

July 30, 2017

To Friends Everywhere:

“Joined by every supporting ligament” was the theme for this year’s Western Yearly Meeting. Using Ephesians 4:16, “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work,” Western Yearly Meeting gathered in Plainfield, Indiana from July 27-30, 2017 for our 160th annual session.

Over the past several years, the themes of each gathering have continued to build on each other, providing a framework for unity and growth to meet today’s challenges. From recognizing and encouraging spiritual giftedness, becoming better stewards, and laying a foundation for growth; we moved this year to consider the process of strengthening each part so that we can, together in the Spirit, withstand the forces that threaten to weaken us as we move forward.

Quaker Lecture speaker, Max Carter, had his childhood roots in Russiaville, Indiana (a part of Western Yearly Meeting.) This connection made his Thursday night presentation especially meaningful. He reminded us through historical anecdotes that the growth of Quakerdom was not without conflict, disagreement, and heartache. What allowed the Quakers to survive as a group, was that despite stretching “every supporting ligament,” (sometimes to nearly breaking) they recognized they were united by love and the Spirit which is stronger than any outside force. He pointed out that each generation has been faced with deep social conflict, threats to theology, advances in technology, and resulting changes in culture. Each generation emerged stronger because they faced and worked through the challenges. The current generation does not need to be the exception if we remember that love and the Spirit of God sustains us.

Like many faith bodies today, Western Yearly Meeting faces the realities of outside forces competing for the time of members, a dwindling number of active adults due to aging and its effects, and reduced numbers of new members. While several individual meetings are seeing growth, others are struggling to remain viable, and several have been laid down. We recognize that it is the actions of the current generation that will revive the fervor that draws in people for Christ. Individual meetings have already started reaching out into and engaging the communities around them in a wide variety of ways. At the same time, these meetings are working to strengthen the support and nurture of current members. These meetings have realized that strengthening requires action! The annual Memorial Service provided an opportunity to remember those who have gone before us and the roles each of them played in helping the current generation grow and strengthen.

Western Yearly Meeting was well represented at the Friends United Meeting Triennial and those who attended reported growth in understanding and strengthening of relationships as a result of attendance. Balancing this “outreach” to the world is the “inward” care and nurture that will result from successfully reaching the financial goal for the Western Yearly Meeting Pastoral Ministry Excellence sustained fund. As grants are made from this fund, everyone in Western Yearly Meeting will have a part in helping pastors retire with dignity, and reduce the financial strain of those entering pastoral training.

Each year provides an opportunity to program the annual meeting differently, adapting it to meet the needs of those attending and encourage new attenders. This year was no exception. Morning devotional speakers were local leaders. Meetings for Business were shortened to a two-hour session on each of the first three days, encouraging written rather than oral reports with opportunities for discussion provided. Western Yearly Meeting approved a minute encouraging members to support discussion and legislation abolishing the death penalty in the case of severe mental illness. A proposal to change current procedures regarding nominations and Area Meetings was considered to meet the challenge of reduced membership and still maintain a framework for future growth.

Afternoons were filled with engaging workshops and interest group sessions. Workshops included: "Practice in Peaceful Problem Solving" presented by the Indianapolis Peace Learning Center; "Communicating for Peaceful Resolution" presented by the Alternatives to Violence; and "Drug Addiction and How the Church Can Help," a panel discussion conducted by especially qualified community specialists. A wide variety of additional interest group sessions reflected the diverse needs and concerns of the members of Western Yearly Meeting. Intergenerational activities were well attended and new evening activities such as a Festival of Fun and an open-to-the-public free concert with Tim Grimm were tried for the first time.

Saturday morning started with a Pancake Breakfast sponsored by the Quaker Men as a fund raiser for the mission in Belize. After the business session, workshops, and interest groups, the mission emphasis continued. Quaker Men and the USFW met for a combined session led by Oscar Mbali from Nairobi who is assuming pastoral responsibilities in Belize. This was followed by Quaker Men/USFW meals and business, and the public concert!

Sunday was a day of rejoicing. Musical gifts of individuals and groups from within Western Yearly Meeting were highlighted in an uplifting program presented prior to the Sunday morning closing worship service and the official recognition of our newly recorded minister, Kathy Luethje.

As we move forward "To strengthen every ligament" by putting our faith into action, your prayers of support and encouragement are appreciated.

In Christian Love,

Sarah Lookabill, Presiding Clerk

Elizabeth Ann Carter, Recording Clerk

Kay Carter, Assistant to the Clerk