

General Epistle

Great Plains Yearly Meeting

Sixth Month 3-5, 2010

Wichita, Kansas

To all Friends everywhere,

We greet you from our 103rd annual session, held at Heartland Friends meetinghouse in Wichita, Kansas, where Friends from Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma, and visitors from around the region and the world have gathered together to listen deeply and to seek our common purpose as Great Plains Yearly Meeting.

We come from a wide range of geography and customs. We are pastoral and non-pastoral, city and country, young and old, Native American, Latin American, African, Asian, and European American. In all of our differences, we find unity in the Spirit of Christ who is our present Guide and Teacher. While we sometimes struggle to make time for the wider fellowship of Friends, we were once again reminded of how important it is to gather together in mutual submission to God's Spirit.

Great Plains Yearly Meeting was blessed this year to have in attendance a number of Young Adult Friends who participated in the North American YAF Gathering, held last weekend at University Friends meetinghouse. We were enriched by their prayerful presence with us, and we were pleased to hear the epistle from their gathering. Great Plains Yearly Meeting and University Friends Meeting were glad to support the recent gathering in Wichita, and we look for ways to be supportive of Young Adult Friends in the future.

We give thanks to Heartland Friends for their hospitality this year. Heartland's meetinghouse has been an uplifting location for our sessions, and we enjoyed the gallery of area Friends' art that was erected for the occasion. We have been blessed by the hospitality that local Friends have shown in providing meals and lodging. We recognize that hospitality is a spiritual gift, and we thank God for how this gift is manifested through our brothers and sisters at Heartland.

Throughout our time together this weekend, we have heard Christ's command in John 15: that we love one another. We are grateful for Betsy Blake of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (FUM), who has sweetly and powerfully brought the word to us. She has challenged us to wrestle with the discomfort of self-examination: What does it mean to be a follower of Christ, in practical terms? How should our commitment to Christ affect how we relate to other individuals, to society as a whole, and to our fragile planet? How is Christ calling us to change our lifestyles to conform to the Truth of His Love?

Perhaps as the beginning of a response to this question, Great Plains Yearly Meeting is entering into an exciting time of rediscovery and clarification of its purpose and ministry. We have been blessed and challenged by new leadership in the Yearly Meeting, and we have grown by wrestling with the tension between who we have been as a body, and who God is calling us to be today. An important area where we seek to grow is in allowing our actions to arise out of worship, rather than from our preconceived ideas of what should happen. In this way, we hope that we might learn from our Good Shepherd how best to demonstrate our love for God and neighbor.

We are called to demonstrate this love through sharing our faith with others, and we explored *Quaker Quest* as one way to engage in this work. At the same time, we were reminded of the importance of struggling together for social justice and right relationships in the world at large. We explored the history of conflict and social change among Friends, as well as the modern-day struggles of immigrant families in the United States. We know that prayer must be at the center of all that we do, but we recognize that prayer alone will not be enough to address the sin and systematic injustice that grips our country and our world. What concrete action are we being called to in Christ?

Leroy and Eva Brightup reminded us that following Jesus will often result in hardship - even persecution and death. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is one that confuses and scandalizes the world, and we must be ready for great resistance as we seek to walk in His Way.

As we close our time together, we feel encouraged about our emerging direction as a fellowship of Friends on the Great Plains. We ask for your prayers in the coming year, as we seek to be faithful to how Christ would lead us as a body.

Blessings to you in the Spirit that was before the world was,

Laura Dungan, Presiding Clerk