

To Friends Everywhere:

Pacific Yearly Meeting met in August this year at the University of Redlands in California. This yearly meeting followed a year of discernment. Using queries posed by Ministry and Oversight, during this year we looked at our practices, traditions, and assumptions. This reflection has both challenged us in our response to the world's ills and reaffirmed that the Spirit is active within and among us. Our discernment is not finished.

It has also allowed us to look at our epistle with fresh eyes, and try a different approach. We are trying to avoid pious language and the self-consciously poetic. We collected from Friends of all ages some thoughts about our time together. We asked Friends two questions:

1. Why do you come to Yearly Meeting?
2. What has been particularly meaningful for you this week?"

What has been meaningful:

Meeting for worship this morning was most meaningful for me. I was heartened and surprised by the degree to which the Spirit was moving people to minister in Christian terms. . . . Quakerism's original message was what was, or was not, authentically Christian.

I was comforted to find that so many friends came together in an interest group to explore a post-theist orientation to being Quaker—struggling with language to express their love of Spirit that is not dependent on any single religious tradition.

Worship sharing is most meaningful because you bare your soul and you know it's contained within that group. You build trust and get to know each other. You find out that people are amazing. You build, within that group, a sense of community.

There is a shift in monthly meetings and PYM toward the spiritual (away from the strictly social action), a move towards the more personal in ministry. The Unity with Nature minute asked us to make significant changes in our lives in response to global warming.

I think in the year of reflection we had a "quietist period." Turning inward to discern, we did so, diminishing our awareness and response to the larger issue of Iraq and elsewhere. I find that surprising, given our peace testimony. Our look inward has been valuable, but it came at a price.

I have been aware this week of how much gay, lesbian, transgender Friends carry much of the work and bring great spiritual richness to our gathering.

As a gay man, to hear of a Meeting which is, at least in name, Quaker deciding they will have nothing to do with any organization accepting gay and lesbian people saddens me greatly. What happened to our equality testimony? What happened to seeking that of God in everyone?

When we were sitting together trying to write our epistle, we were having a hard time understanding each other, but in the last 15 minutes the adults left and we got a draft.

I observed that the Junior Yearly Meeting Plenary is more centered than the adult plenary. The JYMers are less invested in their own opinions, and don't wax eloquently.

This morning in worship I was reminded through the rich vocal ministry of many Friends, that we need to keep open minds, open hearts, and open arms. We don't know from whom we may receive the blessings of the Spirit.

Why we come to Yearly Meeting:

I come to PYM to be a part of a supportive community where I'm free to express my own opinions and be myself without judgment.

I come to find out what Friends are thinking now and what is our response to what is happening in the world.

I particularly enjoy the community and the authenticity of the people involved, because in normal conversation the social boundaries and limits strictly govern a person's conduct socially. Here social relationships are not governed by convention, but governed by the individual person.

I like playing with Legos. I do it with the group and sometimes by myself.

I like swimming and playing with my friends.

I like taking care of dogs, cats, dinosaurs, and pterodactyls—and my family.

We speak with many voices. The questions we have raised continue to be provocative. We have work to do: to become closer across age lines, to craft our corporate witness about earth care, to explore our testimony on equality, to worship without cell phones ringing, to care for our children who are "already Quakers, not just future Quakers," to be the beloved community.

We worship, and work and play with our friends. We come, Friend, to walk with you.

Yours in Friendship,  
Joe Franko  
Presiding Clerk