

## Epistle of the 2012 Annual Session of North Pacific Yearly Meeting

To Friends everywhere,

The 39th Annual Session of the North Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends opened out of silent worship at Pacific Lutheran University near Tacoma on July 18, 2012. Two hundred sixty-seven Friends came together for inspiration, fellowship, business, and renewal. We came from Meetings across five states (an area larger than France and England combined), with visitors from New England Yearly Meeting, intermountain yearly Meeting, Northwest Yearly Meeting, and the Holiness Friends Meeting in Bolivia by way of Bolivia Quaker Education Fund. The Annual Session's theme Listening in Tongues asked that we leave our fears of what we don't understand to listen deeply to the meaning of messages from other Friends, the wider world, and importantly, to each other. Our Friend in Residence, Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, quoting one Meeting's State of Society report, reminded us that "we are closer to each other than language allows."

Many of us arrived with a sense that NPYM and the individuals in it are feeling diminished. There is a perception that there are fewer volunteers to do more work and a need for greater discernment on several fronts, and many feel often like parts instead of a whole. Are we dipping deeply and widely into that holy, common well as often as we need to replenish ourselves?

We seem to be overwhelmed by process and the scale of the work before us. Some of us are running on empty. Are we confusing habit and tradition for "good Quaker order? Could it be that NPYM's current approach to our work may not serve us well any longer? Our Clerk of Coordinating Committee reminded us that no amount of organizational reordering will help us if our spiritual practice is lacking. She urged each of us to devote time daily to focus on the divine. "Don't worry about the pipes. Just bring the Water you've been given," Benigno urged us.

We know that Spirit is not diminished. When we returned to that deep place, way opened. This aided our difficult discernment regarding affiliation with Friends General Conference. A "third way" arose that may address many concerns. Our Nominators proposed to temporarily lay down their three-person Committee. They were exhausted after facing enormous challenges finding Friends who are ready and able to carry the work of Yearly Meeting. Upon hearing this, six willing people stepped up to serve on a reconstituted Committee. ...Even when faced with unexpected business, the FCNL Call to Action to Reduce Pentagon Spending, the Meeting very quickly reached unity in support of the minute. ...

Perhaps we are in the midst of a transformation that is bigger than we are able to imagine from our current vantage point. We had a powerful reminder of this in an epistle from Nancy Ewert telling us of the state of her family's soul as they attend the dying process of her husband and our Friend Greg Ewert. She wrote, "Sacred journeys do not always FEEL sacred and we do not always think we know the way . . ."

Other epistles echoed Benigno's metaphor of "putting on the Guide's ears, hearing each others' love." The Nontheist Friends Network, encouraged us to be open to "the possibility of new, adventurous religious thought and practice. . . ." They affirmed that "theism and non-theism need not be adversarial viewpoints but may be seen as different ways of seeking, finding, and expressing meaning and purpose in our lives."

Listening to each other, we heard much that is good. Our Friend in Residence helped Young Adult Friends Junior and Central Friends listen beyond words to each other, as well as those who speak "a different tongue." Our Junior Friends look forward to planning a service trip, with hopes that they will find the opportunity to serve others in our hemisphere while deepening their bonds with each other. Our work with and support of Right Sharing of World Resources makes a real difference in the lives of many. NPYM Friends attended the 6th World Conference of Friends at Kabarak University in Kenya in many capacities. They returned to us with messages that unity is possible out of great difference through common dedication to love and light.

We muddle through, never forgetting as we go that we must be tender with one another, because there are places where we feel raw. Nancy reminded us, "...we must continue to steer our vessel through stormy seas with faith we don't always believe we have." We may not be able to see or understand all the ways in which we are being transformed, but we do know how to love each other.