

EPISTLE
from the 11th Pacific Northwest Quaker Women's Theology Conference
Canby Grove Christian Center, Canby, Oregon,
June 15-19, 2016

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

Quaker women from the Pacific Northwest in the US and Canada gathered from June 15-19, 2016 amidst the beauty of God's creation under dripping cedar trees at Canby Grove Christian Center in Oregon, USA. We came together to share our experiences of the Divine, and the Gifts of the Living Presence, our theme for the gathering. Seventy-six women gathered from three Yearly Meetings and one independent congregation in the Northwest. Twenty-eight women attended for the first time, in part because of the encouragement and hard work of the planning committee. Eight women were under 35 years of age. Sixty-three percent were from unprogrammed worship communities, and thirty-four were from programmed or evangelical traditions. Two Friends attended from outside the Pacific Northwest.

Friends from North Pacific Yearly Meeting, Northwest Yearly Meeting, Canadian Yearly Meeting and Freedom Friends Church found ourselves worshipping, learning, singing, and discerning together as we listened carefully and grew to know and understand one another, ourselves, and God more deeply. We were a loving, diverse group and we were blessed by the wisdom and passion of Resident Friends Jan Wood and Chris Hall, who tenderly guided our studies and learning. We met, embraced by love and beautiful quilts hanging in our meeting hall.

Our first evening we were welcomed by the planning committee and encouraged to create nametags that did not name any Quaker affiliations we carried. This allowed us to welcome one another with open hearts. As we worked in partnerships, shared in home groups or fed our bodies in the dining room, we met one another as Quaker women, curious about our lives, passions and where our understanding of Spirit met one another. It allowed us to gather as one people and delight in one another as we raised beautiful voices together, circle danced, laughed and chanted. Friends supported one another in a specially called Meeting for Grieving.

Chris and Jan encouraged us to consider where our spiritual gifts lay through Bible study, self-reflection, and the experience of trying to create a body from many parts. We came to understand more fully that being faithful to our Quaker traditions means embracing every member of our Religious Society, as God requires each part of the body to labor, build, and create an inspired, healthy and challenging landscape to live out our faith.

We return to our faith communities filled with the gifts of the living presence, more connected to one another, and determined to make our lives matter in the converging body of Friends. After meaningful study of Exodus 4:1-5, we are inspired to throw down

our staffs as called by God, and watch in wonder as the Spirit transforms them, and us,
to take our spiritual gifts and callings out into the world.

In friendship,

Virginia Wood, Clerk

Norma Silliman, Recording Clerk

Meredith Egan, Deborah Lewis, Evelyn Myers, Epistle Committee