

May 2018 Northern Yearly Meeting Annual Session Epistle

With thanks for our wonderful time together we send greetings to Friends everywhere from the 2018 annual session of Northern Yearly Meeting, held May 25th to 28th at the Lions Camp in Rosholt, WI, ancestral land of the Ho-Chunk Nation, other nations including the Menominee, and the Oneida, and many other Native peoples throughout the ages.

This year 253 of us attended, including 74 children and youth. We come from Lake Superior to Illinois and Lake Michigan to the Dakotas and from 30 different meetings. During our time here we supported one another in our spiritual journeys in small conversations, in Worship, worship-sharing groups, workshops ranging from inner spiritual growth, building community within and among our meetings, and political action. We also attended meeting for business, children and youth programming, and other fun activities such as swimming and boating.

This year our theme was “Restorative Justice” and we explored this throughout the weekend.

Friday night an intergenerational activity explored the formation of a trusting and learning community. During this event a 10-month-old started a spontaneous clapping conversation with the larger group demonstrating a way of being present and listening deeply, the evening event also involved definitions of justice in haiku form.

Workshops and interest groups included aspects of Quaker practice and exploration of faith while others explored aspects of restorative justice including one, led by a visiting Friend David Bucera from the Friends Peace Teams African Great Lakes Initiative, a discussion on “gacaca”, a traditional community reconciliation process, used in the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda.

On Saturday evening we participated in a plenary, by Jenn Hamrick of Friends for a Nonviolent World, about mass incarceration and the complexities of the criminal justice system, with information about problems such as solitary confinement, and identified courses of action for individuals and Meetings.

Business meeting also discussed issues related to this theme such as divesting our funds from fossil fuels, the Friends General Conference institutional assessment of racism, Quaker Earthcare Witness, American Friends Service, Friends Peace Teams, and Friends Committee on National Legislation advocacy teams.

We look forward to welcoming Quaker Voluntary Service to a new home in Minneapolis this coming fall.

Our children and youth also engaged with our theme. The high schoolers explored nonviolent communication and how to engage with those who disagree with you through programming with Friends for a Non-Violent World and discussed restorative justice both here and abroad. The middle schoolers attended a presentation about recognizing other cultures through intercultural dialogue and the effects of the criminal justice system, particularly focused on how it relates to mental health. The older elementary group created a book of quotes and photos from attendees of all ages responding to questions about justice. The younger elementary group explored restorative justice in the context of the parable of the good Samaritan. The preschoolers practiced their own form of justice by sharing their blocks.

The injustice surrounding us today can at first seem too large and overwhelming to deal with; but with Divine assistance and new insights about specific small and local places to start working for change it can seem more manageable.

During one Early Morning Meeting for Worship, a Friend noticed the leaves of an Aspen tree, moved by a breeze too slight to affect other trees. Perhaps we, like the Quaking Aspens who share a common root, are called to be sensitive to the slightest wind of the Spirit, allowing ourselves to be moved to hope and action as we return to our daily lives, home Meetings and communities renewed by our time at this gathering.