

North Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Annual Session 2015

To Friends Everywhere:

Friends from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana gathered in the sunshine among the ponderosa pine trees at a university campus in Spokane, Washington, from July 15 – July 19, 2015 for the 43rd Annual Session of the North Pacific Yearly Meeting.

In the days before annual session, a “play-shop” explored mirthful spirituality through games, songs and play. This training for volunteers for the children's program was also outreach for those open to the idea of worship including play.

Our Friend-in-Residence was Robin Mohr, the Executive Secretary of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas. Robin addressed the meeting on the theme “QuakerCraft: Becoming Quakers the World Needs”. As with all crafts, it is not based on book learning, but is learned experientially. The formation of a skilled craftsperson takes hard work, hours of practice, and teaching and advising from others. Once learned, it becomes our vocation as we work to become the Quakers that the world needs. Only if Quakers embody the blessing that Quaker practice offers, will the world want to hear about this blessing. Robin closed by asking that we blow on the glowing embers contained within our Quaker community, kindling the fire of the Spirit.

The Clerk of the Nominating Committee spoke of the challenge of finding members and attenders willing to serve on the committees that carry forward the life of the Yearly Meeting, which led to an honest, open discussion of the issue. This has been a recurrent concern with no easy answer. An interest group the next day offered a place for people to come together to reconsider and re-imagine the purpose of Yearly Meeting.

The Junior Friends reported on their service trip to Guatemala last summer. This was followed by a dialogue between young and older Quakers about barriers to communication between them. Just as Junior Friends found that people in Guatemala saw and greeted each person as an individual, young and old in the gathering came to see beyond the masks of age differences.

Peace and Social Concerns committee announced a newly-formed working group on racism and white privilege.

Friends from Multnomah Meeting shared their year-long process of education, listening, and sharing with love and respect about transgender and other gender issues. They minuted their commitment to become an affirming place for people of all genders, no matter how people self identify. Here at annual session, we started our own process to become more inclusive by having gender neutral bathrooms in the dorms, which also produced some discomfort involving personal privacy. These are beginning steps for Yearly Meeting on this work of the Spirit.

Many of the children joined us for a concert by songwriter Anna Fritz who has been traveling in ministry with her cello. We sang together:

Take this heaviness from my heart
Throw it into the fire
Let me learn to be joyful
Lift my soul up higher