2025 NPYM Epistle

To Friends Everywhere -

Greetings from North Pacific Yearly Meeting 2025 annual session, held on the campus of the University of Montana (UM) in Missoula, Montana, from July 9 to 13, 2025. We were 131 adults and 24 youth attending in person; and 33 registered on Zoom**.** We gathered on the aboriginal territories of the Salish and Kalispel people, and we have crossed the lands of many other peoples in our journey here. We honor all those peoples, remembering that they were here first and that they are still here.

A few months before our annual session, NPYM organized, in an unprecedented action, a called meeting to discern our response to the University of Montana's sudden new policy regarding gender. In the spring, the Montana State legislature had enacted a bill to require segregation of restrooms and dorms in public facilities by biological sex; the University would have required attenders to identify "gender at birth" when they registered. The NPYM called meeting grew from the concern that to hold annual session in a location with policies in conflict with our witness and leading as Friends would put our trans members and attenders at risk. By the time of the called meeting, a judge had stayed the law and UM had agreed not to enforce the restroom law for NPYM. We were grateful for UM's support of all-gender facilities. Over 100 people participated in the called meeting over Zoom and achieved sense of the meeting to proceed with the annual session in Montana and to support trans Friends. When we gathered here, many attenders joyfully joined Visibility Brigade, a local event in support of trans people, immigrants, and democracy. The NPYM attenders joined Missoulians for the demonstration at a pedestrian overpass during rush hour, waving flags and celebrating the honks and waves of support. Trans attenders of all ages, from children to elders, felt safe, supported and welcomed at annual session.

This annual session, we were nurtured and challenged by our Friends-in-Residence, Keith Runyan and Nora Lisette, who joined us with their one-year-old child, Juniper. Keith is general secretary of Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW). They invited us to explore what it means to live the theme of this annual session, "Lift Your Voices and Sing Loud!", which was inspired by the words of Sufi poet Rumi:

> *God picks up the reed-flute world and blows.*
> *Each note is a need coming through one of us*
> *A passion, a longing-pain.*
>
> *Remember the lips*
> *Where the wind-breath note originated,*
> *And let your note be clear.*
> *Don't try to end it.*
> *Be your note.*
> *I'll show you how it's enough.*
>
> *Go up on the roof at night*
> *in this city of the soul,*
> *Let everyone climb on their roofs*
> *and sing their notes!*
> *Sing loud!*

To create the movement that the world needs today, Keith suggested that we go into the wilderness and find that wisdom that speaks in a language older than words. "There is a sermon in the wilds that await us." Nora spoke about her life as a cycle of falling in love, to betrayal, and back to falling in love, in relationships and with Friends. Keith and Nora concluded their presentation by leading us in the sacrament of movement and the song, "The Course" by Ayla Nereo, about two grandmothers passing the torch from one generation to the next. Keith and Nora also led an interest group, where they explored the world's ecological crisis through the lens of relational healing - drawing from the insight that our separation from the living Earth mirrors our separation from ourselves and each other.

During plenaries, we dealt with internal and external concerns. We were asked to consider whether NPYM might respond swiftly *and* faithfully to the rapid pace of threats to our democracy. We struggled with how to find a balance between yearning for rapid response while holding our discernment process as precious and valid. We approved doing what we can to support the lawsuit by Philadelphia, New England, and Baltimore Yearly Meetings to prevent federal immigration agents from entering places of worship. Discussions of internal concerns centered on finances, restructuring, and the difficulty filling some leadership positions.

After five days of worship, singing, friendship and listening, we return to our homes, keeping in mind the call we received for this annual session: In these days when all the world seems to tremble, we gather as Friends, and we tremble, too. But we do not tremble in fear or despair. Our trembling is the quaking that comes the moment before we break the silence of worship and speak. Our trembling is the Spirit stirring us to speak and act. We are called to let the Inward Voice ring through us with such clear conviction that we rise in courage and sing.

Paul Christiansen, NPYM Presiding Clerk