

## 2006 NYM Epistle: A Journey in Faith, Hope, and Love

Greetings from Rosholt, Wisconsin and the thirty-first annual session of Northern Yearly Meeting, where our theme is “Moving towards a Blessed Community.” This is our largest meeting yet, with more than three hundred souls present, about 120 of them children and youth. Under the ministry of Friends from New York and El Salvador Yearly Meetings, we embark on a journey of faith. Discernment and discipline in our Quaker process is being seasoned. And, our hearts melt with joy over the love we feel in being together.

Plenary and workshop leaders, Ernie and Vince Buscemi, traveling from New York City on a ministry to eradicate racism in FGC, lead us through a brief history of race relationships among Friends, followed by sharing from the heart about current experiences of racism in our meetings. Then we are queried, “What might it mean, to value diversity?” Perhaps, to expand ourselves to spiritual wholeness, no longer to be oppressor or oppressed-to participate; to learn as well as to teach; to be engaged with our neighbors, to be in equal partnership with communities of color. Their Ministry helps to guide us along the path to rediscover our sacred wholeness.

Friends from our sister yearly meeting in El Salvador lead us in a programmed worship; we sing familiar hymns in Spanish and hear Bible readings and a brief, prepared message. Although some may feel discomfort about evangelical expressions of faith apparently different from ours, many rejoice in new-found openness to that difference and find the event “profound” or “elemental.” We begin to accept, in fullness, that there are many paths to love in Quaker worship and that “there are no segregated rooms in heaven.”

Our labors with three Faith and Practice chapters give our growing faith in that of the divine in each other a new meaning, just as the first generation of Friends “came upon a faith which cut to the root of the way they saw life; radically reorienting it.” A hope is instilled: might we be a generation of Friends who return the fire to the Society of Friends and radically reorient our vision of life through the rediscovery of our faith in the wholeness of who we are? One friend terms our newly approved chapter on the Simplicity Testimony, which has required five years of loving midwifery, “Quaker writing for the ages”

It is HOT here, the lake well used. Toddlers in hats pick dandelion puffs while older Friends renew relationships in sociable walks through the enchanted forest around the

beautiful lake. At sundown, dragonflies gobble insects in erratic flight. There is the soft sound of gentle rain as it puckers the waters.

Diverse conversations reign-insights regarding the similarity between the Aramaic words for 'camel' and needle', dining hall conversations about God with a deeply spiritual atheist; murmuring susurrations of intensely probing dialogue, childlike giggles from a sixty-year old-or was she six?

Flow my tears! -as night's blackbird sings sweetly to my heart. In our Sunday morning Memorial Meeting for Worship we weep and hold our newly departed, dearly beloved Friends. The memorial minutes and messages have given us Friends of Light a message: That the darkness, too, is blessed.

Our Saturday night Talent Show, in a hall dimmed against the August-like heat, brings much laughter and joy. There is tender play in the full Quaker garb of children, older Midwesterners, and honored guests from afar. Simultaneously, abrupt shouts and rushes mark a game of Ultimate Frisbee outside. There's a teenagers' card game on the other lawn. And, at sunset, our teenage saxophonist breaks our hearts with a riff on Finlandia.

In our last session we thank our current presiding clerk and co-clerk, both ending their service this year, for their loving and seasoned ministry. We also approve the following minute:

Our experience confirms that all people are equal before God and equally loved by God. In witnessing the truth of God's love to the wider community, we support full and equal inclusion of gays and lesbians in enjoying the rights and privileges afforded any citizen. We declare our opposition to the proposed amendment to the Wisconsin Constitution that would ban the legal recognition of same-sex marriages and civil unions of any kind. We further encourage our monthly meetings and worship groups, as well as individual Friends, to act to defeat this proposed amendment in Wisconsin, and similar amendments in other states.

Our children and youth give their epistles and we bring annual sessions to a close. The end of a year, but the beginning of our sacred journey in radical faith, our hopes for diverse community and the energy of its co-creation, and our immersion in our loving of and answering to that of the Divine in each of us.