

Great Plains Yearly Meeting of Friends

Epistle, June 2, 2019

To All Friends Everywhere:

Great Plains Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends gathered for its 112th annual sessions May 30 – June 2, 2019, at University Friends Meeting in Wichita, Kansas. We rejoiced at the opportunity to fellowship together and to grow in the Spirit. We welcomed Friends and visitors from Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Illinois, Vermont, Colorado, and Germany.

Our theme – "Much Good Needs Doing . . . Growing in Peace and Love" – came to fruition as we adopted a Statement of Inclusion. The Statement recognizes that God calls us to love one another as God loves us, and we affirmed that all people are welcome in our midst and are invited to fully participate in the life of the Yearly Meeting. The Statement is the culmination of over 30 years of discernment within the Yearly Meeting, and it aided in healing some old wounds. We are indeed growing in peace and love.

We were reminded that "love is not a thing; it's a thing that does." During Bible Study on Friday and Saturday mornings, we examined the Gospel stories in which Jesus revealed the Love of God by healing a blind man at the Pool of Siloam and a lame man at the Pool of Bethesda. We heard reports of the good works being done by Friends United Meeting and Quaker agencies, including the American Friends Service Committee, Friends World Committee for Consultation, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Quaker Earthcare Witness, and Friends General Conference. Our hearts were gladdened to learn of increased enrollment at Wichita Friends School and of the ways in which it blesses its students through love and acceptance. State of Society reports informed us of how God has been working within our constituent meetings and leading Friends to service in the world.

John Calvi of Putney (VT) Monthly Meeting, New England Yearly Meeting, served as our keynote speaker. John is a longtime Quaker with a recognized gift of healing. John spoke of Friends' call to service in the world. He wisely counseled us that "we want to be doing our best, not our most," and that "in order to do our best, we must choose carefully." In a workshop, John introduced us to a simple massage form – a "laying on of hands" – which we then practiced on one another. Another workshop, led by David Hanson, shared information about justice issues for Native Americans.

Although Great Plains Friends have much to celebrate, we also have our challenges. One of our meetings – Council House Monthly Meeting, a small

congregation with Native American heritage – informed us that it will soon be unable to continue in its current manner, and it is seeking a way forward. Moreover, our Presiding Clerk expressed an intention to step down after one more year of service, but leadership has not yet been raised up to transition into that role. We place our trust in the Lord to guide us through these changes.

Our children and youth were well cared for by willing and dedicated adults who designed and implemented a program of education, service, and just plain fun. We are always grateful for the joy and gladness that radiates from our young folks and blesses us all.

It seems appropriate to conclude this epistle with the final sentence of our new Statement of Inclusion: "Our Quaker testimonies of equality, peace, and community inspire our goal to extend grace, inclusion, and love to all." May the Living Christ be with us in our efforts to be faithful.

With peace and joy,

LaVonna Loesch
Presiding Clerk