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August 22, 2015

EPISTLE 2015

Loving Greetings to Friends everywhere,

Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends met for the 182nd annual gathering of Quakers in Canada, our 60th as a united Meeting, for the first time on the beautiful campus of the University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown. We came knowing that we had many challenging discussions to have and decisions to make.

The pre-gathering retreat, *Nurturing Joy in our Meetings*, was led by Lesley Read of New Brunswick Monthly Meeting and grew out of silence. Participants moved into small group work and consideration of joy in all facets of our lives.

On Saturday Friends gathered from all across Canada and celebrated community together in the evening. We were welcomed to the traditional Mi'kmaq territory of Abegweit by Indigenous Elder Judy Clark.

On Sunday afternoon, we celebrated the lives of those who died in the last year. That evening we heard the Sunderland P. Gardner lecture, titled *Decolonizing Land and Soul: A Quaker Testimony*, presented by Alastair McIntosh, Scottish Quaker and activist of Glasgow Area Meeting of Britain Yearly Meeting, whose words were challenging, humorous and thought-provoking. He continued his themes with workshops during the week. The lecture was followed by the traditional 'cake-night' in celebration of our beloved Archivist, Jane Zavitz-Bond, who is moving toward release from her long service.

Deborah Fisch of Friends General Conference and Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) led us in Quaker Study titled *The Joy of Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business*, with depth and humour. We began our regular week of activities, with Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business, as our Quaker Studies leader has reminded us to call it. An important session took the form of an extended Meeting for Worship with attention to the future of Quakerism in Canada, and the future of our Canadian Yearly Meeting's functions. We proposed major changes to our structure. We are anticipating a fallow year in 2017 during which we will not meet as Canadian Yearly Meeting in session. We were tested, being unable to reach unity in this matter about which many felt deeply. We remain committed to seeking the spiritually rich and financially-sustainable Yearly Meeting we desire. We learned with sadness of the laying-down of Simcoe-Muskoka

Monthly Meeting in Orillia, Ontario, and welcomed with joy the birth of Cowichan Valley Monthly Meeting on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Afternoon programs consisted of worship groups, followed by a wide selection of Special Interest Groups. One afternoon, we took part in community service projects proposed by our hosts, Prince Edward Island Worship Group: labouring in a nearby community garden and tree planting in a river watershed. Funds saved by a simple supper were donated to the university food bank. The week continued hot and humid, and many Friends enjoyed the glory of God's Creation in salt water on nearby beaches.

Our evenings were filled with interesting activities. "The Experience of the Spirit in my Life", an annual opportunity for Friends to share spiritual journeys was moving, with Friends sharing sometimes unusual experiences. There was a Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgendered-Queer (LGBTQ) sponsored film presentation, entitled *My Prairie Home*, and discussion. Another evening, we were led in considering communication and outreach in times of changing technology, finances and demographics.

Our youth numbers were small but Young Friends particularly loved the sun and activities of Canada's smallest Province situated on an island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Because the group consisted almost entirely of Young Adult Friends, youth joined in on much of the adult programming, including attending Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business meetings, Quaker study, worship groups, Special Interest Groups, and evening activities. Youth-specific activities involved Canadian Young Friends Yearly Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, excursions to beaches, late-night brownie baking, a dance, to which we joyfully welcomed older Friends as well, and drawing games. Some Young Friends and Young Adult Friends also enjoyed volunteering with the Children's Program.

On our last evening together we enjoyed the various gifts and talents of many Friends young and old during our annual family night. The ministries of music, dance, and laughter nourishes us as we prepare to leave this blessed community.

We are grateful for the setting here but recall the unusually severe wildfires in western Canada and the dangers these pose to Western Friends and to Mother Nature. We urge Friends to work ceaselessly, including with faith-based groups around the world, to mitigate and adapt to the challenges posed by changes to Earth's climate.

Although it was a week spent in serious work and in considering and making decisions, it was also a week during which Joy was a recurrent theme. We approach the coming year spiritually refreshed and full of hope and expectation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Bishop', written in a cursive style.

Elaine Bishop
Presiding Clerk