

Pacific Yearly Meeting 2017 epistle

To Friends Everywhere:

Greetings from the heart of Pacific Yearly Meeting. Our clerk, Diego Navarro, introduced the theme of our 71st session, "Awakening to the Presence", by reminding us to soften and open to the Spirit. Pay attention to your body. Listen to your heart and your gut.

Sky Road Webb welcomed us to the land of his people, the Coast Miwok. Young Adult Friends spent time with Sky Road during their pre-Yearly Meeting Gathering, and joined him in leading a Miwok song. The teens in Junior Yearly Meeting went to Point Reyes Seashore with Sky Road for a service project. Throughout the week at Walker Creek Ranch, we saw deer, gray fox, raptors, and other wildlife from the plenary tent and near our worship-fellowship groups.

We cheered for Friends from meetings in California, Nevada, Hawaii, Mexico and Guatemala; visitors from other Quaker Yearly Meetings and organizations. Newcomers, and Ministry and Oversight committee, had special nametags to encourage us to approach them.

Our Ministry and Oversight committee asked us to respond to the question, "What makes me feel welcome at Annual Session?"

- Even if you don't know me, sit with me at meals
- Connect with me as a person before raising committee business
- Ask me how I am, or how Spirit is moving in my life

Zachary Moon, an adult child of Pacific Yearly Meeting, returned to share his experience of receiving an unlikely call to become a Navy chaplain. God calls insistently, like a cat pawing us awake to be fed. This call brought more questions than instructions. What does it mean to be a good Quaker? Who am I to turn away from what God gives me?

Clarity came through a thousand little moments over years, testing questions with friends and strangers. For the past eight years, Zachary has ministered to the suffering of hundreds of marines, sailors, and their families.

We see and acknowledge those in our midst whose lives have been shaped by war and its institutions. We also question our own complicity in the seeds of war. What do we pass on to our own families? Do we still pay war taxes? Do we see our own privilege, in distancing ourselves from people who participate in wars on our behalf?

When the Spirit comes, we do not know how it will manifest. We explored examples from the writings of early Friend Isaac Pennington and from the book of Acts. The apostles were given messages they themselves did not understand. When they spoke in obedience to the Holy Spirit, others did understand. We are reminded that seeds seldom resemble what they grow into.

How do we nurture the Presence among us?

Ministry is a team sport. We need to make it the center of our lives. We need elders to midwife the birth of our deepest gifts.

In this Annual Session, we have used the practice of eldering, or spiritual accompaniment, to support us in staying awake to the Presence. Elders are paired with clerks and others with work or ministry to carry.

Every Meeting for Worship is grounded by Friends arriving early and deepening the silence. Junior Yearly Meeting and Young Adult Friends have held our worship with tenderness and care. In our plenary sessions, at least one Friend remains in silent worship, as spiritual accompaniment for our collective discernment. The clerk meets regularly with a support group, and has invited past Yearly Meeting clerks to open each Meeting for Worship for Business with reflections on Quaker process.

This year, open committee meetings have taken place on two different days. This allows for committee work to be visible, and for complex issues to be addressed outside of business meeting and brought back.

One issue that is still working on us is a desire for a new name for our Ministry and Oversight Committee. How can we shed the association with overseers of enslaved people, and still express the guidance and accountability we seek from this committee?

Fewer Young Adult Friends came this year, and many could only afford to do so by working in the children's program during the day or receiving financial assistance. Young Adult Friends are exploring new ways to support each other, to be more integral to the Yearly Meeting, to include young people of different classes and situations.

How many of us reach out and listen to people of different generations, backgrounds, languages, gender identities? How many of us answer the call to connect with Friends with disabilities?

Many of us yearn for fellowship that feeds us more deeply. Some find this in worship-sharing, in affinity groups, in the dining hall, spending time with the children of the meeting, or on committees. Others wish for more free time for music, yoga, or writing. Many of us have never walked to the Turtle Pond or on the Enchanted Forest trail. Might we find time next year?

We are grateful to all the people who make the Annual Session possible. Being held in these ways facilitates our openness to awaken to the Presence. May all of us and you, our Friends, remain open and faithful to the Spirit.

Diego Navarro, Clerk
On behalf of Pacific Yearly Meeting
June 14-19, 2017