

HONOLULU FRIENDS MEETING
State of the Meeting Report
Fourth Month 2009 through Third Month 2010

If the past Meeting Year can be said to have had an overarching theme, “sustainability” may be the term that captures it. As defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development, sustainability means “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Representative of that theme was the title of our biennial Friends Gathering – “For the Love of Gardens” – which was held on a weekend of Ninth Month, 2009. For the first time, the Gathering was on the grounds of the Meetinghouse rather than at a rented venue, which itself was a statement about sustainability. The tent pitched on the front lawn was reminiscent of the Friends Festivals of years ago, but without a fund-raising purpose this time. In the course of the weekend, over 50 people participated in community-building events such as home-grown entertainment, repasts of potluck meals made with locally-grown products, and lessons and hands-on activities related to gardening. Joe Morris, from the Pacific Yearly Meeting’s Unity with Nature Committee, joined us via telephone to share a short history of Friends’ environmental concerns, and report on progress towards a possible new Quaker Testimony on Earthcare (or Harmony with Nature). To cap the weekend we enjoyed an inspiring film entitled “Renewal” that led us on a tour of a multitude of faith-based communities’ actions to “green” the planet.

Sustainability encompasses more than aspects of the physical environment. It also has relevance to the spiritual life of our Meeting and reaches into all of the testimonies that inspire us. In essence, we thrive as a Meeting only if we transform our testimonies into action and the way we live, pass our messages and experiences on to generations that follow, and make ourselves known to the wider community so that they, too, might be inspired by Friends’ testimonies.

A Pendle Hill pamphlet entitled “Turnaround” stimulated thought and discussion about “growing” our Meeting, noting that about 45% of the members of the Religious Society of Friends are over 65 years old and some yearly meetings have had annual losses of up to 20% of their membership. That may not be quite the same picture for our Meeting, but it is similar enough to remind us that, if we fail to “announce our presence” to the wider community, and in particular draw younger people into the Meeting, we will wither as a spiritual community.

With that thought in mind, we devoted some of our attention to outreach, starting simply by making it easier for people to find us and have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with Friends. One step was a greatly improved website, thanks to the help of one of our younger attenders. We were gratified to hear several visitors at our Meetings for Worship tell us that they found out about us through this upgraded presence on the web. Another planned initiative is to distribute an edition of our newsletter, *Ka Makamaka*, more widely, especially on the nearby campus of University of Hawaii to reach students and staff who may have heard of Friends but did not know that we were right here in Mānoa.

Another form of community outreach is the expression of our spiritual beliefs as they relate to the broader society. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee organized sessions led by people and organizations that share our interests in issues such as prison reform and nuclear disarmament. Through our “Action Opportunities” initiatives, members and attenders have sent thousands of letters to public officials concerning matters of local, national and international importance. As a Meeting, we sent a letter to President Obama, with copies to our Senators and Congressional Representatives, stating our belief that “war is not the answer in Afghanistan” and urging an end to the war.

We also sent a letter of support for the Hawaii program of American Friends Service Committee (AFSC-Hawaii) when they were facing possible closure of the office due to the national organization’s financial crisis, pointing out the compelling need for an AFSC presence in Hawaii in view of the significant military presence in the Islands and the continuing struggle to affirm the rights of indigenous Hawaiians. We also reaffirmed our commitment to provide office space to AFSC-Hawaii at no charge to

defray program expenses. Fortunately, closure of the Hawaii office was averted, but one of the staff positions was cut and the two remaining positions were reduced in pay.

Several of our members continue to be involved with the CHOICES (Committee on Helping Open and Informed Choices in Education and Schools) program that is supervised by AFSC-Hawaii. The Meeting made a contribution to enable CHOICES to set up an information booth at the Career Fair for Oahu's students again this year to inform young people about alternatives to military service for educational and employment opportunities.

At the Martin Luther King Day parade, we joined the AFSC-Hawaii contingent, as in the past, but the number of members and attenders from Meeting was considerably larger than in previous years, with some riding a trolley adorned by banners for the Meeting, AFSC and other peace and social justice organizations, and others marching alongside with hand-held signs with the message of peace. One who joined us was the baby girl of one of our Meeting attenders, with a "Baby for Peace" sign on her stroller.

In addition to outreach, we also attempt "inreach" to engage people of all ages and F(f)riends who cannot participate directly or regularly in the life of the Meeting due to infirmities, work or family commitments or residence on another island.

Recognizing the challenge of sustaining a First Day School program when the age range is wide and attendance levels are small and uneven, the First Day School Committee polled parents on their expectations for the program and is planning to organize activities around monthly themes, and to increase opportunities for more F(f)riends to share their unique interests with the children. Annual collections on behalf of UNICEF and The Heifer Project imparted lessons about social responsibility.

In order to give the few adolescents and young adults who are actively involved in our community an opportunity to become better acquainted with Friends in their age group, we sponsored two teens to attend the summer Quaker Camp at Ben Lomond Quaker Center and a young man to participate in the Young Friends New Year's event in California. From their reports, all found the experience highly rewarding, resulting in new friendships and closer identification with Friends.

Our interest in young people this year did not divert attention from the needs of aging members of our community. We have added this year a new interest group called Elders Options for people in our Meeting who are facing issues related to aging.

The generations in our Meeting come together at special events, such as the Friends Gathering, visiting Sunday lunches, annual pot-luck dinners for Thanksgiving and Christmas, and a baby shower to welcome the birth of a girl to one of our regular attenders. This leads us to ask: Are there more ways in which we can nurture a sense of community? How can we keep in better touch with F(f)riends living on other islands and provide effective support, when requested, for Worship Groups under the care of our Meeting, and for those who are considering formation of a Worship Group?

As we consider the sustainability of our Meeting, we need to keep records of our past and present activities in good order if they are to survive for the future. We therefore appreciate the work of our Archivist, who prepared policies on records retention and preservation, which the Meeting approved, and has begun the task of assembling some key missing records.

Our Meeting Year, as always, is marked by transitions. During the past year, death took two treasured Friends in Hawaii who had a long-time association with our Meeting. We approved the transfer to another meeting of one member, who has been living elsewhere for many years, and the request for removal of membership for another Friend living on the mainland who is too infirm to attend a meeting at this point in her life. On the other hand, we welcomed the transfer of membership into our Meeting of a couple from the Big Island, as well as the recognition of their son as a "Child of the Meeting".

As our Meeting Year closes, we bid a fond aloha to our Residents, John and Grace Kroeker, who return to Canada, and look forward to welcoming the new Residents, David and Virginia Wood. We will also be introducing a new Clerk of Meeting after five years, as well as other new roles for members of our Meeting. All of these transitions are an essential element of a sustainable faith community.
Submitted by John Whalen, Clerk of Meeting