
PLENARY, THURSDAY MORNING 7/24 10:30-11:45

1. OPENING – INVOCATION/ THANKSGIVING

Good morning, Friends,

It is with joy that Ken and I join you this morning for the first plenary of North Pacific Yearly Meeting 2014. It is a gift to us to be here, learning from you, and sharing some thoughts that have come to us as we have pondered the theme that you have chosen for these sessions.

I shall speak first, with one request: Because of Parkinson’s disease, my speech can be hard to understand. If you cannot hear or understand me, please wave. Ken knows well what has come to me to say to you and can readily take over.

A Yearly Meeting in the manner of Friends is a sacred opportunity. Coming together in community, for several days and nights, seeking the Presence and Guidance of the Holy Spirit, is a gift from and to God. Let’s begin with prayer; first, spoken prayer of thanksgiving and invocation followed by some minutes of silence

Thank You, Loving Creator, for the gift of one another, meeting in-the-motion-of Love, free of the roles and responsibilities of our daily lives. Help us release our preconceptions and self-centeredness and return to You and each other anew, as authentic selves and friends. Help us recognize, respect and be open to sharing our feelings with one another, remembering that feelings are part of Your communication with us. Keep us teachable. Be with us.

Thank You for the courageous and prayerful planning of this yearly meeting by those who have named it as a time for seeking TOGETHER the transformative Power of Spirit. Keep us courageous and truthful. Be with us.

Thank You for our Quaker legacy and the precious rhythms of Friends’ Faith and Practice. Through silence, inward listening, collective discernment and healing action in the world we strive to return to our right relationship with You. Help us hear Your Call to us, individually and corporately. Be with us.

SILENCE – 5-10 minutes.
The expressed purpose of this Yearly Meeting is to seek “The Transformative Power of Spirit in Community” and beginning with prayer is the right first step. In prayer of thanksgiving, we reach out of our fragmented, individual selves toward the unity of the Eternal in hoped for re-consecration, renewal of our relationship. But the prayer must be truthful, it must come from a place of knowing our need for God

Biblical prophet Micah said some time ago that what God requires of human beings is three things: to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Jesus lived these three requirements and promised that the Holy Spirit would help us do so too. But He said and demonstrated that Micah’s third requirement—humility—right relationship to God and neighbor, really is the first requirement. It is the cornerstone on which everything else depends.

How do we learn humility? How do we encourage it in others?

Life, for all of us, is full of disappointments. Disappointments and life crises work to keep us humble IF we face them truthfully. But it is easy to blame others, even God, when doors fail to open, our will is denied, and/or our plans are aborted.

Early Friends knew that humility, an acceptance of the human need for God, is the cornerstone of faithfulness. The major practices of the Quaker Way such as silence, universal ministry, and collective discernment are wonderfully related to humility, as Ken will remind us. All I can say is that the need for humility in this world of ours has never been greater.

In conclusion, I want to share a personal story, which ends in a message that seems as though it is meant for you.

Two years ago, when Ken and I first received the invitation to join you as Friends-in-Residence this summer, we were surprised by the strong and immediate “yes” we both felt even though we knew very little about NPYM and couldn’t imagine how you knew about us. We had no expectations, no idea how or if we could be of help to you, but somehow there was a sense of life and promise, which was unmistakable.

Since last summer our sense of rightness has developed and grown stronger through a series of deeply moving telephone conversations with Tom Rawson and with other members of NPYM in which joys, concerns, goals, and prayers for these annual sessions were directly and honestly spoken. Affirming how deeply connected Love and Truth are, having experienced Truth with you, even by faceless, long distance phone, a deep sense of kinship with NPYM has developed. We have spontaneously held you all in prayer for many months now.
But at the same time, my own sense of personal relevance to NPYM 2014 has been severely tried. Again and again since Christmas, I have come close to asking that I be excused from attending.

I have Parkinson's Disease, as my father did before me. My physical conditions today are different than they were 24-months ago when the invitation to NPYM arrived, and I cannot predict or control these conditions. Sometimes I can verbally communicate; sometimes I cannot. Some times I can stand upright for more than five minutes but often I have to ask for a chair, an arm, or a hand. I can't multi-task. Swallowing requires careful focus to avoid choking and it is often better not to eat when I want to listen at meal times. Most discouraging, my stiff facial expression hides the care I feel for others and what they are expressing.

In short, Parkinsons makes it hard not to have negative expectations.....fears abound...and voices follow, questioning whose will I'm following and why. Body, speech, mind and even soul seem to shrink within. It seems wrong to burden North Pacific Yearly Meeting. Wouldn't it be more Truthful, less prideful simply to retreat?

One Sunday morning in May, in the silence of worship at Beloit MM, I had a thought which almost shimmered: MAYBE...I ACTUALLY AM BEING CALLED TO NPYM.......BECAUSE OF MY CONDITION....BECAUSE OF MY VULNERABILITY, MY DEPENDENCY. MAYBE MY CONDITION SPEAKS IN AND OF ITSELF. MAYBE I'M MEANT TO GO.

I wrestled with this thought. Anxiety took over. A week or so later, as I was sitting at the word processor thinking about the theme of these annual sessions, a message came, which seemed AND STILL SEEMS meant for you.

The Power, which you seek, seeks you as well. Trust the two-way motion of Love. Reciprocal and co-creative, Love generates Life.

Let's repeat and grow into this message of promise (READ AGAIN) and receive it into our hearts.

SILENCE

So, Friends of NPYM, release your expectations for these annual sessions and listen deeply together in expectancy. God is not far. Call for silence when the two-way motion of Love is interrupted and/or Life seems to have gone out of the proceedings. Above all, stay Truthful. Love requires Truth and, in return, Truth allows Love.