

Epistle of the 2011 Annual Session of North Pacific Yearly Meeting

Young Friends and Adult Epistle

The North Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends sends warm greetings to Friends and seekers around the world from the campus of Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. Two-hundred eighty-three Friends have come together here this Seventh Month, 13th through 17th for our 39th Annual Session. We return here where five years ago a Quaker Peace Tree was planted by Friends General Conference along with a plaque declaring: *A living witness that we pray will outlive the occasion of war.* This native red cedar is now perhaps 20 feet tall, yet we have many milestones to reach before that prayer is realized.

Balance, integration, and longing for deep connection were common threads of our time together.

The theme of our Annual Session, *Being Practically Spiritual: The Integration of Inward Life and Outward Action*, brought to us with joy and thoughtfulness by Friend-In-Residence Michael Birkel, informed worship groups, plenary sessions, and other exchanges during this gathering. His presentation used the words and histories of John Woolman and Margaret Fell to evince the “true meaning of religion” as they understood it. Friends tend to follow one of two paths: that of the activist and that of the mystic or contemplative. He reminded us that this is a false duality. When activists understand that prayer is seeking justice and when contemplatives understand that actively seeking justice in the world is a form of worship, we can move away from dualism toward integration.

Conversations about how to smooth the transition for young adult Friends from Junior Friends (high school age) to finding a place in the larger body were compelling. We recognize need for paths for the young among us to step into active roles in the larger body as early and as fully as they are led. Rather than write a separate epistle, young adult Friends combined their message with this one. We are grateful for this choice as it prompted discussions around how we might ease any sense of separation among us. Young adults’ message was clear: “We are here! We are a part of you!” They noted that finding balance during this gathering was a challenge -- balance between the desire to help with the young children, to attend worship and interest groups, to sustain their own work, and to reconnect with each other.

Working with what to some still feels like new form for Yearly Meeting business, we had challenges presented by an agenda that included more decisions than we’ve faced in recent years. We now rely on Coordinating Committee to address practical needs and to share information within NPYM in between Annual Sessions, but we conduct most of our business while convened together as a whole.

We deliberated a minute on population stability. There was a strong sense that this minute must speak more directly to the need for right sharing of resources rather than population stability. The minute addressed complex issues and we could not find unity around it. We did approve a recommendation to affiliate with Quaker Earthcare Witness. There was deep consideration of an ad hoc committee’s recommendation that we affiliate with Friends General Conference after a year of seasoning throughout the Yearly Meeting. We recognize benefits we already receive through many connections to individual Friends and meetings in NPYM, yet this Yearly Meeting has a meaningful history of independence. We accepted the committee recommendation that we engage in a year of discernment on this proposal.

To be mindful of good order is to hold practical realities of a large group together for a short time while remaining tender with each other. This is no small task when there is a deep sense that we are on the verge of significant transitions and there much work to be done. Any discomfort or tension we feel as we labor together to be “practically spiritual” is outweighed by love and respect, shared aspirations, gratitude for the service of many, and by a common belief that it does matter to surrender ourselves to something greater – whether called God, the Divine, Buddha, Yahweh, Christ, Community, Spirit, or any of the other terms used to name the source of the light which we seek.

Central Friends Epistle

To Friends Everywhere:

We, the Central Friends of NPYM, met during the Annual Session. We had 14 members this year.

Pacific Lutheran University was a great meeting space with lots of greenery. Nearby were the ocean, old growth forest, and the ocean. This was a good chance for many Central Friends who rarely see the ocean to get a chance to see it.

We got to know each other on the first day through an introduction game called “Two Truths and a Lie.” We learned some facts about each other that we probably would not have learned otherwise.

We had a discussion about faith and practice and the testimonies and how they could be used as the basis for guidelines for our time together. We wrote down our ideas about the testimonies and used them to make a code of conduct for our time at Meeting.

We then created a Central Friends Capture the Flag flag, which we are hoping will become an annual tradition at Yearly Meetings.

We went swimming, then watched a movie called Pixar Shorts, and then went outside to play capture the flag. During the movie we had some disagreements. The next morning by going back to the testimonies we were able to resolve the problem with guidance from the adults.

Friday we had planned a field trip but it had to be rescheduled. We were all disappointed. We were flexible; we play games like basketball, volleyball, and capture the flag. In the afternoon we practiced skits, attended the Quaker Fair, and relaxed with our friends. In the evening we had a huge game of capture the flag, followed by going to Open Mic.

On Saturday, the Friend in Residence talked to us about John Woolman and invited us to come to Earlham College. We then left on an all day trip to the Point Defiance Zoo, Aquarium, and wildlife area. We toured the zoo until lunch, at lunch at Owen Beach, and scrambled around in old growth forest until 2:30pm. We then returned to PLU. We then worked on the epistle and practiced our skit for Community Night.

We look forward to performing our skit, going to the Junior Friends dance, the final plenary.

The dorms were very clean and makes us look forward to college. The Cave (our meeting place) was the perfect spot for us.

Thank you to NPYM for the wonderful stay and experiences we had. Also, thanks to the advisors Ethan, Josh, and Mark.

Junior Friends Epistle

This year found a gathering of 27 Junior Friends that were involved and excited for five days of Quakerism. We were also very young with over eight newcomers, a blessing for the Junior Friends! These new souls brought light to the meeting as we enjoyed many activities.

One of our main activities was the midnight premiere of Harry Potter, the James bond of your time. The activity led to a great support from the greater meeting as we enjoyed dress up and a late night of excitement. Our activities also included the infamous capture the flag in the Washington rain and the annual Dance and Feast of Love held magical dancing and friendship. Besides the late nights and seamless never ending food, we found time for worship and presentations. Influenced by previous service trips, we had a wonderful presentation on Nicaragua, - a possible future service trip?

The Friend in Residence, Michael Birkel brought Junior Friends and Young Friends together as we found ourselves as a reserved or as an active Friend within our daily lives, an enlightening experience.

We are zealous to bring our energy to our camp in Ft. Worden State Park and continue both our spirited search and strong relationships with each other.

Upper Elementary Epistle:

We are the upper elementary group. This year we made query books. We talked about the queries: equality, stewardship, mutual care and nurture and we made these books.

A couple of the queries were:

1. Equality Do we treat everyone the same even if they seem different from us?
2. Nurture - How do I share my gifts and talents with my friends and family?
3. Mutual Care - When someone looks like they need help or asks for help, do I help them?

We also went swimming, played croquet, made paper mache, went to the zoo and performed in the community night. Sharon Ross did lots of drawing. We had lots of fun, and like being with the older and younger kids.