

NPYM EPISTLE 2017

To all Friends everywhere:

Two hundred fifty-four Quakers of all ages from all corners of the Pacific Northwest gathered on the green, tree-covered campus of the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, as North Pacific Yearly Meeting met for its 45th Annual Session, July 26-30, 2017.

Our theme this year has been "Everything is Connected." Friend in Residence Peterson Toscano presented a lecture-performance which included three moving sketches using comedy to connect his personal story as a gay man with gender nonconformity, Bible stories, and climate change. We used focused worship to consider a minute first proposed by Multnomah Meeting in Portland, Oregon, regarding welcoming transgender and gender nonconforming people into our Meetings; this minute was seasoned carefully through the monthly meetings during the last year, seasoning that continued through conversations and small-group discussions among Friends at this Annual Session. The Young Adult Friends presented their own minute in support of action on this concern by the Yearly Meeting. Heartfelt responses were shared by Friends. Following worship, Friends were treated to tender musical ministry by Friend Anna Fritz, a cellist/singer, lifting the issues we were grappling with into spiritual space. Friends later united on this minute, following a deep, patient, Spirit-filled business session, with one Friend standing aside.

Contra dancing, Community Night skits, Bible study, daily early morning worship, and worship in song led by Friends Jonathan and Rosy Betz-Zall and folksinger and former NPYM presiding clerk Tom Rawson, rounded out Friends' experience. A song Tom presented, John McCutcheon's "Christmas in the Trenches," regarding the ad hoc Christmas Truce of World War I brought about by the soldiers themselves, brought tears to many eyes.

We were aware as we met that a new Yearly Meeting was being formed nearby, as Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends (pastoral), following a difficult process, split into two Yearly Meetings over the issue of human sexuality. A letter was drafted to be sent jointly to both Northwest Yearly Meeting and the new Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting, honoring our existing relationships and welcoming the new Yearly Meeting into the family of Friends.

Friends heard from Kate Gould, a Friends Committee on National Legislation staff person in Washington DC, on the power of persistent and persuasive citizens' advocacy; and from Mary Klein on her work as editor of Western Friend. Junior Friends (High School age) led a Spirit-filled and humorous community-building exercise. We gratefully accepted the final version of our newly revised Faith and Practice, seasoned carefully over the last twelve years, which will be published this year by Western Friend.

When we meet again next year on this same (hopefully construction-free) campus, we will be experimenting with Abundant Financing, a form of financing Annual Session by asking Friends to pay as led instead of charging a fixed amount. We will also be addressing racism and white privilege as a rising concern within our Yearly Meeting.