

Epistle

PACIFIC YEARLY MEETING

69th Annual Session 2015

July 18, 2015

To the gathered people called Friends, everywhere:

At Walker Creek Ranch in northern California, from July 13 through July 18 2015, Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends met on land where the Miwok people have lived among the oak and deer, sustained by a gentle stream, both still and swirling with movement. Our widespread community came together from Mexico, Guatemala, Hawaii, Nevada, and California, to share a week of friendship, nurture, and the promise of transformation, centered on our theme of love and justice.

“This is the day the Lord has made...” With these words, Lloyd Lee Wilson, Friend with us under a traveling minute from North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative, began his keynote address. Drawing on Psalm 127, Lloyd Lee reminded us that before we can change the world, we must be changed ourselves. Our shared conviction as Friends, that the total healing of the world is possible, inspires our lives. Yet not by our own wisdom and direction but through the faithful and courageous responsiveness to God’s guidance will this be accomplished. And like the motion of a pendulum, the shape of this life involves stillness, the swing to motion, and the return to reflective stillness. True Godliness does indeed turn us to the mending of the world, but it must first be true Godliness that does the turning.

We were deeply moved in our gathering by what we learned of marginalized and vulnerable people in our world. Children fleeing violence in their home countries, who cross the southern United States border, face mistreatment and risk in the U.S., often being placed in privatized detention centers. We grieve for these young persons and feel called to their support, and to the work required to insure their safety.

We are sensitive also to the potential dangers to our own Quaker children here. Our Ministry and Oversight committee brought the fruits of a long discernment over our

responsibility to protect our children from sexual and other forms of abuse. We wrestled with this call to more careful work in staffing and overseeing our children's and youth programs.

Paula Palmer, Friend with us under a traveling minute from Boulder Monthly Meeting and Intermountain Yearly Meeting, brought her concern to promote right relationships with First Peoples. She led intergenerational workshops to help us understand the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery. Through an experiential encounter with our history many became aware of the burdens of our complex past and present, and of the call to an active recovery of right relationship with native peoples.

Our Walker Creek setting brought us to an immediate awareness of the beauty and preciousness of the natural world. Jose Aguto of Friends Committee on National Legislation, called on us to join a movement of moral conscience for climate action. FCNL urges us to join with other faith communities in a coalition of conscience for the stewardship of our world. There is awareness and good will in our country, a great reservoir of possibility for change; the faith community, including Friends, has a crucial role in releasing this reservoir to action.

Our Unity With Nature Committee brought us another call for climate action. We approved endorsing "Facing the Challenge of Climate Change: a Shared Statement by Quaker Groups," which calls on our leaders and other communities to take action to protect our natural world. This endorsement led Friends to minister that such statements are only the first step. We must also take action on our own part in support of this call.

The needs of the world are great and we found ourselves challenged by these new levels of awareness. How can we be a moral witness and follow our leadings into action? How can we develop a foundation of faith and trust that will guide and support us in a turn toward the mending of the world?

Our week together also included other opportunities for deepening discernment, for learning, and for spiritual growth. In these ways we sought to make manifest the beloved community not yet fully present among us.

Our “listening sessions” were opportunities to share discernment on topics in advance of our business plenaries. Freed from the pressure to move to unity, we were able to more fully explore sensitive and complex issues in preparation for our business meetings.

We gathered to learn as well. We sought to honor our elders and ancestors in a series on transformative Quakers. These included Albert Bigelow, sailor of the Golden Rule, John and Alice Way, founders of Pacific Ackworth Friends School, Marjorie Sykes, Quaker educator in India, and Heberto Sein, co-founder of Casa de Los Amigos and Mexico City Monthly Meeting.

We continued our daily “come as you are” Bible study sessions, to which all were invited, regardless of viewpoint or degree of experience with the Bible. Attendees were asked only to be willing to have a respectful and spirit-led experience of the text. Many came and were nourished.

Our Quaker Youth Program Committee told us of the work of our Youth Program Coordinator and the newly funded projects in support of youth. We were told of the youth service learning camp at Quaker Oaks Farm, put on in partnership with the local Wukchumni tribe. A weekend gathering immediately preceding our annual session brought Lloyd Lee Wilson and Paula Palmer to join Young Adult Friends and others in a rich time of learning and exploration. Our Children’s and Junior Yearly Meeting programs brought energy and intergenerational spirit to our week. Our times in worship in our great meeting tent were often accompanied by the voices of children around us.

The call to deepen our trust in the spirit and follow our leadings in action, to find the way of love and justice, pervaded our time together. An exercise in the teen program proposed a metaphor for our search and the role of our community. Blindfolded

groups of teens, supporting one another, struggled to stay on a rope line, on a course that took unexpected turns through unfamiliar territory. So, too, do we as a corporate body, seek to support each other's leadings together, our imperfect attempts at following the light rooted in the Holy Spirit. Truth comes through our relationships as a gathered people in our search for love and justice. The word is given to us as a community and made manifest in action. Let us try what love can do.

Steve Smith

Presiding Clerk