

North Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 7/19/2009

To Friends everywhere:

“Experiencing Light in Hard Times: How Do We Stay Faithful in Times of Trouble?” was the theme as 256 Friends from Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming gathered in loving worship July 15-19, 2009 on the campus of the University of Montana in Missoula. From the inspiring address by our Friend in Residence to the smallest worship discussion group, the theme generated many heartfelt responses that, in turn, inspired others.

Our theme had strong relevance this year as many of our members are experiencing times of trouble. For example, grants of financial aid to attend Annual Session far exceeded those in previous years. We learned that other Friends’ organizations have made deep budget cuts resulting in loss of programs and staff. The sudden death of an active member led some of us to consider how to continue her vital work for justice and loving communication with those who hold different points of view. We rejoiced in the company of those who were able to attend the gathering. For the first time we heard a substantial report about the work of Friends Peace Teams. We were moved by the ways in which they powerfully respond to suffering around the world.

Our Friend in Residence John Calvi asked us whether we could be thankful for the hard times as they provide opportunities for learning and appreciation of the spirit. He reminded us, “It is in the absence of light that the light becomes most evident.” He led workshops where Friends learned a simple, basic technique of energy healing as a tool for caring for ourselves and avoiding burn-out in the midst of troubled times. He also shared his ministry as the founder of the Quaker Initiative to End Torture (QUIT).

This was the first annual session held under our newly reorganized structure. We extended the Annual Session by one day to allow for more opportunities for worship, learning, sharing, and conducting business. Our Presiding Clerk, Helen Dart pointed out that the presence of numerous reports from committees on our agendas represented many hours of faithful work for our restructuring process.

The new standing committees approved last year presented their first reports. One of them, the Youth Focus Development Committee, completed its task of providing direction to the Youth Committee and was laid down. The cycle of growth and change in the lives of our Meetings was evident in the State of Society reports. We are revising our handbook of Faith and Practice – working to draft a document that embraces the diversity of our Yearly Meeting. Our new practice of approving the budget in Plenary Sessions provided us the opportunity to think about how we faithfully exercise our new financial responsibilities.

We adopted a Minute on the Abolition of Torture in response to a concern that was brought to us initially by Boise Valley Meeting. The minute was seasoned by Friends throughout the Yearly Meeting and strengthened further during discussion at this gathering. The minute condemns the use of torture under any circumstances and calls for a Commission of Inquiry into U.S. sponsored torture. We felt Spirit led in our deliberations—truly it was Quaker discernment at its most effective.

We were saddened by the fact that there were no preschoolers at Annual Session this year, and hope that the new Youth Committee will encourage increased youthful participation. In order to support this, we allocated funds from our reserves to enable the Youth Committee to experiment with ideas for improving our youth programming. The children who did attend enjoyed swimming, rafting, making chalk drawings, and making “Friendly Aliens” and sharing their accompanying stories with everyone at Community Night. The Young Adult Friends group is growing faster than its own visioning process, having more than tripled in size in the past six years.

Last year we adopted a minute on climate change, calling upon Friends to make a standing priority and corporate witness to take all possible measures to reduce the devastation of global climate change and move us toward more sustainable ways of life. The new Peace and Social Concerns Committee surveyed our meetings and found that almost all had taken some action. Some examples include the formation of a community coalition to foster sustainability, a voluntary tax on gasoline for the benefit of Right Sharing of World Resources, educational presentations, and a work party to install energy efficient light bulbs.

As usual, we danced and sang and enjoyed each others’ company. Community night was filled with talent and laughter, as we celebrated the joy of being together.

We proceed from this gathering confirmed in the Spirit and well-supported by our community to continue living out our ideals in the world. We have been reminded of the strength we can find in the Spirit during personal crisis as well as global distress. We send our love to Friends everywhere, and ask for your support as we work to remain faithful in easy as well as hard times.

Helen Dart, Presiding Clerk