

## Epistle from NYM, May 2024

Greetings from Northern Yearly Meeting (NYM) to Friends Everywhere,

We gathered over Memorial Day weekend, from May 24 to 27– the time of year that damselflies are emerging, revealing the pulse of life – at the Lions Camp in Rosholt, Wisconsin. 210 adults and children were in attendance, including a contingent of students from Scattergood School. Almost 20% were first-time attenders to the NYM Annual Session. Our yearly meeting's attendance is also growing year on year. We celebrate the new energy in the yearly meeting, and the continuing engagement of old friends and new.

The theme of this year's sessions was "Inward guidance, outward action." There are a lot of ways to interpret this theme. Friends are welcome to ask themselves: Is it truly the Spirit moving you, and how to make the Spirit manifest in the world? Friends made their way to camp throughout Sixth-day (Friday), and on Sixth-day night, Friends welcomed each other in a playful gathering reflecting our meeting's spirit.

Seventh-day we held our first meeting for worship. Following the meeting for worship, a Friend gave a powerful and moving talk on leadings. We then split into small worship sharing groups where we delved deeper into a set of queries focused on the theme. These groups met three times over the weekend.

Alongside the stated theme, the themes of welcome and connection emerged as central organizing sentiments, as the meeting community struggles to understand itself and its blind spots in its effort to become more welcoming to people who too often feel excluded from the dominant culture in our nation.

Parents with young children formed a parent support group, and intend to continue to meet online during the year. While most of the adults were doing "grown-up" tasks, the children and youth participated in various craft and social activities. Like many Yearly Meetings, we lean older demographically, but there is a significant group of young adults. As our teens become college aged, they often go their own ways as they start their lives and work on their own concerns. Parents with young children find a way back into the meeting through First-day school. The challenge is to engage these Friends and their concerns, and be a place where they can grow and thrive.

The weather on Seventh-day was perfect for hiking, boating and swimming at the lake. The ticks and mosquitoes welcomed us enthusiastically! Seventh-day also saw several well-attended group events, including the screening of a film produced by a member of our yearly meeting, showing the city of Duluth's celebration of the 100th anniversary of Nelson Mandela's birth. First-day was cooler and rainy, so it was perfect for indoor activities including focus groups on various topics including a Native American interest group, climate action discussion, and spiritual nurture. Another topic discussed the "Roots and Fruits of the Peace Testimony." These sorts of activities reflected the theme of "inward guidance, outward action." We are all trying to discern what level of action is appropriate at the yearly meeting level.

There were spaces for playing board games and singing (and s'mores!) by a huge indoor fireplace. It appears many Quakers have card-playing skills as well; there were a few bridge games on the tables in the dining room.

A group of 15 teenagers brought their energy to a gathering of folk dancers in the Memorial Hall. The theme of musical theater arose in many places throughout the meeting, including at the talent show on First-day when old and young demonstrated some quirky and unique talents for everything from *speaking in "pig latin"* and *"arbor"* to singing show tunes.

Key points from the meetings for business included changing the funding model for Northern Yearly Meeting. NYM is funded mainly from member meetings and from session registration fees, and as we are no longer

drawing down the reserves, plans are in place to also seek support from individuals. It was noted that there is some discernment needed when combining individual donations with member donations, to ensure equity in governance and decision-making.

Several of the founding members of NYM passed away this past year. With these losses, some meetings have decided to become worship groups under the care of larger monthly meetings, but representatives from most member meetings and worship groups were in attendance this year. Friends sat in worshipful memory of those we had lost over the past year on First-day Morning. Our departed Friends were present in spirit throughout the weekend.

Northern Yearly Meeting was fortunate to have representatives from many Quaker groups including

- Scattergood Friends School, a Quaker boarding school in Iowa
- El Salvador Yearly Meeting, with which we have many personal connections and have exchanged visits over the years.
- Friends General Conference
- Right Sharing of World Resources
- New York City 15th Street Meeting's traveling minister among friends who is working on election violence prevention
- American Friends Service Committee
- Quaker Voluntary Service

Nominating committee was busy looking for volunteers to contribute their talents in a formal manner. The weekend was also full of opportunities for service in small ways from table cleaning to piloting pontoon boats. *The nominating committee was successful at filling all but a few open positions, which is a sign of vigor in our yearly meeting.*

We are looking forward to entering true middle age as a yearly meeting, as we celebrate our 50th year in 2025. Looking forward to seeing old Friends and more new ones next year.