

Southern California Quarterly Meeting

State of the Meeting Reports

April 17, 2017

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Introduction

The Ministry and Counsel Committee for Southern California Quarterly Meeting has compiled these State of the Meeting reports from all but 2 of our 13 monthly meetings and worship groups. In submitting our request for the reports this year, we posed the following queries:

- * What are your greatest joys as a meeting?
- * What leadings does your meeting feel most strongly?
- * What troubles or challenges are you facing?
- * Are there any changes you seek for the meeting?
- * How do you put your faith into action?

The 2017 State of the Meeting reports are being presented in two ways:

1. Organized by topic, with a summary and the responses by meeting and worship group, noted in parentheses – this is a new format developed specially for the Spring Gathering presentation, designed to help bring focus to both the common and distinct aspects of our individual spiritual communities.
2. Organized by meeting, including the entire text of each report, with only minor formatting changes for consistency – this is the traditional format we have followed for many years, and this will be shared with Pacific Yearly Meeting for inclusion in the collective State of the Society report.

Our Faith and Practice advises, “The State of the Meeting Report should be a self-examination by the Meeting and its members of their spiritual strengths and weaknesses and of the efforts to foster growth in the spiritual life”. In this report, we will try to honestly answer the five suggested queries on our spiritual vitality. (Orange Grove Monthly Meeting)

Marloma / Long Beach was not able to submit a report this year, and we were not successful in obtaining a contact for Whitleaf Worship Group.

Joys

All of our meetings and worship groups shared that they find joy in their meeting for worship and fellowship. Here are excerpts from the reports:

Claremont – Worship continues to be our center. In recent months, we have felt a gathering and ongoing deepening of ministry. At a time when it is easy to despair, we often find ourselves filled with joy. An experiment with small group discussions around queries has brought a number of us into new friendships and closer community. In the past year, we have welcomed two new families, and our children’s high spirits continue to fill us with wonder. We welcomed back a member who had taken some time away from meeting. Her perspective: “When I returned to Meeting, I found a new, nimble committee structure. I also found that opposition to change and action no longer seem to automatically predominate discussion. The climate feels conducive to growth. In Meeting for Worship, I have a physical sense of roots anchoring my feet deeply in the ground, and the inspired weight of centuries of right practice tangibly present in the room.”

Conejo Valley – One of our greatest joys is the strong sense of community we share among members and attenders. Additionally, a long-time attender has now been accepted as a Member of Orange Grove Monthly Meeting.

We are continuing to grow in faith and in numbers. The “Meetup” social networking app has helped us welcome new attenders who are seeking a spiritual community.

Several of our worship group attend Orange Grove and Santa Barbara Meetings on the First Days we do not meet as the Conejo Valley Worship Group. In return, we welcomed visits from Orange Grove Friends. We enjoy being part of Pacific Yearly Meeting, Fall Fellowship, Spring Gathering and Santa Barbara Retreat. Recently, we joined with Friends from Santa Barbara and Ojai for Quakerism 201 exploration and sharing.

In these uncertain times, we appreciate being part of a community where peace and justice matter, where kindness and compassion are the norm, where diversity is accepted and celebrated, and where we are grateful to be led by the Spirit.

Inland Valley – Our Meeting’s children are our greatest joy, and our strongest priority. We welcome the younger ones shortly before Rise of Meeting, and the older teens attend Meeting for Worship. The number of teens has risen and they actively participate in planning their own activities. We have welcomed two new members, and both are active in Immigration issues. Members and attenders have begun to Clerk new committees or have joined existing ones, which has made our community stronger.

The Women’s March in Riverside was attended by many F(f)riends. It was certainly a joyful occasion.

Meeting for Worship continues to be gratifying and uplifting. In the current political and social situation, many feel overwhelmed. The practice of worshipping together-listening for the Spirit and sharing vocal ministry has helped alleviate our concerns and anxieties. We feel that the Religious Society of Friends is in a good position to help with the challenges facing our society today as we have in the past. As in past years, we sometimes move Worship to an outdoor site, or in members’ homes.

La Jolla – We meet in that which is eternal, letting go of pride, fears, hopes and wishes. Meeting for worship continues to be the joyful center of the life of La Jolla Meeting. We take joy in witnessing the lives of those young people we have sent out into the world and are pleased to see more young adult attenders in Meeting. We are still hoping to attract more children and will be placing paid ads to let families know we are here.

Friends have been faithful in their support of the community. Our well-maintained meetinghouse and adequate financial resources support our community in its work. Lunch and fellowship after meeting for worship are particular joys.

Ojai – Among our greatest joys are the feelings of fellowship and peace during our silent and vocal communication. We are blessed that Val has opened his home as a refuge for us and that his health has improved. One of our members appreciates our group's tolerance and understanding in keeping our shared meals together vegetarian.

Orange County – We frequently experience deep ministry in Meeting for Worship – the sense of a “gathered meeting” is not uncommon. The Meeting provides a safe refuge every week where we can each do our part and experience an "attitude adjustment" from the turmoil in our nation and the world. The loving support from our community is a wonderful container for those who are putting their faith into action.

We delight in the love that we feel in worship, in fellowship, in sharing knowledge and guidance, and in responding to friends in need. More of us are “coming out” as Quakers. Some have found it rewarding to literally wear their Quakerism on their sleeves (using the “Love Thy Neighbor” buttons), thus starting conversations and increasing our visibility.

Orange Grove – One of the greatest joys for Orange Grove is the healthy number of new friends attending the Meeting. They bring new vision and energy to the meeting for worship and our committee work. We have found joy in actively trying to build our community as well. We had a successful retreat which brought those who attended into conversation about our individual beliefs and developed a deeper sense of community. We initiated baby welcoming observances to embrace our young parents. The recognitions of birthdays each month makes us feel more like a family. The consideration of sorrows in the “Afterwords” extension of worship has added depth to our ability to hold each other in the Light.

San Diego – We are pleased that those attending worship have reported strong worship. We usually have a lively social hour following worship. This invites participation that facilitates the development of a spirit infused community.

Santa Barbara – Meeting for Worship has been enhanced by singing during the hour before meeting on the first First day of the month. The musicians join the children for music in Firstday School, then after meeting everyone sings together. Firstday school is without a teacher/helper now, so Friends are volunteering during the search, as we have done for years in collaboration with teacher/helpers. We had a delightful celebration of the fifteenth birthdays of the three teens who have been with us most of their lives. We gave them copies of “Faith and Practice” and “The Prophet” and marveled at their poise, maturity, loving hearts and readiness to serve. These young women are treasures. Occasionally we have had several preteens at meeting, plus a baby boy newly born.

We are fortunate to have received many gifts from past and present Friends that have enabled us to have our own meeting house in a complex that also provides us rental income – especially now, as contributions are down.

Santa Monica – The Meeting community, particularly our silent worship, is a source of comfort, a reliable resource, and a place to rest in chaotic times. A Friend reflected that the community felt like home and family, where they are supported, challenged, held and loved. We experience great joy in Quaker process which brings us together in love and trust. We are thankful for the many vital committees that sustain the Meeting, and offer companionship and opportunity for service. Friends noted the joys of Adult Education programs that featured workshops about the Bible and worship as well as sessions about Leadings, Mary Dyer, Income Inequality and Fox’s Journal. Our children’s education programs are a source of great joy; we are grateful to our Quaker teachers for this ministry.

Leadings

Most reports reflect the acknowledgement and support for leadings, most of which are individual, not corporate.

Inland Valley – Historically, our Meeting has had a leading in supporting people from Central America who have been driven from their homes by poverty or violence. More recently, we have become concerned about the plight of refugees from other parts of the world. We have restarted our Peace and Social Order Committee which is meeting on a regular basis. There are many ideas and questions to explore.

Many in our community have felt led to work with other faith groups. Our nation's troubled times have motivated these efforts. Meeting with others of different faiths has made it easier to see that of God in others. We are reminded that we have much more in common with other faiths than differences.

La Jolla – Adult Religious Education Committee organizes weekly sessions to prepare us for worship and a monthly Saturday education program. With many among us new to Friends, this education in Quaker practice is important. Meeting encourages and subsidizes attendance at gatherings of the greater Quaker community, knowing that it is another way to deepen our understanding of Quaker process and practice.

The actions of individual Friends bring Quaker values into the work of many other groups. Some Friends pursue their leadings with the help of a newly organized Leadings committee, a successor to our Peace and Social Order Committee. Several independent concerns were united this year into corporate action through an Asylees, Immigrants, Refugees (AIR) Committee, assisting Meeting families sheltering people in their homes.

Ojai – Some of us have strong feelings about having more group actions to build connections. Individuals all have their own commitments, but a desire was heard to consider being a presence together in some kind of group action in the future. What that may evolve into isn't seen at this time.

Orange County – Our meeting tends to quietly support individual members and attenders who have strong leadings; in a sense, the interconnectedness of our community is our strongest leading. We share a deep appreciation for the Meeting's absolute commitment to the equality of all people and yearn for a Quakerly corporate response to the frightening changes we see taking place.

We want to make ourselves known to those who might yearn for what we offer, and also we wonder how to do outreach and be consistent with our commitment not to proselytize.

Santa Monica – We are relatively effective in a variety of individual leadings, but struggle with identifying and acting upon our corporate leadings. Many Friends noted that our work about Economic Inequality, including the related blog and the approved Minute, represent a real possibility and opportunity for a corporate leading. We continue to search for who we are as Quakers in the world around us. What is our core? What are we doing together? A Friend spoke of “the past five years as ones of self-discovery, coming to know our identity as a community and faith organization. This will support us as we are drawn into the world and begin to experience an expanding sense of community.”

Challenges

Many of our meetings face challenges with decreasing size and therefore the effect of losing any of its members or attenders. This is especially true the smaller the group. Las Vegas and Ojai speak for our worship groups:

Las Vegas – We deal with the graces of age and life with dignity and minor support from other Friends, and stronger support from other friends and family. Challenges in the form of death, illness, relocation, and everyday life present each member with the opportunity for spiritual growth.

Claremont – Claremont Friends have responded to the challenges of an aging membership, fewer participants and diminished energy by transforming our committee structure, reducing the number of committees from twenty to eight. The process was extensive and inclusive. After a Meeting retreat followed by five threshing sessions, the plan combines committees, subsuming several functions under one general category. Instead of an adult discussion committee and a children's education committee, for instance, we now have a broader Spiritual Growth and Education committee. One result is a dialogue on ways that the Meeting as a whole can take greater ownership for Children's Meeting. After several months with the new committees, we recognize the need for some mid-course adjustments. We are generally pleased, however, with the new energy arising within the meeting.

Conejo Valley – In reflecting on our troubles and challenges, we hold in the Light the health concerns of f/Friends and offer support as we are able.

Inland Valley – A continuing concern has been finding a permanent home for our Meeting. After many attempts to get the City of Riverside to allow us to build affordable housing and a Meeting Site on our property, we have come to the realization that this will not be possible. We have sold that property, which has placed us in a better financial position to support buying an existing structure. We are concerned, however, that we may be forced to leave our current location before we have located a suitable place.

Because of changes in members and attenders, our donations have decreased. This has forced to make difficult financial decisions, which we hope will be eased in the future.

La Jolla – Meeting continues to face challenges. Finding Friends both willing and able to serve on committees remains difficult. We feel deeply the deaths this year of Maria Elena Vidana and Karen Thomas, loving Friends who insisted we look racism and bias in the face. We know we need to make Meeting a safe and welcoming place for everyone. The political state of the country presents Meeting with particular difficulties at present. Friends often feel called to respond to world events but we do not all share the same political orientation. It is our challenge to maintain open ears and an open heart in a world where fear, anger, and violence seem to prevail. We still feel called to answer that of God in every person.

Our meeting does not always meet internal conflict head on. We wish to do better but sometimes still fall short. Recent efforts in search for healing and unity over past conflicts are showing progress, but work still remains. We acknowledge that it is not enough to talk love and peace. The hard part is in living it. We do that best when we seek unity in the Divine.

Ojai – We also find we are distracted by late arrivals and people having trouble settling in to worship. Many feel upset about the current political environment.

We have a desire for more growth and the wisdom to work together, so that everyone is able to respect each other's differences.

Of course, there are other challenges as well, both internal to the meeting community and external-what is happening in our communities, our nation and the world:

Orange County – Many of us care deeply about and are working to address the problems impacting those who are most vulnerable in the current political climate. We also want to ensure we are welcoming and sensitive to those who may not hold our liberal opinions.

Our ability to keep a nurturing silence in the meeting space during certain times (such as the transition between QE and worship) has grown, but remains a concern to some members.

We will not have an Easter Retreat program this year for the first time in many years as too few people signed up. We are exploring alternative programs that more will be able to attend.

We wrestle with the desire many of us share to acquire our own property, and many questions remain as to how we might best nurture that future.

Orange Grove – We feel led to be good stewards of our property, using it wisely while remaining financially stable. Members and attenders have taken advantage of our Special Grants and Travel & Scholarship Funds for individual spiritual enrichment. The children's program is precious to us. Having the children enter at the end of the hour has been beneficial to them as they experience settled worship and occasionally minister. But the program itself needs more consistency and active participation by Meeting and we are challenged to address this.

Some other challenges we face include a great need to deepen our worship when current events dominate our thoughts. We struggle with how to help friends minister from their own authentic experience. We are challenged to lovingly address long-term conflict in the Meeting and how to face it faithfully and constructively. We have concerns about filling our many committee responsibilities with fewer people when both old and new friends have difficulty finding time. We have experimented with laying down standing committees until the Spirit rises to support them again. We struggle with how to make our new members and attenders feel a vital part of the Meeting when committee work has traditionally been the key to building that bond.

San Diego – We have no children's program and no children or teens who regularly attend meeting. We are encouraged by recent attendance of children and of queries from parents. It would be wonderful to have regular attendance of children and young people.

Attendance at meetings for worship has increased to about 12 per week. This has not increased membership or financial contributions. We frequently have persons who attend meeting who are visiting or temporarily staying in San Diego. Many weeks members and regulate attenders are only half of those present for worship. We have difficulties filling committees and actually doing the work of the meeting. The monthly meeting for business often serves as a “committee of the whole”.

Santa Barbara – A major concern within meeting has been fewer attenders at meeting for Worship, Business and committee meetings and after meeting events. Many come for awhile and then stop. Some are students at local colleges or the University and leave at graduation. We have lost several Friends to early deaths and others are not able to attend due to long term illnesses. We are an inclusive meeting, with no gender issues. We accept same sex marriage with a warm welcome, but find ourselves with few attenders of color. The critical question is how to encourage participation of everyone in our meetings? Suggestions were: inclusion of new attenders in conversations during Fellowship after Meeting, outreach when not attending, public notices, more potlucks and more involvement in each others lives.

This difficult time finds us ever more in need of the quiet of Meeting for Worship with Friends. We seek the Spirit which is ever present in us, and becomes more profound and supportive as we gather together. We thank the Friends of the past for their help and inspiration and seek new Friends who will help us build the Peaceable Kingdom, here in our hearts and on this beautiful earth.

Santa Monica – We grappled with many challenges, including discernment about a potential new renter, the functioning of our Children's Education Committee, on-going issues about vocal

ministry, the need to be a supportive, healing community, and the need to be more welcoming. In discerning whether to rent, we discovered that we couldn't come to unity about a potential new renter, although we did assert the value of Stewardship in the use of our meeting-house. As part of this rental process and for the first time in memory, we had a searching meeting with our neighbors, listening and reflecting on their concerns about our rentals, and thereby expanding our sense of community to include neighbors.

In addition, we face the challenge of becoming a more welcoming community to our frequent newcomers and visitors. Friends suggested offering more sessions about Quaker process and versions of Quakerism 101. We would like to see more diversity and younger people as the community skews older. We do greet newcomers and offer a table with literature and a Friend to answer questions, but want to improve our follow-up. One Friend expressed concern about "our lack of purposeful growth." Another Friend said that we are "a community whose warmth and support are insufficient to reach and soothe the individual desperation that often lives buried in plain sight."

Finally, among other challenges, we mourn the untimely death of a beloved member and hold in our hearts our Friends who are dealing with serious personal and family health issues. We pray and wonder: how can we approach these various challenges together, under the guidance of the Spirit, in the Light, and with compassion and love?

Changes

Claremont – We trust in the Light to open us to further possibilities and show us the way forward.

Conejo Valley – We have settled into our new meeting location in a private home with beautiful drought-tolerant flowers greeting us, and feel a sense of stability with our core attenders.

Inland Valley – One of our oldest members and a family with children have moved. However, we have had many new people attending regularly. Overall, we are trying to organize to be more effective and more inclusive.

La Jolla – We are an experimental religion, and we have been experimenting in our practices. We are looking at possible ways to be more welcoming, especially to children and young adults. Ending worship with a time for joys and concerns has allowed us to both deepen the preceding worship time and to allow us to know and nurture each other.

Ojai – We lost a long-time attender recently and hope to engage everyone so that all will be able to worship together again.

Orange County – Some feel there are too few people doing the work of the Meeting. We need to consider how we engage with new people and encourage active attenders to become members, ensuring that every one of our attenders and members has the sense of belonging to a beloved community.

The Meeting is grateful for the children who have become a regular part of our lives this past year, and we continue to miss the vitality of more children being present. We have activity and educational programs for all ages available every Sunday in the hope they will be needed.

We are inspired to diversify and enhance the material we cover in Quaker Explorations (adult religious education) to stimulate our thinking and encourage the development of vocal ministry. We seek to help everyone share responsibility for the quality of our worship.

Orange Grove – Having the children enter at the end of the hour has been beneficial to them as they experience settled worship and occasionally minister. But the program itself needs more consistency and active participation by Meeting and we are challenged to address this.

San Diego – Visitors and new attenders are impressed with our new facility, which is shared with the US Mexico Border Program of the American Friends Service Committee and the Peace Resource Center of San Diego, as well as San Diego Church of the Brethren, the fourth partner in the building. During the past year, we completed construction of a canopy solar system that both shades the parking area and should generate enough electricity to supply most of the energy needs for the entire campus each year.

Santa Barbara – As Santa Barbara Friends gather on First Day Meeting for Worship we are blessed with a silence that brings us into the spiritual depth of our meeting. Often this silence is unbroken. However, many share their thoughts and concerns during introductions, when “afterthoughts” are encouraged. This “afterthoughts” time has become an important part of our meeting, allowing Friends to share thoughts that they may have felt were not yet fully formed enough to break the silence. The question is whether “after thoughts” sharing significantly affects Spirit led sharing during Meetings for Worship. Both ways of sharing are important to our meeting. Seekers meetings have been suggested for better understanding and discernment.

Santa Monica – We have taken steps to protect and save our valuable archives. We are in the process of finding a new daytime renter in order to assure our financial stability. We have established an outreach sub-committee to begin to engage in more effective presence in the larger community.

How do we put our faith into action?

Many in our community are extensively and individually involved in work that puts their faith into action. However, corporate actions are more limited among our meetings and worship groups. There is a recurring desire for deeper and broader corporate action, coupled with a concern for a lack of direction in some cases and also by a lack of people willing and able to serve in roles on committees such as the Quarterly Peace & Social Order and the corresponding and related monthly meeting committees.

Claremont – In finding ways to help those in our community who may be targets of injustice and hate, we were guided by words of one of our members, “We need to first ask them what help they would like from us.” In this light, we brought together in a retreat leaders from the Islamic community, from an organization working with refugees and undocumented workers, and an agency providing food, shelter, and job-training to those with low incomes. One need was recently brought to us by a member who has been studying the Qur’an at a local Mosque and developing a relationship with teachers at their school. She learned of the school’s need for some computer hardware, which our meeting was happy to provide. A new participant in the Meeting has offered to install software so that the students can write in Arabic. Another Friend has joined an interfaith refugee resettlement team and is helping a Syrian woman learn English.

Multiple threshing sessions have helped us to reach unity on criteria for giving and integrating the Outreach budget with core Quaker values. It is encouraging to see Members and Attenders coming together to discuss how we can live out our testimonies both through our giving and our personal involvement. Similarly, our grounds continue to be a source of ministry in the community, through for example our ongoing relationship with the Claremont Homeless Advocacy Program and the growth and burgeoning of our new landscape.

Conejo Valley – As a Worship Group, individuals bear Quaker Witness to the World through their lives as they are led. Some of these activities include being a part of the Afghan Girls School Committee, Alternatives to Violence facilitation in California Men's Colony, as well as other prison ministries, and contributing to food rescue collection and distribution including delivery to home-bound seniors. Our members support our local Islamic Center, as well as the wider Muslim community, and maintain interfaith and ecumenical connections with numerous spiritual and community service groups.

Inland Valley – Many members are involved in many other organizations that fight for social justice. We meet with others who are affected by discrimination, seeking and finding that of God in them. We recognize that everyone in Meeting has something to offer: Commitment, respect, empathy, compassion, openness, and action, including our youth. We know it is required that we listen carefully to each other.

Ojai reflects the general sense of not having a clear direction for our social concerns:

Some of us have strong feelings about having more group actions to build connections. Individuals all have their own commitments, but a desire was heard to consider being a presence together in some kind of group action in the future. What that may evolve into isn't seen at this time.

Larger meetings have a lot going on:

Orange County – A newly formed FCNL Advocacy Team is building rapidly from the interest and conviction of a small group in the Meeting to a much larger team that can make a real difference.

We continue our participation in: the OC Pride LGBT Festival, the Global Village, the CROP Walk, the distribution of homeless hygiene kits, an ongoing relationship in support of the domestic violence shelter Human Options, and the annual Christmas project, which this year supported Friendly Water for the World.

Orange Grove – These challenging times have led our Meeting to be more socially active and more engaged in putting our faith in action. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee is thriving and present on weekends and weeknights in the meetinghouse, in congressional offices, at city council meetings and on marches. Many individuals as well are taking their part in social justice actions in the local community and the broader world.

...by thoughtful use of our energy, we can build the strength and commitment of our Meeting to keep the Quaker Light alive and growing in the 21st Century”.

Santa Barbara – Concerns are carried by many Friends within our meeting. The Alternatives to Violence Project in California has grown to the point where it no longer is under the care of the meeting, while some in meeting are active facilitators. Other concerns addressed by Friends include: Truth and Recruitment in several high schools in Santa Barbara County; monthly vigils at Vandenberg Air Force Base; Prison Visitation; an attendee at Standing Rock Encampment and the Indian March in Washington, and now working on divestment; cooking for the homeless at Transition House; participation in a local clergy and laity group working to decriminalize mental illness and provide care in the county of Santa Barbara; and the Quaker reading group.

Santa Monica – Many of us are politically and socially active, putting our individual faith into action. Meeting is an integral part of many Friends’ lives, and Friends spoke to how the presence of Quaker values and beliefs has changed them. One Friend offered: “I try to be a more attentive listener as I am reminded to see that of God in others.” A Friend noted “the presence of individual Friends’ projects reflecting the testimonies.” How can we get all of these people together and create synergy? How do we use our tools like worship, clearness committees, and Quaker process to enact our faith? Citing George Fox’s *Journal*, Friends urge us “...to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.”

Claremont Monthly Meeting

State of the Meeting, 2017

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Conejo Valley Worship Group
Under the care of Orange Grove Monthly Meeting
State of the Meeting, 2017

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We have settled into our new meeting location in a private home with beautiful drought-tolerant flowers greeting us, and feel a sense of stability with our core attenders.

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Challenges: a continuing concern has been finding a permanent home for our Meeting. After many attempts to get the City of Riverside to allow us to build affordable housing and a Meeting Site on our property, we have come to the realization that this will not be possible. We have sold that property, which has placed us in a better financial position to support buying an existing structure. We are concerned, however, that we may be forced to leave our current location before we have located a suitable place.

Because of changes in members and attenders, our donations have decreased. This has forced to make difficult financial decisions, which we hope will be eased in the future.

Changes: One of our oldest members and a family with children have moved. However, we have had many new people attending regularly. Overall, we are trying to organize to be more effective and more inclusive.

Faith in Action: Many members are involved in many other organizations that fight for social justice. We meet with others who are affected by discrimination, seeking and finding that of God in them. We recognize that everyone in Meeting has something to offer: Commitment, respect, empathy, compassion, openness, and action, including our youth. We know it is required that we listen carefully to each other.

La Jolla Monthly Meeting

State of the Meeting, 2017

We meet in that which is eternal, letting go of pride, fears, hopes and wishes. Meeting for worship continues to be the joyful center of the life of La Jolla Meeting. We take joy in witnessing the lives of those young people we have sent out into the world and are pleased to see more young adult attenders in Meeting. We are still hoping to attract more children and will be placing paid ads to let families know we are here.

Friends have been faithful in their support of the community. Our well-maintained meetinghouse and adequate financial resources support our community in its work. Lunch and fellowship after meeting for worship are particular joys.

We are an experimental religion, and we have been experimenting in our practices. We are looking at possible ways to be more welcoming, especially to children and young adults. Ending worship with a time for joys and concerns has allowed us to both deepen the preceding worship time and to allow us to know and nurture each other. Our meeting cooperates with numerous community groups as well.

Adult Religious Education Committee organizes weekly sessions to prepare us for worship and a monthly Saturday education program. With many among us new to Friends, this education in Quaker practice is important. Meeting encourages and subsidizes attendance at gatherings of the greater Quaker community, knowing that it is another way to deepen our understanding of Quaker process and practice.

The actions of individual Friends bring Quaker values into the work of many other groups. Some Friends pursue their leadings with the help of a newly organized Leadings committee, a successor to our Peace and Social Order Committee. Several independent concerns were united this year into corporate action through an Asylees, Immigrants, Refugees (AIR) Committee, assisting Meeting families sheltering people in their homes.

Meeting continues to face challenges. Finding Friends both willing and able to serve on committees remains difficult. We feel deeply the deaths this year of Maria Elena Vidana and Karen Thomas, loving Friends who insisted we look racism and bias in the face. We know we need to make Meeting a safe and welcoming place for everyone. The political state of the country presents Meeting with particular difficulties at present. Friends often feel called to respond to world events but we do not all share the same political orientation. It is our challenge to maintain open ears and an open heart in a world where fear, anger, and violence seem to prevail. We still feel called to answer that of God in every person.

Our meeting does not always meet internal conflict head on. We wish to do better but sometimes still fall short. Recent efforts in search for healing and unity over past conflicts are showing progress, but work still remains. We acknowledge that it is not enough to talk love and peace. The hard part is in living it. We do that best when we seek unity in the Divine.

Las Vegas Worship Group

State of the Meeting, 2017

The Las Vegas Meeting continues to gather in the same location: a quiet room of meditation, prayer and community surrounded by others' worship, Sunday School, and cars exiting nearby.

We deal with the graces of age and life with dignity and minor support from other Friends, and stronger support from other friends and family. Challenges in the form of death, illness, relocation, and everyday life present each member with the opportunity for spiritual growth.

We gather each Sunday for worship, but maintain minimal contact through the week. Sunday mornings consist of time for worship and informal discussion; we do not have business meetings, second hour education or worship sharing.

Ojai Worship Group

*Under the care of Santa Barbara Monthly Meeting
State of the Worship Group, 2017*

Our small Worship Group continues to seek a Spiritual Experience through our 45 minutes of silent meditation. Sharing our experiences sometimes becomes a Quaker discussion. Our sharing of Joys and Sorrows brings us closer to knowing each other and also brings uplifting support to group individuals and the group collectively. We are saddened at the loss of attendance by an individual whose uplifting spiritual messages were very enriching and welcomed. We were happy to welcome a new Friend who has joined us recently. Our Worship Group has remained committed to helping and supporting each other through illness and loss. The strength of each attender, through the inner spirit, is abundantly shared. The care of each other is witnessed.

Among our greatest joys are the feelings of fellowship and peace during our silent and vocal communication. We are blessed that Val has opened his home as a refuge for us and that his health has improved. One of our members appreciates our group's tolerance and understanding in keeping our shared meals together vegetarian.

Some of us have strong feelings about having more group actions to build connections. Individuals all have their own commitments, but a desire was heard to consider being a presence together in some kind of group action in the future. What that may evolve into isn't seen at this time.

We have challenges surrounding the passing of time, health, and isolation that burden us collectively and individually. We also find we are distracted by late arrivals and people having trouble settling in to worship. Many feel upset about the current political environment.

We have a desire for more growth and the wisdom to work together, so that everyone is able to respect each other's differences. We lost a long-time attender recently and hope to engage everyone so that all will be able to worship together again.

Orange County Friends Meeting

State of the Meeting, 2017

Joys

We frequently experience deep ministry in Meeting for Worship – the sense of a “gathered meeting” is not uncommon. The Meeting provides a safe refuge every week where we can each do our part and experience an "attitude adjustment" from the turmoil in our nation and the world. The loving support from our community is a wonderful container for those who are putting their faith into action.

We delight in the love that we feel in worship, in fellowship, in sharing knowledge and guidance, and in responding to friends in need. More of us are “coming out” as Quakers. Some have found it rewarding to literally wear their Quakerism on their sleeves (using the “Love Thy Neighbor” buttons), thus starting conversations and increasing our visibility.

Leadings

Our meeting tends to quietly support individual members and attenders who have strong leadings; in a sense, the interconnectedness of our community is our strongest leading. We share a deep appreciation for the Meeting’s absolute commitment to the equality of all people and yearn for a Quakerly corporate response to the frightening changes we see taking place.

We continue to seek growth as a Meeting, strongly linked to the need for the right home.

Challenges and Concerns

Many of us care deeply about and are working to address the problems impacting those who are most 5 have an Easter Retreat program this year for the first time in many years as too few people signed up. We are exploring alternative programs that more will be able to attend.

We wrestle with the desire many of us share to acquire our own property, and many questions remain as to how we might best nurture that future.

Changes we seek

Some feel there are too few people doing the work of the Meeting. We need to consider how we engage with new people and encourage active attenders to become members, ensuring that every one of our attenders and members has the sense of belonging to a beloved community.

The Meeting is grateful for the children who have become a regular part of our lives this past year, and we continue to miss the vitality of more children being present. We have activity and educational programs for all ages available every Sunday in the hope they will be needed.

We want to make ourselves known to those who might yearn for what we offer, and also we wonder how to do outreach and be consistent with our commitment not to proselytize.

We are inspired to diversify and enhance the material we cover in Quaker Explorations (adult religious education) to stimulate our thinking and encourage the development of vocal ministry. We seek to help everyone share responsibility for the quality of our worship.

Faith into action

A newly formed FCNL Advocacy Team is building rapidly from the interest and conviction of a small group in the Meeting to a much larger team that can make a real difference.

We continue our participation in: the OC Pride LGBT Festival, the Global Village, the CROP Walk, the distribution of homeless hygiene kits, an ongoing relationship in support of the domestic violence shelter Human Options, and the annual Christmas project, which this year supported Friendly Water for the World.

Orange Grove Monthly Meeting

State of the Meeting, 2017

Our Faith and Practice advises, “The State of the Meeting Report should be a self-examination by the Meeting and its members of their spiritual strengths and weaknesses and of the efforts to foster growth in the spiritual life”. In this report, we will try to honestly answer the five suggested queries on our spiritual vitality.

One of the greatest joys for Orange Grove is the healthy number of new friends attending the Meeting. They bring new vision and energy to the meeting for worship and our committee work. We have found joy in actively trying to build our community as well. We had a successful retreat which brought those who attended into conversation about our individual beliefs and developed a deeper sense of community. We initiated baby welcoming observances to embrace our young parents. The recognitions of birthdays each month makes us feel more like a family. The consideration of sorrows in the “Afterwords” extension of worship has added depth to our ability to hold each other in the Light.

These challenging times have led our Meeting to be more socially active and more engaged in putting our faith in action. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee is thriving and present on weekends and weeknights in the meetinghouse, in congressional offices, at city council meetings and on marches. Many individuals as well are taking their part in social justice actions in the local community and the broader world.

We feel led to be good stewards of our property, using it wisely while remaining financially stable. Members and attenders have taken advantage of our Special Grants and Travel & Scholarship Funds for individual spiritual enrichment. The children’s program is precious to us. Having the children enter at the end of the hour has been beneficial to them as they experience settled worship and occasionally minister. But the program itself needs more consistency and active participation by Meeting and we are challenged to address this.

Some other challenges we face include a great need to deepen our worship when current events dominate our thoughts. We struggle with how to help friends minister from their own authentic experience. We are challenged to lovingly address long-term conflict in the Meeting and how to face it faithfully and constructively. We have concerns about filling our many committee responsibilities with fewer people when both old and new friends have difficulty finding time. We have experimented with laying down standing committees until the Spirit rises to support them again. We struggle with how to make our new members and attenders feel a vital part of the Meeting when committee work has traditionally been the key to building that bond.

We are faithfully trying to be true to the spirit of our Quaker roots and to the many people who have set an example for us at Orange Grove. We conclude with the same thought as we closed last year’s report, “by thoughtful use of our energy, we can build the strength and commitment of our Meeting to keep the Quaker Light alive and growing in the 21st Century”.

San Diego Friends Meeting

State of the Meeting, 2017

The state of San Diego Meeting is mixed. We are pleased that those attending worship have reported strong worship. We usually have a lively social hour following worship. This invites participation that facilitates the development of a spirit infused community.

Visitors and new attenders are impressed with our facility, which is shared with the US Mexico Border Program of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the Peace Resource Center of San Diego as well as San Diego Church of the Brethren, the fourth partner in the building. During the past year we completed construction of a canopy solar system that both shades the parking area and should generate enough electricity to supply most of the energy needs for the entire campus each year.

We have no children's program and no children or teens who regularly attend meeting. We are encouraged by recent attendance of children and of queries from parents. It would be wonderful to have regular attendance of children and young people.

Attendance at meetings for worship has increased to about twelve per week. This has not increased membership or financial contributions. We frequently have persons attend meeting who are visiting or temporarily staying in San Diego. Many weeks members and regular attenders are only half of those present for worship. We have had difficulties filling committees and actually doing the work of the meeting. The monthly meeting for business often serves as a "committee of the whole".

Santa Barbara Monthly Meeting

State of the Meeting, 2017

As Santa Barbara Friends gather on Firstday Meeting for Worship we are blessed with a silence that brings us into the spiritual depth of our meeting. Often this silence is unbroken. However many share their thoughts and concerns during introductions, when “afterthoughts” are encouraged. This “afterthoughts” time has become an important part of our meeting, allowing Friends to share thoughts that they may have felt were not yet fully formed enough to break the silence. The question is whether “after thoughts” sharing significantly affects Spirit led sharing during Meetings for Worship. Both ways of sharing are important to our meeting. Seekers meetings have been suggested for better understanding and discernment.

Meeting for Worship has been enhanced by singing during the hour before meeting on the first Firstday of the month. The musicians join the children for music in Firstday School, then after meeting everyone sings together. Firstday school is without a teacher/helper now, so Friends are volunteering during the search, as we have done for years in collaboration with teacher/helpers. We had a delightful celebration of the fifteenth birthdays of the three teens who have been with us most of their lives. We gave them copies of “Faith and Practice” and “The Prophet” and marveled at their poise, maturity, loving hearts and readiness to serve. These young women are treasures. Occasionally we have had several preteens at meeting, plus a baby boy newly born.

A major concern within meeting has been fewer attenders at meeting for Worship, Business and committee meetings and after meeting events. Many come for awhile and then stop. Some are students at local colleges or the University and leave at graduation. We have lost several Friends to early deaths and others are not able to attend due to long term illnesses. We are an inclusive meeting, with no gender issues. We accept same sex marriage with a warm welcome, but find ourselves with few attenders of color. The critical question is how to encourage participation of everyone in our meetings? Suggestions were: inclusion of new attenders in conversations during Fellowship after Meeting, outreach when not attending, public notices, more potlucks and more involvement in each others lives.

We are fortunate to have received many gifts from past and present Friends that have enabled us to have our own meeting house in a complex that also provides us rental income – especially now, as contributions are down. Concerns are carried by many Friends within our meeting. The Alternatives to Violence Project in California has grown to the point where it no longer is under the care of the meeting, while some in meeting are active facilitators. Other concerns addressed by Friends include: Truth and Recruitment in several high schools in Santa Barbara County; monthly vigils at Vandenberg Air Force Base; Prison Visitation; an attendee at Standing Rock Encampment and the Indian March in Washington, and now working on divestment; cooking for the homeless at Transition House; participation in a local clergy and laity group working to decriminalize mental illness and provide care in the county of Santa Barbara; and the Quaker reading group.

This difficult time finds us ever more in need of the quiet of Meeting for Worship with Friends. We seek the Spirit which is ever present in us, and becomes more profound and supportive as we gather together. We thank the Friends of the past for their help and inspiration and seek new Friends who will help us build the Peaceable Kingdom, here in our hearts and on this beautiful earth.

Santa Monica Monthly Meeting

State of the Meeting, 2017

Joys: The Meeting community, particularly our silent worship, is a source of comfort, a reliable resource, and a place to rest in chaotic times. A Friend reflected that the community felt like home and family, where they are supported, challenged, held and loved. We experience great joy in Quaker process which brings us together in love and trust. We are thankful for the many vital committees that sustain the Meeting, and offer companionship and opportunity for service. Friends noted the joys of Adult Education programs that featured workshops about the Bible and worship as well as sessions about Leadings, Mary Dyer, Income Inequality and Fox's *Journal*. Our children's education programs are a source of great joy; we are grateful to our Quaker teachers for this ministry.

Leadings: We are relatively effective in a variety of individual leadings, but struggle with identifying and acting upon our corporate leadings. Many Friends noted that our work about Economic Inequality, including the related blog and the approved Minute, represent a real possibility and opportunity for a corporate leading. We continue to search for who we are as Quakers in the world around us. What is our core? What are we doing together? A Friend spoke of "the past five years as ones of self-discovery, coming to know our identity as a community and faith organization. This will support us as we are drawn into the world and begin to experience an expanding sense of community."

Challenges: We grappled with many challenges, including discernment about a potential new renter, the functioning of our Children's Education Committee, on-going issues about vocal ministry, the need to be a supportive, healing community, and the need to be more welcoming. In discerning whether to rent, we discovered that we couldn't come to unity about a potential new renter, although we did assert the value of Stewardship in the use of our meeting-house. As part of this rental process and for the first time in memory, we had a searching meeting with our neighbors, listening and reflecting on their concerns about our rentals, and thereby expanding our sense of community to include neighbors. In addition, we face the challenge of becoming a more welcoming community to our frequent newcomers and visitors. Friends suggested offering more sessions about Quaker process and versions of Quakerism 101. We would like to see more diversity and younger people as the community skews older. We do greet newcomers and offer a table with literature and a Friend to answer questions, but want to improve our follow-up. One Friend expressed concern about "our lack of purposeful growth." Another Friend said that we are "a community whose warmth and support are insufficient to reach and soothe the individual desperation that often lives buried in plain sight." Finally, among other challenges, we mourn the untimely death of a beloved member and hold in our hearts our Friends who are dealing with serious personal and family health issues. We pray and wonder: how can we approach these various challenges together, under the guidance of the Spirit, in the Light, and with compassion and love?

Changes: We have taken steps to protect and save our valuable archives. We are in the process of finding a new daytime renter in order to assure our financial stability. We have established an outreach sub-committee to begin to engage in more effective presence in the larger community.

Faith into Action: Many of us are politically and socially active, putting our individual faith into action. Meeting is an integral part of many Friends' lives, and Friends spoke to how the presence of Quaker values and beliefs has changed them. One Friend offered: "I try to be a more attentive listener as I am reminded to see that of God in others." A Friend noted "the presence of individual Friends' projects reflecting the testimonies." How can we get all of these people together and create synergy? How do we use our tools like worship, clearness committees, and Quaker process to enact our faith? Citing George Fox's *Journal*, Friends urge us "...to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one."