

Great Plains Yearly Meeting of Friends

Life From the Roots – Fruit Bearing Faithfulness

June 4, 2016

Dear Friends everywhere:

We send you greetings from the 109th Annual Sessions of Great Plains Yearly Meeting of Friends.

Friends gathered at University Friends Church in Wichita, Kansas June 2-4, 2016 to do the work of God centered on our theme “Life From the Roots – Fruit Bearing Faithfulness.” We joyfully welcomed visitors from Texas, Kansas, Maryland, Virginia, Iowa, Maine, Colorado and Kenya. We have felt God’s desire for us to be together since Nebraska Yearly Meeting was incorporated in 1908. After more than 100 years, we continue to discover our growing knowledge and experience of Divine Presence and Desire.

The Presiding Clerk opened our sessions by reading last year’s epistle to remind us of where we have been. She then acknowledged that God is moving us in new ways, and that “new is good.” We rejoiced with one another at the Life that was apparent during the reading of each meeting’s State of Society report.

Thursday and Friday evening our keynote speaker, Mary Lord of Baltimore and New England Yearly Meetings, shared an experience of Divine Presence she had while meditating under the Mother Beech at Pendle Hill, feeling Spirit speak through the tree. Life is in the roots and the trunk ... our Faith and our Practice, which will produce healthy fruit – our Quaker Testimonies. The branches -- structures, committees, organizations -- come and go. As Quakers we are rooted in Faith and Practice; in deep, personal experience of the Divine; and we dare to share our growing knowledge and experience of God. We were

encouraged to share, together, our names of Divine Presence and to relate a time we experienced the Divine. Mary encouraged us to create space in our meetings to share with one another our deep truths and our stumbling questions.

Our faithfulness to our experience of Spirit is bearing fruit. Our work at nurturing relationships among Friends in the Great Plains Region has led two meetings to express interest in joining us. During our Friday morning Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, Lubbock [Texas] Friends of Christ Quaker Meeting was joyfully granted 'preparatory affiliate status' and Topeka Friends' interest in further exploring membership in Great Plains Yearly Meeting was welcomed with open hearts.

After rejoicing in the expanding Revitalization and Leadership Development Initiative last year, this year we welcomed Dorlan Bales as our first clerk of a new standing committee, the Home Missions Committee. We experienced a new relational and organizational paradigm as the Home Missions Committee and the Finance Committee, which share concerns, held two 'working together' times during our sessions.

For the first time, we used the Friendly Bible Study method as we gathered together for worship on Friday and Saturday mornings. This method, originally developed by Larry and Joanne Spears, emphasizes engaging Scripture with our hearts, rather than our heads. On Friday we experienced John 15: 11-15, 17, and on Saturday James 2: 21-24.

Through God's Grace a process of healing in the relationship between Great Plains Yearly Meeting and Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting begun in 2014 continues with intentional acts of forgiveness and inter-visitation. We are blessed by the presence of the presiding clerk of Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting at our sessions this year and we are strengthened by our desire to be together in the shared Love of God.

We are encouraged by the energetic sight and sound of children and teens during our yearly meeting sessions. We have dedicated planning and resources to building a robust Young Friend yearly meeting program for both children and teen age groups. We are feeling a calling, as a yearly meeting, to provide our younger generation with deep, life-enhancing encounters with Spirit and Quakerism each year.

We grew in knowledge and compassion as we received reports from Friends who attended American Friends Service Committee, Friends World Committee for Consultation, Friends United Meeting and Friends Committee on National Legislation. We look forward to hosting the FUM Triennial at Friends University in Wichita in July 2017. Our spirits were deepened by workshops presented by our Young Friends as a culmination of their “Stories to Song” experience; by John Muhanji, FUM Director of African Ministries; and by Laura Dungan on “Deep Listening.” We enjoyed the musical gifts of En Power and Light on Friday evening.

We find great joy in being together in the presence of God. We are scattered over Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. We are pastoral and unprogrammed. We are liberal and conservative. We are Native American and 1st to 12th generation immigrants. We are blessed by a diversity that strengthens our spirits, teaches us Great Love, draws us closer to Spirit and liberates us to do God’s work.

May we continue to be faithful in attending to our roots so that God may bear fruit through us.

In the Light of Christ,

LaVonna Loesch, Presiding Clerk
Great Plains Yearly Meeting of Friends