

Epistle from Lake Yearly Meeting
in Annual Sessions at Bluffton University
in Bluffton, Ohio, July 28-31st, 2016

Wealth is attended with power, by which bargains and proceedings, contrary to universal righteousness, are supported; and hence oppression, carried on with worldly policy and order, clothes itself with the name of justice and becomes like a seed of discord in the soul.
(John Woolman)

What Would John Woolman Do? Those gathered for our 53rd Annual Sessions found this question at the top and center of the schedule of events, meetings, and workshops, as if to announce that communion with Woolman's spirit would bring to our discussions a discerning and loving elder from the mid-eighteenth century.

To the planners who presented us with this question, Woolman's life seems full of relevant advice for Quakers in 2016. Our program committee set up workshops to address our deepest concerns: institutional racism, climate change, economic and racial justice, financial stewardship, implicit racial bias in our court system and in ourselves, the extent to which our monetary system contains the seeds of war and injustice. Beginning with the Woolman quotation cited above, our Plenary Speaker, Natalie Finegar, the Deputy District Public Defender for Baltimore City, chronicled the long series of events and practices that led to the "Baltimore Uprising." She illustrated how systemic racism coupled with wealth and power can lead well-intentioned people to engage in horrific violence.

In worship sharing we considered queries that Woolman might have asked: *Am I learning how to be aware of my own implicit bias that may interfere with my ability to see that of God in every person? Am I mindful of how my lifestyle and my investments can contribute to the improvement of the human condition, or to the exploitation of others?*

There was little mention of Woolman in our business meetings, yet we must have wondered what he would do in the face of problems that we confronted in our business. We approved a policy to minimize child and sexual abuse by creating an environment that eliminates unnecessary risks and dangers. We agreed to support the call for an institutional audit of implicit biases and racial discrimination within Friends General Conference. The Peace and Justice Committee will consider LEYM's need for a similar self-examination. We approved adding our name to the list of signers of the Quaker United Nations Office's statement: "A Shared Quaker Statement: Facing the Challenge of Climate Change."

We celebrated our new on-line registration system with gratitude to our Meeting Worker and our Registrar. We also expressed gratitude to five of our members, who, in a two-day service project at the Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Lima, Ohio, supported recycling and housing for low income families, causes that Woolman surely would have appreciated.

In conversations during meals we mused over what Woolman said to slave-owners or how he might have reacted to issues we grapple with today. We suspect he listened intently, drew people out, suggested prayer. Someone wondered whether he would attend a gay wedding.

Woolman learned from indigenous people, a member of the Earthcare Committee pointed out, their beliefs in spiritual unity and humans' need to connect with nature to be whole people.

One participant took home our idea of learning from Woolman and came up with a written resolve:

- Listen to people.
- Meet people who are different from me.
- Reach out to "the other" whoever s/he is.
- Focus on needs, not wants.
- Slow down, wait in silence, to say or do things.

July 31 2016

Mike Holaday
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