

## NYM Epistle For The 2012 Session

Greeting to Friends everywhere from the annual session of Northern Yearly Meeting.

How can we bring the Eternal Spirit into our work in healing this world, and still not presume we have “the answers?” This query faced the 279 attenders at Northern Yearly Meeting Annual Session May 25-28, 2012. Our session theme was “Being Salt and Light: Friends Living the Kingdom of God in a Broken World,” the same theme as the FWCC’s Sixth World Conference of Friends, in Kenya the month before.

Even in Wisconsin we were surrounded by lions (sculptures of them) at the Lion’s Camp near Rosholt. Rain precluded one day’s swimming and boating, but many of the children continued to play outdoors, pouring glasses of water over one another in the midst of the downpour. Some of us were wakened by flocks of geese and cranes flying overhead. We saw birds of prey and the forest was filled with songbirds.

As in previous years, we were nourished by each other, with communities growing around three different meal options: food prepared by the Lions Camp staff; a simple foods option, prepared cooperatively by ourselves, and fasting. Communities also formed around Sacred Harp and “Nightingales” singing, folk dancing, the ongoing game of ultimate Frisbee, and other passions.

Eighty-two children and youth were part of our group. Our children and youth are integral to the session and many adults devote hours to activities with them. We are delighted with our commitment to provide a spiritually-grounded setting as an alternative to the mainstream culture that surrounds us all. We are six years into a ten-year program of substantially expanding our budget for our youth activities, which take place at the session and throughout the year. We joyfully prepared a traveling minute for a teen member who is going on the Quaker Youth Pilgrimage in Europe this summer, reminiscing about how important it has been for others who have gone, as far back as 1959! Session experimented with a new way of sharing our memories of Friends who have died in the last year. We also tried out a new way of receiving State of Society reports from monthly meetings and worship groups. This approach allowed us to focus more on the state of the Yearly Meeting as a whole. We feel “very good” about our Yearly Meeting. Among the things that we value most are “the people” and “warm, exemplary relationships.”

We endorsed our support for the Quaker-inspired Northern Spirit Radio, and also this Epistle.

Our theme of being salt and light was addressed in many ways including in our Friday evening intergenerational activity, and in worship sharing. Saturday evening’s plenary featured six of our number just back from the Kenya Conference, sharing photos, experiences, songs and vocal prayer. Some of these participants also presented to groups of children. We are enlarged and challenged. Can we remember that deeply held individual truths are not THE truth? Friends give different emphasis to the place of Jesus of Nazareth in their spiritual lives. Do we subtly suggest that others with differing views are wrong, or can we open ourselves to the truth as they receive it? And how do we name the movement of God in our lives? How do we share our understandings with other Friends?

We face similar challenges around issues in our home communities including the current divisive Wisconsin Governor’s recall election. Also in our hearts and minds is the proposed amendment to the Minnesota state constitution forbidding the civil marriage of same-gender couples. Some of our meetings have been marrying same-gender couples for decades. Over the last year many of us, encouraged by Twin Cities Friends, have been working to defeat the proposed amendment. At the Sunday session we united strongly with a letter written by our Clerk for publication in Twin-Cities-area newspapers, to witness our opposition to the amendment. We encouraged that the letter be distributed more widely, to all NYM meetings and groups, and to other denominations. On this matter NYM is united, strong and clear. Still, how can we be respectful of others, not dismissing those with different views? (This was our theme for last year’s session, and we sense a continuity with that experience of hearts opening, sharing with the representatives from El Salvador Yearly Meeting.) How can we live in a broken world with an open heart, remaining true to our principles? Perhaps feeling inadequate is inevitable, even necessary, but we can still act on Truth as we understand it.

We join with Friends everywhere in seeking to live spirit-driven lives.