MtToby activities on Peace, Social and Environmental Concerns

Prepared for a meeting of such committees on 2/3/19

First, it should be noted that the P&SC committee is not the only committee working on these issues. The issues around race and class have resulted in a separate group spawned by P&SC, which Race and Class group meets independently. Issues around immigration and undocumented people similarly resulted in a separate group called the Immigrant Solidarity Group, which meets independently. Quite a while back when issues of the environment and specifically climate change became important, a separate group arose now called the Climate Witness Group. I will say something below about each of these three groups, but the point is that just looking at minutes of the P&SC committee would give only a picture of the interests **not** covered by the other three groups. In a sense, P&SC has been “hollowed out” by the calving off of the three, and for a real picture of Mount Toby Meeting activities you need to include all.

* The Race and Class group (<https://www.mounttobyfriends.org/organizational/peace-and-social-concerns/race-and-class/>) meets monthly, reads materials and encourages Friends to do likewise, and presents discussion materials for Friends. Members also cooperate with and provide leadership to non-Quaker groups such as SURJ (<http://www.wmsurj.com/>).
* The Immigrant Solidarity group (<https://www.mounttobyfriends.org/organizational/__trashed/>) has been active in supporting an undocumented man in sanctuary in Amherst, for example arranging 24/7 accompaniment, meals, rides for his family to visit him, etc. It buys and then resells to meeting members on Sunday tamales which are made by undocumented women in financial distress, whose husbands have been deported or are incarcerated. It supports a monthly “Jericho Walk” bringing attention to the need for politicians to support sanctuary. It led MtToby to be a “level two” sanctuary church. It is working on passing the “Safe Communities Act” in the Mass legislature, to declare Massachusetts a sanctuary state.
* The Climate Witness Committee (<https://www.mounttobyfriends.org/organizational/climate-witness/> ) led the meeting to install a large solar tracker and several heat pumps, to make the meeting nearly energy independent of fossil fuels. It led the fundraising for this large project, with $10,000 from NEYM and the remaining $80,000 or so from zero-interest loans from members, and outright gifts. It created a climate minute which went to the quarterly meeting and then on to the yearly meeting, encouraging all meetings to look into ways that their use of fossil fuels could be reduced. Its most recent interest is in preserving forests locally and globally to combat global warming. It created a “voluntary carbon tax” fund to which a dozen or so MtToby Friends subscribe, voluntarily taxing ourselves and sending the “tax” collected to groups working on climate issues. To date the group has donated $15,172 to such groups, and it created a public website (<http://voluntarycarbontax.org/index.php> ) and encourages other meetings and groups to participate. So far ten groups have joined and contributed a total of $46,990 to various organizations.

Now as to the Peace and Social Concerns Committee itself.

One of the most novel things, probably unique in the yearly meeting, has been the creation and oversight of Mount Toby Concerts for Peace and Social Concerns (<https://mttobyconcerts.wordpress.com/> ). This series, begun several years ago by the P&SC committee, puts on monthly concerts (except in summer) of folk singers who bring messages of peace and justice to the audience. Unlike most folk concerts, the focus on peace and justice makes these concerts unique, and valuable to the performers who otherwise have a very difficult time finding venues which welcome “political” music. Although since it is sponsored by P&SC and therefore is not charged rent for the concerts, the concert series has donated around $1000 to the meeting.

Minutes of all of the meetings of P&SC are online back to 2013, at <http://www.mounttobyfriends.org/public/PSCminutes/> where you can see our work in detail. But to briefly mention some things:

Monthly letter writing for all MtToby Friends, to state and federal officials.

Occasional films and discussion, for example “Voices Across the Divide” with ensuing conversation about Israel/Palestine issues.

Presenting to the meeting recommendations for funding organizations, and recently regularizing the criteria for these: 1) Quaker organizations or organizations with a Quaker governing board - like QUNO and Right Sharing of World Resources; 2) Organizations that directly help us carry out the peace testimony by implementing Quaker testimonies of peace and justice - like CCCO and Nonviolent Peaceforce; 3) Organizations which are directly connected to Quaker testimonies and in which Mt. Toby Friends are deeply involved – like AVP and the Cambodian Water Project.

Appointing the FCNL liaison for the meeting, and arranging announcements on FCNL’s priorities. Enlisting meeting involvement in setting FCNL’s legislative priorities and sending in a summary of MtToby’s suggestions for the priorities.

Proposing to the meeting statements arising from events such as attacks on Muslim gatherings and Jewish congregations. Support for mosque’s fundraising for its building.

Proposals to the meeting on issues, e.g. support for the Safe Communities Act, revision of the Mass flag and seal which are offensive to native Americans. (Not always approved!)

Supporting individuals who come to our committee for support in some cause they are involved in.

Cosponsorship of Human Rights Day, Amnesty events, a talk by Nonviolent Peaceforce, the Peace Pagoda walk, Coalition Against US Foreign Military Bases conference, etc.

Arranging “11:40 Hours” – presentation and discussion, for example “This polluter does not pay: The crime of US military pollution on foreign bases” by the head of Traprock Peace Center.

Occasional small donations, e.g. to NuDay Syria, for a PSC member to attend FCNL gathering, etc. (This proved controversial in the meeting; some disapprove of P&SC becoming a “granting agency” uncontrolled by Meeting.)

Approval of a member’s workshop so it could be approved for NEYM sessions.

Sacred Earth Sharing Circle which demonstrated getting away from regular matters to emphasize the spiritual basis of our committee work.

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