

Northern Yearly Meeting Epistle for 2016

*A wildfire of love,
Sparked in this community,
Spreads into the world. — A poem on signs by the path*

Greetings to Friends everywhere from the 2016 Annual Sessions of Northern Yearly Meeting at Lions Camp, Rosholt, Wisconsin, USA. Two hundred and forty Friends, 57 of us young friends, gathered at the end of May, where sunlight and rain punctuated our days. We were smaller in number than most years due to the Friends General Conference Gathering nearby in a few weeks. Yet we felt full in the Spirit. Like a fractal, those of us gathered here are a part that contains the pattern of the whole.

We are a community of Faith and Practice. Our faith is in the divine wholeness and the prompting of Spirit, and is reflected in our session theme of “*Spiritual Deepening -- Bringing the Full Depth, Joy and Fire of Quaker Faith into Our Lives.*” We recognize that our Practice, our spiritual disciplines, are critical to this deepening.

At our Plenary we heard that spiritual deepening requires our intent; it requires an inchworm's persistence from each of us, as well as support from others. Like the sun, which was there all the time even when it was raining, the Spirit waits for us. We are called to live in worship all the time and to take our practices into a world which is hungry for them. In so doing we may find surprise and joy like that which we experienced when an unexpected break in the clouds revealed the sun.

During worship Friends bore witness to the deepening that comes when we are able to allow multiple seemingly incompatible emotions to be held together. We heard from a daughter who watched with both grief and love as her mother died. And a mother, who watches with both joy and fear as her daughter, becoming the Quaker she was raised to be, works for justice in a conflict zone.

We worked in many ways to discern how Spirit informs our practices. How shall we move our Faith and Practice book to publication? How do we see our fiscal discernment as a spiritual concern and an expression of our values to the wider world? How do we respond to anticipated transitions in our session planning team as our long-term registration and housing leaders consider stepping down? Perhaps we can learn from the simple foods cooperative, which joyously developed new organizational structures in order to be more sustainable going forward. They affirm “our business model is Faith.”

We are a community with diverse concerns about the wider world; Earthcare, ecojustice, right sharing of resources, racism and religious intolerance all draw our attention. We are unified by our practice of waiting, listening for, and following the guidance of Spirit, and find that each part of our community seeks to be faithful to it.

Our youngest Friends joined our explorations as well. Our preschoolers discussed friendship, and then, despite struggles with cooperation and sharing skills, found a way to let each other have personal space when needed. The early elementary group described a variety of experiences during meditation: a young boy felt “less stressed” while another child felt there was “a tornado” in her head. Small lines of signs sprouted along our pathways, gifts from the Older Elementary group, sharing messages related to our theme. One group of signs read: “Fire is good / fire is hot / and fire can change a lot.” Another: “Live and breathe and laugh. / Feel the joy, the light, the glow. / Your fantastic glow.” Fractal-like, we discovered similar lessons in our adult meetings.

We are a multiplicity within our wholeness. A swimmer watched a heron wading peacefully near children noisily frolicking and splashing on the beach. In the evenings an astounding array of games, singing and dancing filled our common spaces. This we know experientially: amidst the polyphony of our work and play, we live in a God-filled world, a place of One-ness. It is from this place that our actions must flow.

Submitted by Kathleen Plunket-Black, Nancy Newman, Richard Fuller and Shel Gross