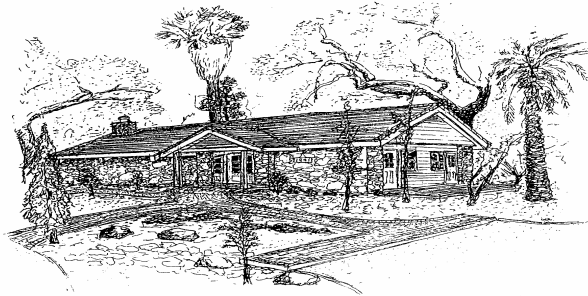


Visalia Friends Meeting

17208 Ave 296
Visalia, CA 93291

Newsletter

March, 12



Visalia Friends Meetinghouse

Spiritual Life

The life of the spirit gains depth and vigor through devotional practices, prayer, study and meditation. Take time regularly for individual and family worship, discussions, readings from sacred texts, and other spiritual refreshment in order to live a more centered life and to bring a deeper presence to the Meeting for Worship.

Friends believe that the spiritual path is best found in community. Create opportunities in your Meetings for people of all ages to explore and express their evolving relationship with the Divine, their spiritual highs and their doubts. If different metaphors and language interfere with communication, listen more deeply, honoring the Spirit in which the thought and words have their beginnings.

- *Do I live in thankful awareness of God's constant presence in my life?*
- *Am I sensitive and obedient to the leadings of the Holy Spirit?*
- *When do I take time for contemplation and spiritual refreshment?*
- *What steps am I taking to center my life and to stay open to continuing revelation?*
- *Do we share our spiritual lives with others in the Meeting, seeking to know one another in that which is eternal?*
- *Does the Meeting provide religious education including study of the Bible and Friends' history and practices?*

Meeting for Business

Present: Olga McCallister, David & Klara East, David & Billie Chandler, Trudy Wischermann, Greg Seastrom, Bill & Beth Lovett, Bob & Joy Marshall, David & Joanne Dudley, Mark Koenig, Ginger Curtis, Charlene Roberts- Caudle, Patti Howard

Meeting began in silent worship

Committee Reports:

M&O: Greg Seastrom reported on M &O meeting from last week. M & O reported that there were no health and wellness concerns among meeting members. There was discussion about two members that have not attended in several years and have not responded to correspondence. Lorena Bruff, and Bob Goins membership will be either terminated or transferred. There was discussion on a sexual misconduct insurance option on the meeting's insurance policy. More information is being sought on this issue. End of life matters were also discussed. Sara Shana gave Greg a booklet and will make available more for Friends as needed. There is also a form that M&O developed as well. Finally, M&O discussed vocal ministry within the meeting. Two questions arose: 1) was the incident that occurred recently a sole incident and 2) was it an ongoing problem with the meeting? There was discussion on having a session or meetings devoted to vocal ministry or have a session similar to the meeting for business structure. David Chandler opened the idea to the members present. **(See attached words on Vocal Ministry from Faith and Practice.)** Discussion ensued. **There was consensus towards having a focus meeting after meeting for worship regarding vocal ministry for the 26th for March.**

Outreach: David reported that the boards for the billboard still need to be painted. David & Joanne Dudley are willing to get the boards painted and ready for lettering.

Childrens Committee: Joy asked for volunteers to take the month of April for children's ministry. Joy stated that attendance is erratic. Mark Koenig followed by saying that presenting and preparing for children was a valuable experience regardless of attendance.

Rep Com Report:

Charlene attended the Rep Com meeting in Santa Monica. She reported a well run and warm event. M&O has the Advices & Queries available in a booklet for sale. Yearly Meeting will be at University of Redlands during the first week of August. They are recommending a potential registration deadline and late fee. Registration should be available by April. Cost should be fairly reasonable. Old checks issued will be cancelled; reimbursements will now have 90 days to be cashed. PYM Children's Committee expects up to 46 children and need volunteers. Also issues regarding sexual misconduct liability and policies are being discussed. There was a drop in last year's registration. Site committee is looking for a Northern California site for 2007. Mt. Madonna, Asilomar, CSUMonterey, are potential sites being discussed for PYM 2007. M&O are thinking about taking a sabbatical to think about "what PYM should be?" Queries were developed by M&O and Charlene shared them. Overall, Rep Com was represented by a small contingent, about 45 attendees, and discussion centered on how Yearly Meeting can meet people's needs and wanting to bring more vitality to PYM. Charlene said that this is a time for change in PYM and contact Joe Franco the Clerk of PYM if you have concerns.

Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP):

Mark Koenig reported the training he attended at Chowchilla Women's Prison. He gave a brief overview of AVP and its goals and purposes. Mark reported that AVP would like to expand to the Valley prisons. There will be an advanced training in May. There is nine days of training: beginning, advanced and training to be a trainer (three days each). Mark reported on the training and had positive comments. Bonding, empathy and self-esteem among inmates were enduring themes from the trainings. There is administrative support for the AVP program. Mark would like to expand this program into the local area to respond to racism and violence. He would like to bring the AVP basic workshop for a weekend either in the summer or fall. They would like a workshop with about 20 people. Mark suggests we expand the attendance outside of the meeting and into the larger community. Mark suggested that the meeting purchase manuals for the library. There was support for this suggestion. There was also a suggestion by David to offer the meeting house as a facility for this project. A sign up sheet was passed around for those interested. **AVP is looking for volunteers.** More information can be found at <http://www.avpcalifornia.org>

Other Business:

Ginger Curtis proposed that there be a sign up for dinner gatherings among family and friends in each other's homes. Ginger said she would be willing to organize the process.

David shared mail items and newsletters and will place pertinent items in the foyer.

Events:

- *Easter Potluck Breakfast at the Lovett's 9:00 am April 16th*

Worship And The Meeting

Meeting For Worship

Vocal Ministry and Faithful Listening

Just as careful preparation enhances the quality of worship, so too does attention to the Light during worship. Friends come to worship to receive and to give, to speak when led, to be silent when that is what obedience requires. Vocal ministry is a vital part of the Meeting for Worship. It is a form of service in which a person stands to share a message from God delivered through the individual. Friends hope that all spoken messages during worship are in fact vocal ministry. The responsibility rests on each member of the group to be ready and willing to offer such ministry when called to do so.

As one sits in silence, a message may arise out of the depth of the soul that seems intended not simply for the worshiper, but for the gathering as a whole. Some Friends feel burdened with a sense of omission if a message is not expressed, but once it is faithfully uttered, a sense of inward peace may follow. Experience in Meeting helps to discriminate between private words and those that arise as true leadings of the Spirit that should not be silenced. An inclination to share a message may arise in advance of Meeting, but the decision to speak should await a clear leading at the time. With practice, a person may learn to discern a call clearly, though many are quite unable to describe its quality.

Some worshipers called to speak feel an internal or external quaking, deep emotion, tears, an increased heart rate, or other agitation. Some have felt grabbed by the hand of God and held until after delivering the message. One person feels a profound stillness accompanied by a clear voice that is not her own. Another may find himself suddenly standing, and then wait, praying silently for guidance, before beginning to speak. Still another may test a message by repeatedly pushing it 'out of mind' only to find that it returns again and again.

As one is weighing whether to speak, certain questions may be helpful: Is this message Spirit-led, or merely emotionally compelling? Is this message intended for this group, or is it only for me? Is it better saved until another time or place? When the call to speak is clear, the worshiper should stand if possible. He or she should speak simply, briefly, audibly, and from personal spiritual experience. Occasionally, ministry may take the form of singing or of standing silently. Neither debate, nor discussion with previous speakers, is ever appropriate, and speaking twice during a single Meeting for Worship is very seldom so.

Those who are led to speak have different backgrounds, verbal skills and interpretive power. Friends try to listen more than they speak, keep an open heart, seek the Spirit behind the words and hold the speaker in love. Listeners may find it helpful to pray that the messenger is faithful to the call, and that God's word will emerge through the medium of human speech. A message that does not speak to one person's needs may be helpful to another. After a message has been given, it is important to allow time to ponder its meaning, letting the Spirit move through the assembly of Friends before another ministers.