

**PACIFIC YEARLY MEETING of the Religious Society of Friends  
EPISTLE 2012**

To Friends Everywhere,

Healing—of self, community, world—was the theme of the 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Gathering of Pacific Yearly Meeting, held from the 13<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> of Eighth Month, 2012. We gathered again at Walker Creek Ranch near Petaluma, California, among the live oaks and golden, rolling hills of the Northern California coastal range, a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. In the quiet repose of this remote area (blessedly free of cell phone connection!) we saw deer foraging daintily on the outskirts of the ranch, turkey vultures circling above, raccoons feasting upon food found in backpacks. All were reminders of the healing beauty of the Earth and its readiness to welcome us back into communion with the Great Spirit in which “we live, and move, and have our being.”

In the call to our Annual Gathering, Presiding Clerk Marilee Eusebio invited us to “Come with open minds and hearts that in the Spirit, we may share our deepest selves with one another.” In the opening plenary, she quoted from a speech by Shirin Ebadi, the first Iranian (and the first Muslim woman) to win the Nobel Peace Prize, whose message was simply “Embrace kindness.”

In his keynote message, “The Dance between Hope and Fear Among Friends,” John Calvi of Putney Meeting in Vermont spelled out various dimensions of healing. The deepest, most lasting healing occurs when we surrender ourselves into the Light—where “surrender” does not mean giving up, but rather joining something far greater than ourselves. Our work of healing is most effective when we have a clear sense of our own goodness—the “spiritual essence” which is our connection to the Divine. This awareness is strengthened by many things, including the enjoyment of giving and receiving love; acts of conscience and the use of our personal power for the common good; and the direct experience of the Divine through the stillness of Friends’ worship.

The schedule for our Annual Session was redesigned to enhance opportunities for healing, by fostering more deeply gathered or “covered” Meetings for Worship on the Occasion of Business, and by greater coordination of age-related and intergenerational group activities. Worship-sharing queries addressed healing at many levels: care for our physical selves, our inner lives, our Meetings and wider communities, and the common ills of humanity. Many Interest Groups featured initiatives to mend the world, including “The Joy of Racial Healing”; Friends Peace Teams; Promoting Diplomacy (not War) with Iran; Healing From Trauma; Abolishing the Death Penalty; Ending Torture; and listening to needs of undocumented students.

We broke into enthusiastic applause at the end of the premier showing of a film made by four of our Pacific Yearly Meeting members who had attended the 6<sup>th</sup> World Conference of Friends, held in Kenya earlier this year: “Being Salt and Light: Friends Living the Kingdom of God in a Broken World.” The film, *Salt and Light*, depicts in compelling intimacy the exuberant joy of coming together and sharing in worship with Friends from many parts of the world, as well as the sometimes painful gift of wrestling with deeply held differences, especially those regarding differences in sexual orientation. We have been heartened by reports that healing is taking place, even across such painful divisions. The film has been adopted by Friends World Committee for Consultation as part of its own publicity for the World Conference.

We are deeply gratified to witness a growing energy and commitment to the Yearly Meeting among our youth. One young Friend speaks with wonder of the greater fluidity that he senses between various age groups within the Yearly Meeting. At one meeting, Friends of all ages gathered to find ways to soften separations and enhance connections between younger and older Friends. The youngest person present, a three-year-old boy, was allowed to play on the floor with a roll of Scotch Tape. As older Friends talked, the little boy decided to stretch pieces of tape from the feet of one person to the next, until many feet were joined by transparent, sticky links. Reuniting the generations begins with outreach at the most basic, ground level—and “A little child shall lead us.”

The decision of the Yearly Meeting in 2009 to experiment with our first paid full-time staff person, a Youth Program Coordinator, has been deeply affirming to many of our young people, who report that they feel a greater sense of belonging to Pacific Yearly Meeting—that they have “come home.” Their revitalized connection to the Yearly Meeting and to the Religious Society of Friends is infectious and empowering, spawning eagerness to share with others in the wider world the beauty of an inclusive and loving Blessed Community.

At the same time, some of our Monthly Meetings struggle with the increased financial burden posed by the newly-hired staff person. Following a full evaluation, at our Annual Session in 2013 we will decide whether to continue, or to lay down, this initiative.

Healing occurs at many levels and by many means, some less visible and obvious than others. A message out of the silence this week reminded us of the hidden, yet deeply healing power of lives of integrity and compassion. Such lives affect all whom they touch, beyond what words can say. Ultimately, who we are as human beings is our greatest and most lasting witness to the world.

In the Light,

Marilee Eusebio, Presiding Clerk