

2013 North Pacific Yearly Meeting
Seventh Month, 17th through the 21st
Forest Grove, Oregon

Friends from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana gathered together finding joy in each other's company, in worship and in doing business. We considered the theme: Not By My Strength Alone: Laboring Together Beyond Our Comfort Zone.

Our Friends in Residence, Paul and Becca Mohally Renk, were forced by the Spirit to give a talk that was more challenging than they had originally planned. They shared with us how their hearts keep breaking, over and over again, as they open themselves to the poor in Nicaragua. They asked us to be willing to have our hearts broken as well, to see the poverty and the marginalized people existing all around us. This means becoming aware of our own power - the power of privilege and position. Those of us coming from a position of power need to show up as learners and listeners rather than teachers. Voluntary powerlessness means letting go of being in charge of the process; it means making common cause with the losing team. Because this process is painful we must trust the power of the Spirit and live in community. Community can lift us up in times of despair, lead to more courageous decisions and temper our egos when we desire to be the savior.

During presentations by such groups as Friends World Committee on Consultation, American Friends Service Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation and Quaker Earthcare Witness, we saw ways in which Quakers are acting in the larger world to be a witness to poverty and injustice as well as to open our hearts to the Spirit within all creation. Other organizations doing this work had displays at the Quaker Fair including Friendly Water for the World, Quaker Voluntary Service and Bolivian Quaker Education Fund (represented by Alecia Lucasi).

We took a big step for our Yearly Meeting in deciding to hire a children's program coordinator. The children's program at annual session provides a Quaker foundation for our children all year long and into their future. Many spoke about the vital role of children in bringing new light and increasing our diversity. They are our future leaders. We are all responsible for the children of the meeting. We committed to volunteering as teachers, recognizing the value of time spent with our children. We also recognized that hiring someone requires bringing more money into our budget which may further stretch household and meeting finances.

Five years ago the Yearly Meeting changed its structure to more closely support our vision. Now we are evaluating the new structure and finding which elements work. Communication between local meetings and the Yearly Meeting needs to be improved. It was also brought out that an underlying concern is that the structure of the Yearly Meeting is not the main concern. Rather, are we living our lives in such a way that we are open to the Spirit when it moves us rather than being distracted by the busyness of our times?

In later plenary sessions, Friends labored past their comfort zone to discern the meaning of why we are here. Our hearts were broken open as people asked what the Spirit is calling us to

do. We are grappling with the questions of what our Yearly Meeting is for and how can it better engage the people within it; these questions are strongly stirring up the Spirit within us.