number of issues regarding the welfare of our community. These included ways to handle end-of-life decisions, improving communication within the Meeting (we created a phone tree.), and writing a policy and providing insurance to protect us as we work with children. Each meeting of the Ministry and Oversight Committee begins with concerns about our members and attenders.

A Rough Year

We had in the past year two contentious happenings: criticism of our nominating process and a decision whether to accept or reject the offer of the Lovett property. When our nominating committee met to draw up a slate, some on the committee felt that enough thought wasn't given to the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates and raised that issue with the Meeting. Our most serious issue is the decision on the property, which is still in process after a number of threshing sessions. These are why the qualification "still" appeared in the statements about how we are getting along.

The nominating issue was aired in Meeting for Business and efforts were made to assure the Nominating Committee Clerk and others that the complaint wasn't personal, recognizing that they were following our "standard practice." A decision was made to enter the nominating process earlier next year by forming a Naming Committee to choose the Nominating Committee in June. A skills list for all in our Meeting is being compiled.

Two issues have arisen in the process to decide about the property. Some people feel that the project is moving along too fast, denying us the chance to consider all our concerns. What happens if the non-profit fails? What ownership responsibilities will we have? What will be our agreement with the non-profit? If we have oversight shouldn't we be setting up the non-profit? The fact that the non-profit is already operating before we have decided has bothered some. A second concern is interference with all a Meeting should be doing by stretching our already active group too thin. Will we be able to take care of our basic responsibilities? On the

other hand, many see this project as an opportunity to pursue our interest in a sustainable environment and as a potential draw for new, younger members.

Our Spiritual Center

One more item concerns us. We are a small meeting, which allows us to be more informal; however, some are concerned that in being informal we move too far from Quaker tradition and practice. Quakers recognize the vital connection between the light we experience in worship and how we live. We understand that; however, some of us lean more toward activism while others value the meditation more. There is concern that we are not making our worship central to all we do. Are we too casual about when we begin our worship? Do we stray too far from “the light” in our oral ministry? Do we form opinions and make decisions on bases other than what we discover in our communal worship? We are tugged between congenial informality and formal Quaker practice, between contemplation and activity. To maintain our closeness, which so far has enabled us to undergo stress and remain loving, we will monitor the quality of our worship as we live in the way of Friends.