

Epistle from North Pacific Yearly Meeting (NPYM) ANNUAL SESSION 2020

Greetings to Friends everywhere from the Pacific Northwest, on the traditional and seized lands of dozens of indigenous peoples. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this 48th Annual Session was our first virtual gathering. The theme, “Deepening the Roots in Troubled Times,” guided us through plenary and business sessions; worship-sharing; a Quaker Fair; and breakout rooms for singing, socializing, and discussion. Friends also had access to a talk and conversation with Oregon State Senator Lew Frederick, a leader in the People of Color Caucus and an attendee of Multnomah Meeting in Portland, OR. The virtual format made a precise count of Annual Session attendees difficult; there were 279 full-time registrations and 63 part-time registrations. Attendance at plenary sessions ranged from 75-95. Unfortunately, attendance by children and Junior Friends was extremely low.

However, organizers saw the pandemic as an opportunity for Annual Session to be more accessible. Freed from limitations of time and space would help include Friends whose distance, health, finances, or schedules would otherwise not allow them to attend. Thus, Friends from the Pacific Northwest and around the U.S and the world came together.

We gathered as a “Meeting Beyond Walls,” figuratively and literally. “A bridge is the opposite of a wall,” Friend-in Residence Kenya Casanova from Cuba reminded us. Kenya bridged the obstacle of her modem breaking down and recorded herself on her mobile phone. The result was a series of six, four-minute videos that suggested that love is the steel of our bridge-building.

We welcomed presentations from *Western Friend* magazine and Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). Mary Klein, *Western Friend* editor, outlined ways the magazine serves as a bridge during the pandemic (see <https://westernfriend.org>). “Thank you for hiring me,” Mary said. “Being editor keeps me sane during this difficult time.” Amelia Kagan, Legislative Director for FCNL, likened advocacy efforts to the “Golden Hour” in the 100-mile marathons she participates in. The final runners are cheered by more spectators than the first person who crossed the finish line. She suggested increased work for justice for people of color, the climate, and health care may be like that Golden Hour.

The Youth Committee presented a major revision of our Youth Safety Policy to incorporate current “best practices” for organizations involving children and youth. We began an important, challenging process toward keeping our children as safe as possible in a way that allows them autonomy, community, and spiritual growth, without participating in policing systems.

Gathering with Friends for worship, singing, community, fun, and interest groups (including nine about systemic racism), was possible thanks to the brilliant use of technology and the exceptional efforts of those organizing the event. We feel deep gratitude for those who worked so hard to make it possible. At the same time, we intensely missed gathering in person and feeling the presence of the children; we also acknowledge the technology we used relies on unjust labor practices. Nonetheless, there is great satisfaction and many advantages being together virtually in this extraordinary time of change and continuing revelation.

Signed among and for Friends of North Pacific Yearly Meeting

David Zeiss, presiding clerk