

Greetings to Friends everywhere from the annual session of Northern Yearly Meeting, at Lions Camp, Rosholt, Wisconsin, USA

We have gathered in the blessing of warm sunshine in central North America, on land inhabited previously by generations of indigenous people. The trees leafing out, the flowering crabapple tree bursting into bloom, and the calling of the cranes are balm for our spirits, as we have endured a long cold winter and spring. One of our children captured the scene in a haiku: “The still pretty lake, the beauty of the water, the jumping bright fish.”

In this setting we come together joyfully rediscovering the love that flourishes in our community of longstanding friendships, intergenerational connections, and new attenders. Of the nearly 300 Friends gathered here, more than one-third are sleeping outdoors (by choice).

We take refuge here from daily life, seeking wholeness in Spirit and community. We rejoice that so many of us are sharing this experience, while sharing at the same time a sense of paradox. We treasure this abundant community, even as we are aware of the great sufferings occasioned by income inequality in our world. Many celebrate that our Roman Catholic brother, Pope Francis, is firmly addressing the issue of economic injustice. Paradox strikes us also when we revel in our connection with the Earth and the planets in the skies, while at the same time feeling challenged by the quickening reality of climate change and the growing dangers to our planet's ecosystem. We are happy for the efforts of NYM planning committee to more actively support carpooling to this gathering. We are also working to further decrease the investment of Meeting funds in fossil fuels.

“What Canst Thou Say,” our session's theme, calls forth many responses. For some of us, Spirit seems to be saying, “Wait. Listen. Be patient.” Others hear the urging, “Well, what are we going to do about it?” Some of us hear both. At our plenary on Saturday evening, a young adult Friend urged that we need to listen to each voice, making room for diversity, without judgment. Our Early Teens did that, producing a valuable recommendation quite unexpected by the adults. On Sunday we heard reports from many local meetings. We are doing much, caring for each other and the world.

We rejoice in the maturing relationship we have with El Salvador Yearly Meeting. Our yearly meetings take turns, regularly sending representatives, and this year Raul Pérez and Glenda Pérez de Murcia journeyed thousands of miles from San Salvador to be in community with us. Two additional Friends who were scheduled to join us were denied visas. With ESYM we are challenged to build bridges of spiritual connection across the vast differences in economic wealth between our yearly meetings. We seek to know the spiritual riches each can offer the other. This year, Raul pointed out that each of our yearly meetings has subjects that are taboo, and asked if perhaps one gift we can offer each other is help in talking more openly about difficult topics. During a workshop that Raul led about nurturing and maintaining our relationship with God, a group of us bridged our ways of worshiping, concluding the meeting with worship sharing in the manner of NYM, with simultaneous interpreting. We thank God for the community between our yearly meetings.

We are happy that, after nearly two decades of drafts and reviews, prayers and discernment, we are close to publishing, in book form, the first *Northern Yearly Meeting Faith & Practice*. At this session, we approved the chapter on community. We are indebted to those Friends who have labored so faithfully with this task. We also thank the ad hoc committee on finances, who recommended ways to simplify our financial structure to reflect and support our two key priorities: this annual session and the children and

youth programs that we hold throughout the year. There are 77 children and youth attending this year's session. Many of us had the pleasure of walking the "spiritual path" that the Older Elementary group created through the pines near their meeting room. They stood branches on end and posted queries, quotes, and haiku for contemplation, inviting us to share our own.

We enjoyed the many artistic gifts shared by young and old during the annual talent show, as well as lots of spontaneous live music (singing, guitars, string bands and what we believe was a euphonium).

We mourn the loss of many beloved Friends, mostly elders, during this last year, and celebrate the gifts that each brought. We continue to explore ways that our memorials for deceased Friends may strengthen our living community.

"What can we say?" The chapter of our Faith & Practice on "Testimony of Community" says: "A longing for spiritual connection brings us into community. Our disciplined steady practice of being present with one another ... feeds this hunger." We rejoice that in this year's annual session, we have engaged in this practice of being present with one another, listening and connecting across many languages of diversity.

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