

Pacific Yearly Meeting
Latin American Concerns Committee
Report to Annual Session (AS) 2023

In 1997, PYM Annual Session established a standing Latin America Concerns Committee to gather and disseminate information to Pacific and other Yearly Meetings regarding Friends groups and service projects in Latin America with special attention to Casa de los Amigos in Mexico City, El Salvador Projects and Guatemala Friends Scholarship Program (Progresá). The intention is to support rather than replace spirit-led projects already supported by Monthly Meetings, Worship Groups and individual Friends. In 2017, the Undocumented Student Program of Sacramento Meeting became the fourth project in LACC.

Casa de los Amigos

Casa de los Amigos is a Quaker Center for Peace and International Understanding in Mexico City and the historic home of the Mexico City Monthly Meeting. The Casa remains paralyzed by an ongoing institutional crisis that began in 2019 when a former director of the organization illegally removed the majority of the Board (Asamblea) without their knowledge and hired a new director unfamiliar with Quaker work. Since then, most programs have ceased, most partners cut ties, and the building has been occupied. Further, it appears that the economic reserves of the organization were withdrawn in 2017 and 2018 and remain unaccounted for. About a year ago many of the people who instigated the crisis have ceased their involvement. The occupants are now overseen by Miguel Angel Lomeli, the accountant of the Casa at the time of the Crisis, and his uncle Horacio Peña, a programmed Quaker from Northern Mexico. The Board works diligently to return the Casa to its community and mission by attempting a solution directly with the occupants while also persisting in the legal work necessary to remove them. Please consider joining our newsletter email list by emailing asamblea@casadelosamigos.org or visiting www.casadelosamigos.org.

El Salvador Projects

Political problems in El Salvador have made our director Robert Broz continue to keep a low profile, this after basic constitutional rights were removed by congress as a way for the government to combat criminal and gang activities. The initial declaration of March 27, 2022 is still in effect today with more than 61,000 thousand arrests including now around 3000 cases of people with no known ties to criminal activities. The temporary law has now been used to quiet 5 leaders of ADES, a communal association in Cabañas who had been publicly criticizing allowing mining that would contaminate the water source for thousands in the area. This is the first clear case that the law is being used to arrest anyone who opposes president Bukele and his New Ideas Party.

In 2023 our work continues providing financial support in a no interest student loan to 18 university students, providing a stipend to one teacher in the K-12 school in El Barrio as well support for four teachers who provide extra classes to junior and senior high school students on two Saturdays of each month. Our coed student house in San Salvador now back open with no covid-19 restrictions although all residents must have their vaccines. It looks like 18 of the 22 beds will be used as our president has ordered that all schools return to normal in person classes.

Although we are currently in the process of updating our website you can still follow our work visiting www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org, or see us on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/pafmelsalprojects>. You are also welcome to write to our Project Director, Robert Broz, at rpbroz@gmail.com, or Committee Clerk Hulda Muaka, at huldamuaka@hotmail.com

Guatemala Friends Scholarship Committee (PROGRESA)

Higher education in Guatemala experienced a crisis in 2022 when the government appointed a person known to be corrupt to head the University of San Carlos, the only public university in Guatemala. A faculty and student protest resulted in a shutdown and thousands of students lost one or two semesters. Several Progresas students were affected resulting in increased staff work and cost as students needed to repeat classes. Despite this setback, Progresas served 92 students (67 women and 25 men). Of these, 15 graduated. In October, Progresas staff attended training in how to assist people who have experienced trauma. This has increased their ability to address the emotional needs of students who have experienced trauma. We feel that as an organization, we are now better able to serve our students. In December, we held our first in-person Student Conference in 3 years with almost 100 in attendance. There was a variety of activities and sports that were enjoyed by all. An alumnus/board member awards to the 3 students with the highest grades. Alumnus/board president and former Vice-Minister of Education in Guatemala, Hector Canto encouraged students to be positive instruments of change. We are very pleased to see the active participation of alumni in Progresas. This year we are celebrating our 50th anniversary in December. Also in December, we will be offering Teaching English, an opportunity for volunteers to spend a week with our students in Antigua, Guatemala. Contacts: www.guatemalafriends.org or Miguel Costop, Director at progresas3@gmail.com or Donna Smith, Clerk, Guatemala Committee, Redwood Forest Meeting, dforestvil@aol.com.

Sacramento Friends Meeting, Undocumented Student scholarship Project

Sacramento Friends Meeting has been working to support undocumented students at Sacramento State University since 2010. Starting in 2022 our scholarship award was raised from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per year to keep up with inflation and students' needs. The scholarship is renewable and available to undergraduate and graduate students. In the current academic year 2022-2023, we awarded four qualifying applicants. Thanks to the continued commitment and support from many Monthly Meetings, we continue providing support for DACA renewal fees, for buying materials for classes, and for help with housing. Our first recipient, who also contributes regularly to the scholarship fund, shared this recently: "I now have DACA status and I am able to work with legal authorization. Thanks to having a Master's degree I am able to earn a higher salary. I now work in social services in Southern California. The job gives me the financial stability that I desire and access to healthcare and retirement benefits. Most recently, I purchased my first home which hopefully will give me even more stability."

On April 23, our Meeting will celebrate with a meal and a presentation during Second Hour. It will be a hybrid presentation and you are welcome to attend.

<http://www.quakerundocumentedstudentscholarship.org/index.html>

Please contact Patricia Portillo at portillope12@gmail.com if you have any questions.

2024 Margaret Willis, Delta.

2024 Paty Constantino, Mexico City

2025 Linda Rowell, Chico, Co-Clerk

Appt by Casa de los Amigo--Bart Czyz, Casa Board

Appt by El Salvador Project-- Hulda Muaka, Palo Alto

Appt by Guatemala Scholarship (Progresas)--Donna Smith, Redwood Forest, Co-Clerk

Appt by Undocumented Student Project--Patricia Portillo, Sacramento

Submitted by Donna Smith, Co-Clerk