

Western Yearly Meeting Welcomes All

Western Yearly Meeting seems to be venturing into some new territory, it seems. This year's annual sessions have been broken into three parts with three different dates, locations and focuses. Part 2 was held June 14 to 18 at Quaker Haven Camp. "All Friends Camp" was attended by about 90 people ages 2 to 82 who gathered for worship, discussions, presentations, games, water activities, fellowship, and of course, eating. With superb weather and hospitality, and the very practical theme of "**How to Be a Quaker Today**" it was a rich time of deep thought, hilarious laughter, serious prayer, a few tears, singing and sharing among a colorful and creative group of Friends. Here is a brief description of several of the "meetings for learning." Many of them were recorded and are available to you on the WYM website.

Superintendent Shawn McConaughey opened the sessions with an invitation to build relationships with others here and enjoy the fellowship of old and new friends. He then shared his view of two major ways Christians organize and manage their churches: Either with a commitment to a Christian belief system with rules and boundaries that hold people in or keep them out according to their theology OR put into action an invitational approach with a spirit of inclusiveness and encouragement that invites people to a common center which is the God we know from the life and teachings of Jesus. "Do we focus on the center or the gate keeping? We need to trust God's love to be transformative, and we need to trust others in their discernment. As a yearly meeting, can we agree on what defines our center?"

Tom Rockwell, Associate Superintendent presented research and statistics on the current trends affecting church attendance and views of young people about religion prior to sharing the work in progress through the summer to develop a strategic plan for the Yearly Meeting. He engaged people in discussion and invited further thoughts on what should be included in the plan that is intended to guide YM Committees, Boards and Staff in their work.

Myron Guachalla, WYM Youth and Young Adult minister, led three workshops on how to welcome new people into our meeting with opportunities for practicing how we would converse in actual situations.

Guest speakers from affiliated organizations were invited to relate their work to one of the Quaker SPICES (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality & Stewardship). **Megan Fair of Right Sharing of World Resources** said **Simplicity** requires separation. "We need to remove the things, or attitudes, or the ways we use our time that separate us from God, from addressing the needs of our friends, and from what God calls us to do." She added that some people think so highly of themselves they cannot think of the needs of others. We may spend much effort decluttering our house yet not decluttering our hearts. We often mistake busyness for faithfulness. **Alicia McBride from Friends Committee on National Legislation** spoke about **Integrity**. "What makes an organization demonstrate integrity? When we hear God's

voice and put it into practice. We need to live our lives consistently with our call from God and assure that every action we take is preceded with discernment.”

For evening devotions, **Chad Campbell, a representative of Everence**, a financial management company that tries to incorporate faith and value in decisions about money, spoke about how Quakers, because of their testimonies on **Integrity** and **Stewardship**, try to align their finances with their beliefs and pay attention to the way investments can be used to “seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.” (Micah 6:8) **Sophia Lemons from West Richmond Friends** spoke on the meaning of **Community**, saying when congregations announce, “All Are Welcome Here,” too often they mean all are tolerated here. “Do we really make room for someone seeking community if we don’t engage them in the work and fellowship of the meeting?”

Other guest speakers, some from faraway places in the world, also offered inspirational messages. **Josih Hostetler** from Fairfield Friends encouraged us with words from Matthew 25 to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, etc. He distributed small magnifying glasses to remind us to step up our game when it comes to sharing God’s love so that people feel cared for and welcome in our meetings. **Brown Mujete**, from Kenya, is a student at Earlham School of Religion. He shared a different perspective on faith from his experience living in Turkana where food, water and educational opportunities are scarce. His wife is a nurse at Reid Hospital. They have four young children. **Two ladies from Bolivia**, Doris & Lisseth, spoke about Project SUMA, a program intended to bring restoration and abundant life to those affected by sexual exploitation and physical violence.

Staff members visiting from **Friends United Meeting** were **Kelly Kellum, Michael Sherman, and Karla Jay** who spoke about how important it is in their work to “Encourage one another in Love.” They described some of the ways that FUM is effectively doing that such as the 2000 lbs. of food and medical items that have been donated from various sources and are being shipped to Cuba Yearly Meeting for distribution. Kelly stated that FUM is decidedly Christian and Quaker, a niche that no other Quaker organization has found.

Being with Western Yearly Meeting Friends felt as though **everyone** there was looking at the needs of this world through the eyes of God’s Love and Light. I am glad to part of such a kind and committed group of Friends. —Sylvia Graves Beane