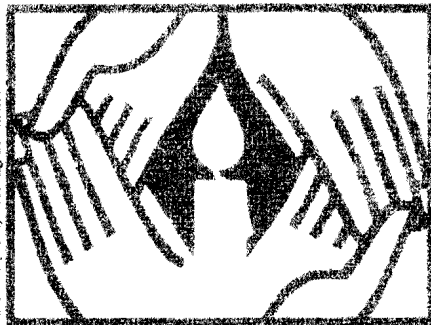


# Christmas at Live Oak Meeting



Purchase (N.Y.) Meeting newsletter

Once a year, some Sunday during the Christmas season, Live Oak (Tex.) Friends have a programmed worship. This tradition was started by one of our meeting families, who had lived for a time in West Germany. The children in the family loved this German Quaker observance so much they asked to bring it back to Texas. We tried it first in 1983 and like it so much we've been doing it every year since then.

It is a simple observance, easily prepared, not requiring weeks of rehearsal or costumes. It is also moving. On the morning chosen, a long table is placed in the center of the meeting room. Children help cover the table with silver foil and arrange fresh pine boughs around the edges. A tall white candle is placed in the center.

Friends have been asked to prepare some brief thoughts about Christmas and to bring them, along with a candle and holder, to the worship service. After Friends have centered down and silence enfolds the room, the clerk rises, says a few words of greeting, and lights the white candle. Then, one by one, Friends approach the table, light their candles from one previously lit, and share what is in their hearts. Some read a short poem or passage from the Bible. Once we were surprised, and delighted, when an attender, a former professional actor, recited from memory the entire account of the birth of Jesus, as recorded in Luke.

Some Friends like to recall a special Christmas from their childhood. Others offer prayers of thanksgiving for the love encircling the table. Absent ones and those imprisoned or suffering far from the circle of light are also remembered.

As might be expected, many messages center on the Light, the Light of hope,

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by Yvonne Boeger

*Live Oak Friends bring  
a German Quaker tradition  
back to Texas.*

the Light that is within us, the Light that came into the world on that first Christmas morning. As more and more candles are lit, we are reminded that while the light from one candle may be flickering and vulnerable, the light from many blazes forth and cannot be hid.

Several Friends have compared the variety of candle holders on the table to the diversity of people within the Society of Friends. Tall ones, short ones, thin ones, and fat. Some holders are traditional silver ones, others pottery, still others little lumps of clay, molded by the holy hands of children. One Friend, a native Palestinian, brings an intricately patterned blue candlestick from the Holy Land. Some Friends forget to bring a holder and have to be helped by another person to anchor their candle securely on the aluminum foil table top.

Some Christmas vignettes stand out in my memory. About ten years ago, Live Oak Meeting sponsored the resettlement of a Vietnamese family in Houston. They arrived, tired, frightened, minus the father of the family—who

had been detained enroute—but full of courage and determination to succeed in their new country. Now, several years later, a son in the family walks to the table, lights his candle, and in perfect English speaks words of love and gratitude.

Last Christmas our observance was held in the unexpected surge of hope and optimism we felt as walls of oppression were beginning to crumble in Europe. It happened that a young German, who was doing his alternative service in Houston, was present at our service. Uli spoke to us of his deep joy in the rays of light shining at last into the depths of his divided homeland. He invited us to sing with him a verse of "Oh, Tannenbaum," which we were glad to do.

What I remember the most, however, are the children. Though newly minted, they are already expressing their individual personalities. Some bolt to the table, stepping on toes on their way, light their candles, and shout a hearty "Merry Christmas." Others approach shyly, with sweet, sober expressions, light their candles with concentration, smiling with relief when the difficult task is accomplished. The youngest ones are brought in mother's or father's arms. They wiggle in their blankets, waving tiny fists in challenge or benediction.

After the last candle has been lit, a silence falls over the room. I cannot know what is in the hearts of others, but in mine there is joy. There is also gratitude for every person who dares light a candle in the ocean of darkness. I am reluctant for it to end, wishing I could remain always in this circle of light. But children do get hungry, and these kids have prior knowledge of sugar cookies and gingerbread boys that wait in the kitchen.

At a signal from the clerk, we join hands and softly sing a carol. Another Christmas has been observed at Live Oak Meeting. □