

Old Chatham Monthly Meeting State of the Meeting Report

February 10, 2013

The life of Old Chatham Monthly Meeting has been profoundly impacted for over a decade by the planning and building of a new meetinghouse. This past year we took a leap of faith and committed to finishing the meetinghouse, and we have learned that we can step out on faith. We expect to move into the space before many more months have passed. Our Meeting has grown in the Light through this leading to build. Overall, the process has been a positive one for our community. It has allowed us to share one another's gifts and to shine through usefulness. The project has demonstrated one particular gift: our ability to cooperate and get things done in a very practical manner. Everyone has participated one way or another in the project, before and especially since the groundbreaking over two years ago, when the oldest and one of the very youngest members of the Meeting took turns with the shovels. These activities have been associated with cheerfulness and joy.

The Meetinghouse Committee's focused intention has been that the project should reflect our Quaker testimonies of simplicity and integrity. They are reflected in our design and to further this end, we have employed mostly local companies to do the work which we could not ourselves perform, and have benefited from their skills and experience and friendship. Regular work days have given Meeting members of all ages and skill levels the opportunity to participate, and by inviting our youngest people to contribute their labor, we have designed a way of drawing them in, allowing them to experience both the community and the Spirit. Fund-raising activities have also involved Friends of all ages, and gifts in cash and kind have been generously offered. We were even able to borrow an outhouse for temporary use!

We have continued to be aware that the effort to build a Meetinghouse can detract from other pursuits. Some feel that we are not serving our youth as well as we have in the past, and our First Day School Committee continues to work actively to develop programs to serve our children. We hope that once we are in our new home, we will be able to expand our efforts into other areas.

Our Outreach, Peace and Justice Committee has continued to offer monthly movies, an aspect of outreach which will be continue in our new home. A recent showing of a film about the American prison system, "Broken on All Sides," will be followed up by discussion on Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow*. Members have been given copies to prepare for this activity.

We feel strong in the ministry of helping one another through life transitions. In our Meeting, we have families facing great challenges. This year members have lost spouses and parents, and some have been challenged by cancer and other serious illnesses, and by the difficulties originating in the national economy. Members who need to come and go for work or who are led powerfully in certain directions are well supported by the Meeting. We hold all in love and prayer. Every challenge offers us an opportunity to live what we believe; we are constantly growing into what it means to live faithfully. For the most part, we are a quiet Meeting, but continue to explore the place of vocal ministry. The Spirit moves among us, in both Meeting for worship and our business meetings.

We have a least nine children who regularly attend Meeting for Worship, and several strong attenders who are now away at college. We welcome visitors, whether from Powell House conferences, the local community or Williams College, a few of whose students have now worshipped with us for the past three years.

We hope to find new ways of meeting our own spiritual needs and those of the surrounding community in our light and hopefully Light filled space. Our meetinghouse will offer a refuge to many, a place to center during challenging times and to follow leadings which we cannot yet imagine. We have held the vision of this building for over a decade and in 2013 the vision becomes a reality, and our energy and labor can be dedicated to furthering its purpose.

Other opportunities await us: perhaps to develop a clearer institutional voice in the wider world, and to engage in community-wide discussions on peace and justice and environmental awareness. How this voice sounds and how it is discovered will take effort and reflection. These are questions for this new year.