



2014 NEYM Epistle

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Aug 26, 2014

To Friends everywhere,

Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only...—James 1:22

New England Yearly Meeting gathered August 2–7, 2014, in beautiful Castleton, Vermont, for our 354th annual session, around the theme, “You are my witnesses.” In many activities throughout the week, we considered various aspects of the word “witness.”

Among early Friends, “witness” was often used to express the active presence of the Divine. Before we can be witnesses to the world, we need to submit ourselves to the unsettling and transforming Witness within.

That same Witness speaks to us through others, opening us to new and more compassionate understandings. Listening heals the brokenness that comes when our words and our actions don’t match. Then we can begin to teach by being ourselves teachable and by first listening to that Witness which is closer to us than we are to ourselves. We were moved by the words of a four-year-old Friend: “When you hear the Voice, you have to follow it.” When asked whether he had heard the Voice, he said, “No, but my brother has.”

We are blessed by the faithful labor of many Friends in our youth programs, which have produced a harvest of gifted and Spirit-led young adults who have matured into leaders. We are engaged in re-visioning and updating our Yearly Meeting structures. We are grateful for a new interim *Faith & Practice* as we continue to discern which of our practices, while familiar and comfortable, no longer have life in them. We struggle with corporate decisions over the best use of our resources to do God’s work. Change and new energy are both welcome and unsettling. We hope for renewal and for energetic spreading of the Good News. We must discern a new way of doing Truth.

We live with tension. We want to discern and do the will of God. We grieve over the destruction of the environment, violence, racism, and injustice. We want to live with equality and respect for all. We need to free ourselves from the belief that our differences do not exist. Instead, we need to embrace and respect those differences. We praise God for the burden and joy of our struggle to deepen our work on issues of sexuality and ethics in the context of our membership in Friends United Meeting and our inability to unite with its current personnel policy.

We are challenged to consider how we will use the proceeds of a recent sale of Yearly Meeting property. We are struggling with the implications of our repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery. We long for transformation. If we are to be God’s witnesses in the world, what is our testimony?

Mystery God, help us remember that in your arms we can give ourselves freely to mourning, yearning, rejoicing, needing. Help us remember, in heights and depths, to call on whichever of your sweet names pierces our heart.

On Behalf of New England Friends,

JACQUELINE STILLWELL

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