

PACIFIC YEARLY MEETING EPISTLE 2009
Final as Presented to Plenary, 1st 8th Month 2009

To Friends everywhere:

Greetings of all peace and good to you, dear Friends!

We in Pacific Yearly Meeting carry you in our hearts here at our 2009 annual session, held 7/26 to 8/1 at Walker Creek Ranch in rural Marin County, California. We have heard epistles from other Yearly Meetings throughout the week, reminding us we are part of the larger body of the Religious Society of Friends.

Our 2009 annual session has provided us with many opportunities for worship in spirit and truth, as well as for learning, fellowship, and relaxation in the countryside. The setting, hemmed in by rolling, fog-enshrouded hills, reminded us of the musical “Brigadoon,” as we recreate once again this faith community.

This week we deepened our faith together, in community. A major topic before us was a proposal to create a Youth Program Coordinator as the yearly meeting’s only staff position. A year ago, Pacific Yearly Meeting approved the position in concept. An ad hoc subcommittee circulated a detailed proposal and gathered extensive feedback from meetings and individuals, compiled in 110 pages of appendices.

Wrestling with this proposal demanded the best of us. We were reminded to be faithful to our Quaker practice of meeting for worship with attention to business. We needed to step back from results, create space, and leave room for the Spirit to enter. We were not here for a product or goal, but to be faithful and uncover: What does God will for us? After lengthy and difficult discernment, we came to unity to try this three-year experiment. Friends were reminded we remain one community, bonded by love.

Opportunities for nurture and growth of our spiritual lives included extended worship every morning. The children participated for the first 20 minutes, with a lesson, and then retired to their programs. Vocal ministry reflected a grounding in Quaker faith and practice. The lengthened periods of worship created more space for the Spirit to breathe and allowed time to absorb each ministry.

Friends found inspiration through shared reflection and study, including Bible study and a series on transformative Quakers. Worship sharing in smaller groups explored the theme of community and our relationships with our meetings. Meeting for memorials was powerful as usual, offering Friends a chance to remember the departed. The presence of the entire yearly meeting community—babies, children, teens, adults, and elders—showed the full circle of life present among us. An intergenerational dance later that evening provided a vibrant celebration of life.

The clerk’s reminders and steady hand helped conduct business in good order. One notable example of improved process this year was the swift approval of the budget on

second reading. Friends often reminded one another of the importance of our testimonies, including equality, integrity, and peace.

We approved a minute from Peace and Social Order Committee against the U.S. war in Afghanistan and supporting peacebuilding. Another minute on healthcare for all in the U.S. was adopted. We were concerned that the American Friends Service Committee reported a 50% across-the-board budget reduction, a result of the economic recession. Other reports, interest groups, and a tabling fair provided opportunities for Friends to engage with numerous other organizations and concerns.

We engaged on the difficult topic of racism within the Society of Friends. Visitors Vanessa Julye and Janice Domanik, coordinator and former clerk respectively of the Friends General Conference Committee for Ministry on Racism, convened affinity groups and discussions. Vanessa also discussed the new book she co-authored, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans and the Myth of Racial Justice*. Friends of color wrote an open letter to the community, naming a certain level of interracial tension, asked to be greeted, and asked the Yearly Meeting to support Vanessa's return in 2010.

The natural beauty of Walker Creek Ranch provided encounters with wildlife, as well as opportunities for reflection on the environment. The Unity with Nature Committee has found new energy, fostering a dialogue held in monthly and quarterly meetings about an emergent testimony on harmony with nature.

We also made many efforts to "green" the annual session. In the past year 48 committee meetings were held by conference call, saving on travel impacts. Some Friends bicycled to our site from locations in the San Francisco Bay Area. Meals were primarily vegetarian, with as much locally grown food as possible. We also ate one meal of plain rice and beans in solidarity with the many people around the world who eat simply at every meal. A Friend presented her Walk with Earth from San Diego, California, to Santiago, Chile. Over 380 people have walked part of the way, including many from our yearly meeting. She described the miracles that can open up when one faithfully follows one's leading from God every day.

Children's programs nurtured the children's spirituality and their experience of our yearly meeting community through lessons, games, and outdoor activities like canoeing and swimming. Junior Yearly Meeting had a sizable turnout, and the teens created guidelines for participation and their own schedule. Their spirit and energy provided Light for all of us.

We send our loving greetings and our gratitude to you all and the larger world of Friends.

In peace and friendship,

On behalf of Pacific Yearly Meeting
Joe Franko, Clerk