

Epistle from Northern Yearly Meeting, for 2015

Greetings to Friends everywhere from the 2015 annual sessions of Northern Yearly Meeting at Lions Camp, Rosholt, Wisconsin, USA, where 312 Friends gathered in late May.

This is the 40th year for Northern Yearly Meeting (NYM). Thirty monthly meetings and worship groups were represented. We enjoyed the sun, as well as the rain, in our land which had been too dry to permit campfires. Shared laughter, dancing, music, games and prayer fed our spirits and helped us to face the theme of our sessions: “Climate Change: Turning Awareness Into Action.”

For many years we have worried about the impact of global warming on our Earth. This year we organized our annual session to focus on this grave reality. In our meetings for business, and in our plenary session, workshops, interest groups, children’s programs and informal conversations we learned more, met in our shared pain, and continued to plan and to act.

Our plenary speaker, Howard Vogel, held up two different ways of understanding our relationship with the Earth. One, inherited from the European tradition, assumes that land is owned by humans, and is “other.” In contrast, the Native American Dakota tradition assumes that the Earth is part of our family, and in fact the word for Earth and mother are the same. As we considered the implications of each way of connecting with Earth, we were encouraged to wait on Spirit and then let our lives speak, as patterns and examples.

The urgency of climate disruption made it a struggle to balance the importance of waiting for spirit with our eagerness to respond to pressing needs. We know that climate change is not just “coming”; it is here. And we know it will worsen, even if we are able to make profound change now. Quakers prefer slow deliberative processes, but with this present crisis we chose to at times “take steps, even if they are not perfect.”

Some of the small and larger actions we took included:

- seeking ways to carpool, recycle, compost and save energy where possible,
- attending workshops, six of seven of which specifically addressed climate disruption,
- deciding to move NYM savings into investments that don’t support fossil-fuel extraction,

- endorsing the shared statement by Quaker groups, “Facing the Challenge of Climate Change.”

In the midst of these actions we honored community members who have died during the last year. We celebrated the 89 children and teens as they exuberantly reported on their climate-change-related activities this weekend. We were inspired by the work of our national Quaker organizations in the wider world. We are gearing up to host the annual gathering of Friends General Conference in 2016 in Minnesota.

Last year we were nearing completion of our first book of Faith and Practice. This year we are preparing to publish. An accomplishment that happened at our beloved “Quaker speed” was the approval of the final chapter on the testimony of Equality. More than one hundred people participated in writing this chapter over seven years. The chapter calls upon each of us to recognize that of the Divine in all people, and in all creation. It affirms our knowledge of continuing revelation and the appropriate urgency we feel to do what we can to preserve the divine Earth we are part of. We must bring our whole hearts and minds and spirits to this work, feeling the grief and agony that facing this calls up in us. Experientially, we find that sharing our grief brings us into communion and gives us strength to continue. In worship we found ourselves called as a community to “Stand up, shine out, invite in” as our world continues its relationship with us.