

Epistles to all Friends

From Intermountain Yearly Meeting

June 11-18, 2017 (including Early Days)

Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, New Mexico, USA

To Friends Everywhere

The sky is wide here at Ghost Ranch in northern New Mexico, which means we can see approaching weather from great distances. On the first day of our gathering this year, Friends were hoping for rain as some storm clouds came drifting in over this high desert valley. Several raindrops were reported, but mostly the clouds brought thunder, lightning, and eventually some smoke on a flat-topped mountain known as The Pedernal, made famous by Georgia O'Keeffe. Any fires that may have started are no longer visible, so we were fortunate here, even more so when we finally did get some rain on Saturday morning. Still, many other fires in the region continue to burn.

Climate change that exacerbates drought, extreme heat, and other harmful weather patterns is a concern in our yearly meeting. Likewise for the Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT), a grassroots nonviolent group working for a just and more ecologically-sustainable economy. Philadelphia Friend Eileen Flanagan, the clerk of the EQAT Board and our plenary speaker this year, described the role of faith in discerning her call to work for climate justice. Several generations of Intermountain Yearly Meeting, represented by Leslie Stephens, Gretchen Reinhart, and Anastasia Ebi, participated in the plenary by describing their own experiences of putting their faith into practice.

Early Days sessions involving the arts and other spirit-led pursuits, along with worship sharing groups and interest groups during regular meeting days, helped us to practice our faith and led us into outwardly focused concerns like Immigration and Sanctuary, Racism and White Privilege, Homelessness, Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity, Clearness and Care Committees to support Friends' Leadings, Nurturing Aging Friends, and Climate Change. A group of men met and shared their reflections on the Me-Too movement.

Inspired in part from an Early Days presentation on Implicit Bias and Racism, also led by Eileen Flanagan, we explored some of the ways in which our meetings might act to counter the influence of white privilege and racism. Though we may think of ourselves as progressive and well-intentioned, many of us are not aware of our own implicit biases and how we benefit from a system built on white privilege. We are working to acknowledge complicity on issues of racism, to make our meetings more welcoming, and to be more effective and proactive allies for People of Color.

In discussions about bias and white privilege, many agreed that the issues of immigration and border issues, sanctuary, justice for native peoples, and work on white privilege are all interrelated. Much of the work going on in our yearly meeting reflects the focus on border and sanctuary issues rising from our Meetings. Several Meetings sent members to the Border Convergence demonstration held simultaneously in Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, Mexico last November. At least two Meetings have offered sanctuary to those in need and many continue to work with interfaith coalitions supporting the human rights of migrants in our communities and along our border.

So much of our time here at yearly meeting is spent listening: to each other and for the Spirit that moves among us. We listened to Senior Young Friends, gleaning wisdom from their responses to a wide range of queries in a session they offered to the rest of the meeting. We listened deeply to one another's concerns in making the difficult decision to leave Ghost Ranch and move our annual meeting to Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. We listened for guidance as we approved several minutes: one encourages legislators to stand with courageous high school students throughout the country who are speaking out against, and promoting solutions to, gun violence; another urges the Trump administration and Congress to fully support a diplomatic path with North Korea; and a third urges our government to stop human rights abuses against migrants and asylum-seekers along our border and to end the zero tolerance policy that separates family members from one another. All of these minutes reaffirm our stand on the side of equality, community, humanity and peace through justice.

As a yearly meeting, we are small—there are about 800 of us—but we are strong. We were heartened to see that our attendance numbers grew this year with 295 members here at Ghost Ranch, a 10% increase over last year. Also the number of

first time attenders at Intermountain Yearly Meeting increased by 20 percent. It may be that the pay-as-led system, which was put in place this year in order to make Yearly Meeting more accessible to all Friends, is already bearing fruit.

We are finding the way forward with strength and with gratitude,

In Peace,

*Molly Wingate*

Intermountain Yearly Meeting of Friends

Molly Wingate, Clerk