

Epistle from Great Plains Yearly Meeting 2018 Annual Sessions
Fifth Month 31-Sixth Month 3, 2018

Greetings to Friends everywhere!

It is with joy we send our greetings to the Religious Society of Friends from our 111th Annual Session of Great Plains Yearly Meeting held in Hominy, Oklahoma and hosted by Hominy Friends Monthly Meeting.

We know we are different, and we choose to be in fellowship together as Friends. We are grateful that our circle of fellowship includes the newer members of Topeka Friends Meeting and the Lubbock Friends of Christ. We are programmed and unprogrammed, pastoral and non-pastoral, and we encompass the spectrum of Friends in the United States—Evangelical, FUM, Conservative, and FGC. Our attendance at this year's annual sessions exceeded 50 persons with a group of twelve children and youth.

Eden Grace, the director of Global Ministries for Friends United Meeting, brought us the message that “we are precisely made to hear God.” She encouraged us to listen attentively to God, presented ways to discern true leadings, and gave us examples of how Biblical characters responded to God's call. She was a much appreciated resource as she involved all ages in her presentations, invited interaction, provided a cross-cultural perspective, and advocated for the full involvement and development of all members in our meetings, especially the young people. In her presentation on the work of FUM, she reminded us that “FUM is an African denomination with 90% of membership in East Africa.”

We benefited from three workshops on Seventh-day afternoon. Lacina Onco, a Shinnecock and Kiowa fellow with Friends Committee on National Legislation, shared with us about the efforts to positively impact Native Americans' lives by focusing on health legislation, specifically the Urban Health Parity Act and Diabetes program. FCNL is also working to combat attacks on the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Violence against Women Act. Lacina reminded us that 4 out of 5 Native women experience violence and that the disappearances and murders of Native women are underreported. We are reminded that God is on the side of the vulnerable.

Connie Adams facilitated an intergenerational demonstration of Faith & Play with the help of the Yearly Meeting children and youth. We are so grateful for the continuing efforts of those who engage in the work of religious education of children and youth.

The Home Missions Committee and Ministry and Council presented a panel on “Visitation, The Ministry of Connection” to discuss their project to increase visitation among our meetings and churches and outreach to other Friends in our geographic area.

As a Yearly Meeting, we continue to outline our project to expand visitation between our member meetings and churches in order to build relationships and fellowship and to support each other through ministry. Another focus of our visitation is to reach out to isolated or unaffiliated meetings and to connect with Friends in our geographic area in a concern for cross-branch relationships among the Religious Society of Friends. We feel that this ministry of visitation should be approached from a place of love and with a commitment to deep listening. The Yearly Meeting is inviting all who feel led to participate and encourages the identification of spiritual gifts of members knowing that God will use each of us exactly as we are to minister to others. While in person visits are preferred, we are encouraged to use letters, social media, phone calls, and video calls to reach out to other Friends. We also seek ways to encourage the development of new and

established leadership within our monthly meetings and churches. We ask what work of the Spirit is your Monthly Meeting drawn to do? Are there old leadings that need to be revisited and are there new leadings that are being revealed?

Beth Green-Nagle led us in Bible study of Acts 2 and 10 when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples and then on the Gentiles, reminding us that the Holy Spirit, given by Jesus as our direct connection with God, is available to all people, for “God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17).

Our times of fellowship were filled with conversation, laughter, music, song, good food, and fun. We especially enjoyed the Osage feast Saturday evening. This was followed by an Osage handgame which included Osage singers around a drum. Most of us joined in the round dances and straight dances which concluded each handgame. What a joy to laugh and dance together! We look forward to gathering together again Fifth Month 30 through Sixth Month 2 of 2019 at University Friends Meeting in Wichita, Kansas. We invite you to join us.

God is not done with Friends on the Great Plains. In fact, God is moving and working through us in our communities, our meetings, and in our relationships. For this we are very thankful.

With a grateful heart,
submitted by LaVonna Loesch
Great Plains Yearly Meeting
Presiding Clerk