

EPISTLE of
The 12th Pacific Northwest Quaker Women's Theology Conference
June 6-10, 2018
Canby Grove Christian Center, Canby, Oregon

Greetings to Friends everywhere:

A total of 84 women gathered on the banks of the Molalla River near Canby, Oregon (U.S.A.) for spiritual enrichment and fellowship at the Pacific Northwest Quaker Women's Theology Conference. Thirty of these were programmed Friends and fifty were unprogrammed Friends. Four registrants from other faith traditions also attended. Thirty were first-time attenders. Only two women under age 35 attended.

We explored the conference theme, "Answering That of God in Everyone" through our worship, plenary sessions, experiential groups, and the small "home groups" designed for deeper and more personal sharing in response to theme-related queries. The conference opened with silent worship preceded by a warm welcome from our planning team and the introduction of the eight "compassionate listeners" who would be available to Friends as needed throughout the conference. The tone of the conference was set in worshipful silence, song and prayer that opened and closed every plenary session. The fun of making art together and/or giving worshipful consideration to the natural world complemented our often emotionally-charged and deep work in plenary sessions and home groups. Ample space was made in the schedule for private times of replenishment, expressive movement and crafts.

Our plenary sessions brought us gifts of song and scripture and offered new options for framing our relationship with God and each other. We pondered hearing and naming "that of God" through the perspectives of Hagar and Sarah, as vividly and movingly conveyed by the presenters. Through these new ways of listening to the stories of our ancient spiritual ancestors told in modern voice we sensed the timelessness of the struggle to trust the voice of God as it is uniquely revealed to each of us. We received tools for self-care and for accessing God's presence within ourselves. Our common ground as Quakers was honored, but also we looked back to the obstacles to trust and understanding that programmed and unprogrammed Quaker women had to overcome as they first found their way to shared fellowship in the Pacific Northwest. Rich personal narratives invited us to take our Quaker way into the world, finding God in darkness as well as light. Through the process of group lament, we shared our suffering

and that of the world with God and each other. Each of these sessions led us to trust God to love and use *all* that we are.

Our invitation is to come to God in our entirety, balancing whatever we call “dark” with the recognition that within each of us is *that of God*. In the spirit of that invitation, we found opportunities to reflect and also to rejoice. From the theme quote we were exhorted to see “God in others,” having been reminded that the foundation for doing so is to see God in ourselves. There was an intention to really see and deeply listen as opposed to argue or pull away. Around every corner there was a sight to behold: women of different faith traditions talking together, laughing together, crying together, walking together. We had time to see, know and love and to receive these gifts of the spirit in turn. We were glad to have had such a large number of women participating in the conference, and were especially glad to have had thirty first-time attendees. We were gladdened that two young first-time attendees energetically participated in leading plenary presentations. We look forward to taking the joy of inter-Quaker fellowship into the future.

In friendship,

Chris Cradler, Presiding Clerk

Jessica Bucciarelli, Recording Clerk

Elisa Dale, Valerie Milliron, Mari Gilge, Epistle Committee