

Epistle from North Pacific Yearly Meeting (NPYM) ANNUAL SESSION 2019

“We too often bind ourselves by authorities rather than by the Truth.” Lucretia Mott

Greetings to Friends everywhere from McMinnville, Oregon, traditional territory of the Tillamook, Siletz, Yamhill, and Kalapuya peoples. Two hundred thirty-four of us gathered at Linfield College July 17-21, 2019 for the 47th Annual Session of North Pacific Yearly Meeting. We welcomed Friends and presenters from the American Friends Service Committee, Quaker Earthcare Witness, Pacific Yearly Meeting, and Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting.

The theme “Hope? Abyss, Faith, Kinship” focused our worship and business as we grappled with the seriousness of today’s reality.

Our Friend-in-Residence was Jay O’Hara, member of Sandwich Monthly Meeting on Cape Cod and co-founder of the Climate Disobedience Center. In his presentation and again in focused worship, Jay described the spiritual damage of living stuck in our domination culture, and he invited us into something bigger. He urged us to return to the roots of our Quaker tradition, to listen to the still, small voice of Spirit, and to turn ourselves over to it and follow its leadings.

Jay urged us to rediscover and embrace the concept of Spiritual Authority and to practice the gift of naming. We can rekindle the flame; we can cultivate the eruption of the Spirit among us.

Jay also spent considerable time with the children and young people to talk about responses to climate change. One older friend remarked, “The children know more about these things than we do!”

We were blessed with a follow-up report by last year’s Friend-in-Residence, Vanessa Jule, from Friends General Conference’s Ministry on Racism. One outgrowth of Vanessa’s work with us was a Friends-of-Color Retreat at Ben Lomond Quaker Center. An epistle from that retreat is available at the *Western Friend* website (<https://westernfriend.org/article/friends-color-epistle-june2019>). The eighteen Friends who met reported, “Together, we found energy for the work that remains to be done by all members of our monthly and yearly meetings in order to become a more anti-racist and truly inclusive, compassionate community.” In light of those efforts and Jay’s challenge to us to re-examine traditional Quaker structures and practices, we struggled with ways to open our Yearly Meeting budget to meet emerging needs of the community, and particularly of Friends of Color.

After years of labor as well as deep sharing during this Annual Session, we approved a Minute on Uprooting Racism (available at <https://npym.org/?q=content/minutes-0>) that includes concrete action steps and future work for NPYM Friends.

Through Worship Groups and Interest Groups, we shared and learned about hope, despair, faith, and kinship in regard to climate chaos and racism. These themes resonated with Junior Friends (high school-aged youth) as well. They led a plenary session that invited us to reflect on our beliefs and values in relation to ourselves, others, and the earth. Their honesty continues to guide us.

Throughout our time together, we were heartened by Friends' words of wisdom. We share a few quotations with you.

- *What we call "normal" is morally and spiritually bankrupt.*
- *Privilege and comfort are numbing drugs. Individualism is misguided. We require community. Whether facing climate chaos, racism, or any of the world's deep problems, we know we can't do this alone.*
- *Our society is in desperate need of something new and different. We can't just go through the motions of what's gone before. We can, and must, rediscover the fire that burns within and celebrate and recognize those among us in whom the fire burns brightly.*
- *Despite all the loss we experience, there is still One who can speak to our condition. We are challenged to take that inward revelation and bet our lives on it.*
- *Our job is to make the impossible feasible and to make the feasible inevitable.*

During his address, Jay taught us the following song (lyrics by David Schiffman, music by Lisa Littlebird) that touched us deeply.

In Desperation we found Freedom
In Freedom we found Love
In Love we found Devotion
And in Devotion, Spirit found us.

In our desperation, may we all find freedom, love, and devotion. May Spirit find us all.

Signed among and for Friends of North Pacific Yearly Meeting

Lucretia Humphrey, presiding clerk