

Pacific Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

To Friends Everywhere,

We gathered for the 65th Annual Gathering of Pacific Yearly Meeting from the 25th to the 30th of 7th Month, 2011 held on the campus of Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, CA. amid the joyful greetings and grins of Friends, many of whom we have not seen for a year.

Marilee Eusebio, clerk, invited all to “go beyond what is to what might be”. She asked, “Where are we stretched anew and where might truth take us?” and reminded us to remember that the Inner Light is in each of us and that we observe that aspect of each other in all our conversations.

As a group we can be the container that George Lakey spoke of last year which creates safety for people to expect the unexpected and experience life in the Spirit. We need to be accountable, that is, to live in truth even if it hurts, be present and be willing to struggle together as we look deep into difficult issues of racial justice, conversations about nuclear power, torture, and information about the nature and substance of the Palestinian-Israeli tensions.

Holding these topics and ourselves in the Light, we struggled to see what Love could do and how we can stretch ourselves anew.

Ministry and Oversight committee led us in stretching exercises, both physically and spiritually. Quoting from Monthly Meeting State of the Meeting reports, we were informed about the three stages of stretching being experienced throughout the Yearly Meeting: Warming Up, Reaching Out and Over-extension.

We are working to redevelop a program to provide a traveling Friend to visit Monthly Meetings to share ministry aimed at supporting the life of our Monthly Meetings. Meanwhile, Ministry & Oversight (M&O) committee struggles to help us answer the questions of the purpose of being a Yearly Meeting and the value of holding annual gatherings which become more expensive each year and involve much travel in an era of concern for our carbon footprint. M&O wishes to strengthen the relationship between Monthly Meetings and PYM, including the Annual Gathering, through training and increased communication with Meeting representatives.

Trisha Sellick, AFSC Regional Director for the Middle East, spoke to us of Palestinian-Israeli tensions and AFSC work in the region. Sixty per cent of the population of the Middle East is under 25 years old, many of these young people are educated and getting organized. They want to take the future into their own hands without Western interference. They do not say, “this has been done before and it didn't work”, but rather have a belief in what is possible and invite optimism.

Friends deepened their connections to each other and the Spirit through early morning outdoor worship, bible study, presentations on transformative Friends (Ham Sok Hon, Elizabeth Fry, Bayard Rustin and Henry J. Cadbury), worship sharing, and a variety of interest and affinity groups.

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Racial justice was a central concern with activities such as an intergenerational Power Walk, and interest groups on white privilege and race and the criminal justice system.

We strive to build a loving community that incorporates us all; young and old alike. Our youngest children joined us for 15 minutes in Meeting for Worship each morning; Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) exhorted us to join in intergenerational games and learning exercises such as the Power Walk. Meanwhile the JYM program carried out its own program of learning, growing and service. For the second year in a row, they performed service work for the Prison Library Project and raised money for mailing expenses.

Sarah Beutel, our Youth Program Coordinator, for the last sixteen months described the development of this new program. The role of the coordinator was described as a catalyst, an interpreter between adults and teens, and as a resource person. Alyssa Nelson, the incoming Youth Program Coordinator encouraged us to explore how love and unity are maintained among us.

A minute firmly opposed to torture around the globe, was brought forth by the Peace and Social Order Committee. It was approved despite concerns about the process.

The Unity with Nature Committee presented their recommendations for Monthly Meetings to explore the issue of nuclear power through discussions and possible threshing sessions.

We would be remiss not to mention that communicating with each other and the Spirit in our Meetings for Business still hits a snag occasionally. We struggle to maintain the blessed community as we try to obtain unity among 150 to 200 Friends. At the end of the struggle, we manage to move forward as friends as well as Friends with laughter as well as tears.

Our attendance at the Gathering this year is lower than last year and membership in the Yearly Meeting also down to its lowest level in eleven years. Is the Yearly Meeting properly organized? Do we spend too much time on business? Should we change our structure and decision-making in some way? These are questions we have put to Ministry & Oversight and its subcommittee dedicated to envisioning the future of the Gathering.

A rousing community program wound up the final evening of our week together as we celebrated each other and enjoyed the diversity of our talents and humor.

In the Light,

Marilee Eusebio, Presiding Clerk