

PYM Epistle 2005

To Friends Everywhere,

Greetings from Pacific Yearly Meeting. We met August 1 – 6, 2005 at Mt. Madonna Center, once again graciously hosted by the spiritual, yoga community that calls this mountaintop retreat of Redwoods and Oaks their home.

Our worship here has been rich and deep, more so this year because children and adults sat in the silence together at the beginning of each day. Ministry reminded us of several basic truths. That our work proceeds from our worship wherein process and outcome are of the same cloth. And that we can strive to be “always kind and true” in our comings and goings.

From this grounding in worship we proceeded to challenging business especially around questions of site and home for our yearly meeting. Moving us forward from past ambiguity, a group of Friends put forth a specific proposal for Yearly Meeting to meet for eight years on donated property in the Central Valley of California.

Friends shared with passion and integrity their sense of Spirit’s leading. Many people felt it is essential for our future to have a home for our memories, our work, our children, as well as a place of continuous witness. Many others expressed concern that such an endeavor is the wrong focus of our resources and could distract us from other work to which Spirit is calling.

At the close of our discernment, the Clerk recognized that we had not come to unity on this proposal. However, even in disagreement, we expressed the desire to continue in love and community to seek God’s will – understanding that God’s timing may not be our timing.

Many other questions have been alive among us during this week. How are our different generations connected to each other? How are individual leadings related to Meeting business? How do we balance the damage we do to the world by travel with the good we do by our witness in the world? How do our yearnings and feelings of brokenness lead us to growth and joy in the Spirit? And how does the tragic horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 60 years ago instruct us in this present time of fear and war?

Specific to the question of young and old, Young Friends and Junior Yearly Meeting led a plenary session at which four young people shared their current, youthful experience of Quakerism. Their words informed and resonated across generations:

“What I need help with is learning how to meditate and get in touch with Spirit, and get something out of all the worship sharing and praying.”

“Quakerism is possibly one of the hardest religions to be raised in because of the openness. . . .I don’t want someone telling me what to do, but I do need some

information — and right now I'm not getting that from my Meeting.”
“I want to change the world, but how can I expect the world to change if I can't even change myself?”

“I've decided to go on the assumption that God exists.”

In response to this Friends recognized the many gifts that young Friends bring to our communal Spirit and our work. Several shared the sense that you are, we are, the real Quakers—the yeast enlivening the bread dough.

Responding to an invitation from younger Friends, many friends attended a nearby vigil commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing.

We connected with old friends and made new ones. We danced, sang, acted, braided and beaded. We found joy in conversations, and in our Memorial Meeting shared the sorrows and joys of remembering ordinary Friends who lived extraordinary lives. Our lives were made richer by each others' gifts and the gift of each other.

Friends, our community continues its journey of ever deepening faithfulness. This week we have been challenged by our differences, yet in finding the courage to engage them we come through with feet once more on solid ground and a deeper sense of, and appreciation for, our connection to one another. We now more clearly hear a call to understand fundamentally the purposes and mission God has in mind for our beloved yearly meeting community. With the work of this session completed we wish you peace and continued lives of loving service in Spirit.

Pacific Yearly Meeting

James Anderson, Presiding Clerk