

GREAT PLAINS YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells. Psalm 46:4*

June 6, 2015

Dear Friends everywhere:

We send you greetings from the 108th Annual Sessions of Great Plains Yearly Meeting of Friends.

We gathered in the Village of Hominy on the Osage Reservation in northeastern Oklahoma June 4-6, 2015. Friends joined together across boundaries of culture, geography, and theology to do the work of God, centered on our theme derived from Psalm 46:4, "There is a River: Building Communities of Great Hope."

We joyfully welcomed visitors from Texas, Maryland, Pennsylvania, California, Indiana, Iowa, Oklahoma and Belize. We are grateful for those Friends who, unable to join us, held us in prayer.

As a yearly meeting, we are small in size with five member Meetings spread over the Nebraska-Kansas-Oklahoma region. Thursday evening, our speaker Noah Baker Merrill gestured to a tapestry of *The Last Supper* and reminded us that the entire Christian movement began with a small meeting of friends. Noah encouraged our meetings and churches to become communities that carry a message of a great Hope that lies beyond the despair we see in the world around us. He reminded us that prairie fires, so familiar to us in this region, have historically been set to burn the old into nourishment for the emergence of new life from the ground.

Among Friends in the Great Plains new life is indeed emerging. We rejoice that our Revitalization and Leadership Development Initiative, begun as a 2-year project in January 2013 is now an expanding Initiative. New energies are rising among us. GPYM Friends have been instrumental in organizing gatherings that widen our circle of fellowship to include Friends from other yearly meetings and from unaffiliated bodies. We find ourselves hungry for fellowship and for opportunities to share our stories with one another. During our Friday Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, a query asking us to reflect on a time in our individual lives when we felt special strength of God's Presence led to deep sharing in small groups and among the larger gathering.

We are heartened by the presence of children and youth in our Yearly Meeting. Looking to the future, we have intentionally committed more energy and resources to provide our young Friends with spiritually nurturing experiences during their formative years. We are grateful to Beth Green-Nagle and Lisa McConnell for developing and implementing a program for children and youth during our sessions this year. On Friday evening young and not-so-very-young Friends enjoyed a traditional Osage meal provided by Hominy Friends and then joined voices together in a song circle.

With great joy, we celebrated Nebraska's repeal of the death penalty, which Friends in our Yearly Meeting have worked toward for many years. We enjoyed and appreciated workshops on the work of the American Friends Service Committee, Friends in Belize who have a school in the impoverished area of Belize City, and the Osage Hymn Project. With David Nagle's instruction, singing several songs in Osage was particularly moving.

Our hearts were warmed by God's Love at work among us as we read a letter from Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting that continues a conversation of reconciliation begun in 2014. We welcome the Light of knowing that Friends who were divided hurtfully over 50 years ago need not remain estranged, but can rejoice in the shared Love of God. To share that joy in person, three GPYM Friends will travel to Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting in August.

Above all, we find joy in simply being with one another in the Presence of God. Our worship together has given us precious and sustaining moments: Ministry given to us in song from the silence encouraged us to "lift up our wings and fly!", and Noah Baker Merrill reminded us that "we don't have all the answers, but we have beautiful spiritual practices that bring us into God's presence and liberate us to do God's work."

As we discern together the leadings of Spirit, we feel great joy and great challenge. There is much work to do as we build communities of great Hope. We look forward to assisting with the FUM Triennial to be held in Wichita, Kansas in 2017, and we rejoice in all the work God gives us! Thanks be to God!

In the Light of Christ,

LaVonna Loesch, Presiding Clerk
Great Plains Yearly Meeting of Friends