

Developed by the Epistle Committee. Convener: Dave Hackett, Frank Wood, Jane Wolff, Robin Greenler, Stephanie Speicher

May 27, 2019

To Friends Everywhere,

Again, we gather in Rosholt, WI as the crabapple trees start to drop their petals in order to bear fruit and we too celebrate our ongoing community and new growth. In this, our 44th year together, we focused on understanding Communication -- learning, growing, practicing, and developing our skills. Our theme—Speaking with a Holy Voice: Using Human Words to Communicate Divine Truth—led us to consider what is truly longing to be expressed. We strive to be present to one another in an ongoing effort to learn the skills to build the community we wish to live in. It seems we get a little closer in these weekends.

We are blessed to have over sixty youth attending the session this weekend, making up a fifth of our total attendance. They have been engaged in mirth-making and wide exploring, building friendships as they navigate new communities. Themes of communication weave through their projects as they drum together, learn sign language, lead one another in trust walks, make buttons reflecting their faith, engage with visitors from Friends Peace Teams and El Salvador Yearly Meeting, hear a peer presentation on political lobbying, and conduct their own business meetings. Young teens considered a query relevant for all of us: how do you use your holy voice? The work of our youth parallels our own as we all struggle to learn how to listen deeply and discern when Spirit is speaking.

We are building community over informal and serendipitous talks at dinner or down by the water's edge. Sharing s'mores, boating, and meeting for worship, singing together and playing games on the lawn are opportunities to share parts of ourselves with one another. And of course, we demonstrate our commitment through vast volunteerism in youth programs and the attending of several days of Spirit-led Meeting for Business. We are reminded of the power of presence.

As part of our ongoing relationship with El Salvador Friends Yearly Meeting, we again hosted three Salvadoran Friends. We heard of the progress made at the two schools under their care, Soyapango and San Ignacio Chalatenango, educating almost 450 students. We shared our traditions of singing at gathering, joining in evening singing, closing meeting for worship with song, and leading Grace at meals. We value the opportunities to build friendships as we communicate across culture and languages.

We celebrate the concrete expressions of our testimonies. We are finding that the use of modern technology is making it easier to register, organize ourselves, meet from a distance, and decrease our carbon footprint for travel. We have committed to fully fund yearly meeting representatives' expenses to Friends organizations thereby making these opportunities

available to all regardless of financial means. And we continue to express our value of inclusivity with a simple foods cooperative that feeds approximately half of the session attendees.

We continue to learn to integrate as a community of newcomers and longer-term attendees. We are reminded that the responsibility of becoming a whole community rests with all of us. Are we conscious of things we do that exclude people? Do we continue to remain welcoming and genuinely interested in everyone present?

We wish for our work this weekend to extend into the larger global community like ripples in a pond. We look forward to receiving epistles from other yearly meetings.