

## **The Epistle of Intermountain Yearly Meeting Ghost Ranch, New Mexico, June 12 - 19, 2005**

“Would that all God’s people were prophets!” – Numbers 11:29b, NRSV

“The transformative value of dialogue, I think, is in the listening” – from *Shaking the Foundations: A call to prophesy in the Society of Friends*” given by Jane Orion Smith

“God is not finished with us” – State of the Meeting report, Tempe, Arizona

*“I am calling, I am asking  
About the hunger, the waiting  
And the weight of the world  
Someday I’m gonna be bold”*

“Weight of the World” – Cate Friesen

To Friends Everywhere:

Once again we send our warm greetings from the rugged and beautiful landscape of northern New Mexico, where we have gathered in the company of over 300 Friends in the “magic place,” as one attender called Ghost Ranch, a serene, supportive “home” where no doors are locked. The past year of continued war, reports of torture, and political divisiveness has been a strain in many of our lives, and it restores our spirits to know that we are not alone in our desire for peace, here and among Friends throughout the world. As always at Ghost Ranch, the wind whistled off the red and yellow rock walls and between the old adobe buildings. This year it seemed to breathe a word: Listen. Listen to the stories of genocide survivors in Rwanda. Listen to Israelis and Palestinians. Listen to the myriad birds and creatures around us. Listen to that of God in each other and in our own hearts. Listen ... to the call to prophesy.

The theme for this year’s gathering was “Shaking the Foundations: a Call to Prophesy.” Early seminars segued into the keynote message, encouraging us to make room in our lives to go spiritually deeper in various ways so that we may go out into the world as prophets. Jane Orion Smith, the General Secretary of the Canadian Friends Service Committee, energized Friends with a keynote address rich with biblical, Quaker, personal, and musical language reminding Friends that “Prophesy, like God, is really a verb. The task of living in the Light requires us to do as John and his community did in the time of the Roman Empire: to lift the veil, to see the world as it is, to transform ourselves and, by extension, the world, to realize a truly new world order, the peaceable kingdom.”

We asked ourselves: What would our lives look like if we embraced the verb prophesy? What if we were all prophets, “living the peaceable kingdom into existence” through faithfulness to God’s will and message? We have all treasured those among us who lived a prophetic witness, showing God’s love, living out God’s will (whether or not they saw or acknowledged the divine nature of what they did).

Themes which came up again and again during the Yearly Meeting were: the call to act boldly in our leadings; the need to listen – in Quaker business, in discerning the will of God, and the great power of compassionate listening in reconciling grievous divisions; and issues of money, which, as our co-clerks warned, are “generating an unhealthy amount of unfriendly heat.” How can we match the wonderful emotional and verbal support we give our projects with the dollars needed to sustain them? The yearly meeting’s beloved Joint Service Project continues to struggle financially, even while many in Yearly Meeting sing its praises. As a Friend stated, from past experience we know the participants in Quaker service projects are “the weighty Friends of the future.”

We were blessed by the presence of a visitor from Rwanda Yearly Meeting, Cecile Nyiramana. Though she lived through the terrible genocide inflicted on her nation ten years ago, she brought news of hope and healing. Her programs, sponsored by Rwandan Friends and supported by Friends in our own Yearly Meeting and around the world, have brought women on both sides of the ethnic conflict together to share their stories and work toward peace and reconciliation. Surely this soft-spoken, gentle Friend is an example of the prophetic witness described by our keynote speaker.

There was a feeling of extended family as Friends worried over the health of a few Friends who had to be rushed to the hospital. All but one returned by the rise of Meeting, and that child we hold in our prayers.

Our children were a joy to watch as they cared for and nurtured each other. Two of our Senior Young Friends did an amazing job of fundraising to help themselves and hopefully other young Friends from around the world to attend the World Gathering of Young Friends scheduled for later this summer.

As we go back out into the world, we exhort each other and all of you, our brothers and sisters around the world, to be bolder, to love more, to be less comfortable, to share wealth and privilege, to surrender to the Light, and to listen, listen, listen.

Yours in the Light,

Hal Wright and Cynthia Smith  
Clerks of Intermountain Yearly Meeting