

July 17, 2016

To Friends Everywhere:

“So that Faith, Love, and Truth Might Flourish” was the theme for this year’s gathering of Western Yearly Meeting. Using 2 Thessalonians 1:3 “...thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing,” and a quote from Thom Jeavons (1987) “It is a challenge to become a people with a vision...so that Truth might flourish in our lives for the benefit of all,” as a guide, Western Yearly Meeting gathered in Plainfield, Indiana from July 14-17, 2016 for our 159th annual session. We were joined in our sessions by representatives and visitors from meetings around the world: Vihiga Yearly Meeting, Kenya; Elgon East Friends, Kenya; Guatemala Yearly Meeting; Bolivia; New England Yearly Meeting; Washington, D.C.; North Carolina Yearly Meeting; Vermilion Grove Meeting, Illinois; Ridge Farm Meeting, Illinois; and Richmond, Indiana.

Over the past three years, the themes of each gathering have built on each other in order to help provide a solid foundation for growth in today’s busy world with its unique challenges. Identifying our tools (resources) in 2013, considering the stewardship of those resources in 2014, and planning for the future in 2015, have led to this year’s emphasis. For the past three years, the Western Yearly Meeting has sponsored a spring retreat at Quaker Haven Camp. In 2014, the retreat focused on discovering individual spiritual gifts. In 2015, that knowledge was used as meetings collaborated to develop strategies for growth, with a catch phrase, “Get out of the Castle,” that encouraged opportunities to meet and work in non-traditional environments as a way of impacting local communities. The retreat of 2016, with the theme “Discipleship Matters” expanded the vision of discipleship with a catch phrase of “Chicken Pie” as a reminder that keeping things the same because they have always been done that way can limit our effectiveness in the world.

For the first time, our summer meeting not only built on the spring retreat theme, but has been blessed by being able to have the speaker from that retreat be the Devotional speaker for the July sessions! Scott Wagoner has continued the spring theme and has encouraged us to look seriously at some of the issues that may be limiting the growth of meetings. He has encouraged us to look beyond the idea of membership to one of Discipleship. A key insight was that to be an effective meeting, the meeting has to be a healthy meeting: in terms of emotional health as well as the more traditionally accepted indicators of meeting health, such as membership, facilities, and finance. Only in a healthy environment are people willing and able to grow into the best possible witnesses of faith.

Quaker Lecture speaker, Jonathan Vogel-Borne, continued the Faith, Truth, Love theme with his insights. As he provided historical perspective, Jonathan provided current real life anecdotes to emphasize the importance of these attributes in today’s life. “What makes our Friends Meetings flourish? It is individual and corporate acts of faith, truth, and love that strengthen the bonds of unity among us, deepen our community, and compel our witness for peace and justice in the world.” He pointed out the need to embrace conflict as an opportunity for growth and also pointed out that unresolved conflict leads to tension within the meeting. That tension is often a reason that newcomers leave or refuse to engage fully.

The order of programming was adjusted this year, picking up on the “Chicken Pie” theme of the spring retreat. Thursday was devoted to “How are we doing?” This dealt with business reports and included highlights of activities of local meetings. The annual Memorial Service provided an opportunity to remember the Faith, Truth, and Love exemplified by those who have gone before us.

Friday considered “Looking ahead” with reports and business emphasizing plans for the future. A high point of this day was the approval of the recording of two new ministers, Katherine Murray and Beth Henricks. Following the evening meal, a “Conversation Cafe” sponsored by the Young Friends encouraged multigenerational conversation and relationship building. Saturday’s emphasis was “Reaching Out” with reports and business that dealt with outreach into the world beyond the local meetings. The mission emphasis was continued through the

evening as Quaker Men and the USFW met for a combined session, followed by separate meals and business. Sunday was a day of rejoicing. Musical gifts of individuals and groups from within Western Yearly Meeting were highlighted in an uplifting program presented prior to the Sunday morning closing worship service and the official recognition of our newly recorded ministers.

Workshops are always a highlight of Western Yearly Meeting. The Friday workshop, led by Jonathan Vogel Borne and Minga Claggett Borne, presented the Alternatives to Violence Program and Help Increase the Peace Program. This brief introduction to the program showed how use of the techniques taught can help individuals and meetings learn to deal with conflict in a healthy and productive way. They continued this idea in the Saturday workshop; focusing on dealing with the difficult issues that occur within meetings and doing so in a loving, supporting, and encouraging way. In addition to these two primary workshops, there were opportunities for small groups to gather and discuss topics within “Interest Groups” designed to provide multiple opportunities for interaction. Among those groups were opportunities to meet with representatives of affiliate bodies, discuss legislative action, explore crafts, read and reflect, and practice as a choir in preparation for the Sunday morning service.

As a step toward moving the “Faith, Love and Truth” theme into practical reality, the Western Yearly Meeting approved a minute from the Peace and Christian Social Concerns Board encouraging action to encourage legislators to reconsider mandatory minimum sentencing for low-level, nonviolent drug offenses; recognizing that current laws, while providing punishment, are not treating the root issues and are leading to additional problems within families and communities.

As we move forward “So that Faith, Love and Truth Might Flourish,” your prayers of support and encouragement are appreciated.

In Christian Love,

Pam Sims, Presiding Clerk

Elizabeth Ann Carter, Recording Clerk

Sarah Lookabill, Assistant to the Clerk