

Epistle of Alaska Friends Conference 2017 Annual Meeting, Wasilla Alaska, 6 August 2017

To Friends Everywhere:

Alaska Friends met in our rustic Meeting House at Dickerson Friends Center in Wasilla. Our theme was “Embracing Diversity: Accompaniment and Witness.” We enjoyed glorious weather and warm water in Ashley Lake.

We welcomed four Fairbanks and Anchorage leaders of NAACP to worship and discuss mutual concerns and work on climate justice. We recognized that climate disruption is an issue for all people, but minority communities are more threatened. We shared our hopes and dreams for our community in 50 years if we successfully address the threat of climate disruption. We described diverse and welcoming communities recovering the sense of shared endeavor and mutual support some experienced in early Anchorage. We envisioned healthy children fed from abundant fisheries and local farming, enjoying a restored natural environment.

We asked ourselves to indicate our position on a spectrum from despair of success to confidence of successfully addressing climate disruption and achieving our shared vision; our positions were distributed throughout that spectrum. We also asked ourselves to indicate our position on the extent to which we felt engaged and empowered to address our concerns and bring about our shared vision. Most of us felt empowered and engaged, not having given up.

Friends and NAACP leaders described a wide range of practical local actions underway as part of the solution: scholarships for training technicians to install solar panels, working to install solar panels on a local school in a low-income neighborhood, an interfaith coalition advocating for sustainable environment relying on renewable energy, a mobile solar power generator. Following shared worship, we felt inspired and committed ourselves to continuing collaboration on climate justice and other common concerns.

Alaska Friends have been very active in wider Quaker organizations for many years, relishing the opportunity to worship and share experiences with Friends from around the world. We devoted sessions to describing recent activities within these organizations. Four AFC Friends attended the 100th Anniversary of AFSC; they were especially enthusiastic about the Plenary Address of Erica Chenoweth on the power and effectiveness of non-violent social movements, based on extensive global research. We are hopeful about FGC's determination to undergo a rigorous assessment to identify and root out institutional racism. FWCC's success in bringing together Friends from different traditions and different continents has been inspirational and sometimes transformational. FCNL has been astonishingly effective in advocating U.S. policies and legislation that advance Friends' vision of the world. Legislative visits with the Alaska Congressional delegation were important in retaining access to health care in a recent series of votes.

As a series of isolated monthly meetings, our yearly gathering renews our joy in community, our spiritual connections and our hope in sharing our vision of a diverse and welcoming community, in right relation to the world.