**A Year of Loving Earth**

**Wrap-Up Report — June 2023**

What a year we’ve had with the Loving Earth Project here in Sacramento!

Early in 2022, several people from the Sacramento Friends Meeting decided to participate in a Loving Earth Project created by Quakers at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Center in Birmingham, UK.

The first step was to consider these three queries:

1. *What person, place, or thing do you care about?*
2. *How is climate change impacting it?*
3. *What will you do to protect it?*

Friends were then invited to stitch or paint a 12” x 12” cloth panel to illustrate our personal response to the questions. Our group created eight panels. We submitted the panels to UK Friends and joined hundreds of people responding from around the world.

The Project issued a second invitation later that year: Host a traveling Loving Earth exhibit during 2023 that would display some of the collected works and encourage others to share their stories and perspectives. The Sacramento Friends decided that California Quakers needed to step up and become one of those hosts. Our small group responded with a clear and unequivocal “Yes!”

The planning began in earnest. The Woodbrooke Quakers agreed to send us 110 panels for the whole month of April 2023. We decided that we needed a variety of locations to reach the most diverse audience possible. We did not want to exhibit solely to people who were already engaged with climate concerns. The city’s Museum of Science and Curiosity had opened recently in Sacramento and was a perfect location. Other possibilities included faith communities, schools, and the tourist/nightlife crowd in Old Sacramento. Earth Day 2023 in Southside Park would be the culmination of the Sacramento tour.

In mid-February, a big cardboard box from the UK arrived on our doorstep. It held stacks of beautiful, passionate stories, intricately stitched, made of surprising scraps, found bits, and fabric of every sort. Holding the panels and seeing firsthand the love invested in each person’s response was profoundly moving. There was no doubt that this had been a Spirit-led decision, and we were privileged to share Loving Earth with as many people as possible.

Eventually, the Sacramento tour schedule for April 2023 was confirmed for these locations:

* SMUD’s Museum of Science and Curiosity
* Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento
* Atrium Art Café in Old Sacramento
* Effie Yeaw Nature Center on the American River
* St Anthony Catholic Parish
* Ethel Phillips Elementary School in South Sacramento

On the last Sunday in March, the tour launched with a preview for Sacramento Friends at the Meetinghouse after worship. As the exhibit was displayed at various locations throughout the month, we consistently heard comments such as, “I had no idea how different it would be to see the Loving Earth panels in person” or “The stories and notes written by the panel makers are touching and true.” Nearly every location asked to keep the exhibit longer than the agreed upon schedule.

Wherever the Loving Earth panels visited, we asked people to pause and consider the Project’s three questions: *What person, place, or thing do you care about? How is climate change impacting it? What will you do to protect it?* Then we invited them to respond by drawing or writing a personal reflection using cards and markers we provided. We hung these “heart cards” around the exhibit, so that everyone became part of the display. It was a personal and community-wide expression of awareness and a commitment to act.

One of our most satisfying experiences came at the local elementary school where we had a constant stream of classes coming to see the panels. In two days, we had a chance to share our concerns and hopes with nearly 300 students and their teachers. We talked about California’s wildfires, droughts, honeybees, and other endangered critters. It was heartening to learn that many of the children were already informed and equally concerned.

On Earth Day weekend, the Unitarian Society devoted their entire Sunday service to a Loving Earth theme and invited us to speak. The panels were beautifully displayed on the walls of their sanctuary-in-the-round so the congregation could walk around to see them then write or sketch personal responses. The exhibit also made appearances in May at the Museum of Northern California at Chico State University, Gateway Science Museum in Chico, and the Unitarian Church in Fresno, California.

Each venue came with unique challenges. Some were concerned about being too political or were hesitant to navigate conversations where people didn’t agree on the problem or possible solutions. Some had ready-to-go facilities for the exhibit and good experience handling such activities; others depended on us to do it all.

The Loving Earth Project exhibit is back in Europe now visiting more cities, but its impact here continues. We are strengthening our personal commitments and deepening our knowledge of the climate issues we all face. As a Meeting, we’re becoming a visible, active presence in the organizing and awareness-raising going on in our community and region. There are lively “what’s next” discussions popping up throughout the Meeting. More engagement with schools, perhaps? Lobbying at the state level on important environmental legislation? Demonstrating for corporate divestment from fossil fuel dependence?

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Hilary Burwell

Klara East

Billie Hamilton

Laurel Hollis

Sue McCullough-Sanden

Ani Stanleigh

Chris Shipman Mackey

* *Cindy Fowler, Coordinator*

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