

Epistle from Ministers and Elders

Chicago, October 6, 2017

Greetings to Friends everywhere from the participants in the “Ministers and Elders Colloquium” organized by *What Canst Thou Say?* (WCTS), a Quaker journal, a meeting for worship in print:

Twenty-nine of us gathered at the Cenacle Retreat Center in Chicago October 6 – 9, 2017. Experienced ministers and elders were invited from a number of the branches of Quakerism, the diversity of which enriched the gathering. The two planners and one of the group leaders fell sick at the last minute. Other Friends stepped up at a few minutes’ notice. Those of us who like everything planned were a little cranky, but we marveled at the miracles and mischief of the Holy Spirit manifested among us. Some Friends expressed concern about the diminishment of the Christian base of the Religious Society of Friends. Other Friends shared their sense of signs of renewal among Friends that gave them hope.

In the information sent prior to the Colloquium, participants were encouraged to read the book, *Inner Tenderings* by Louise Wilson, especially chapter 11. Louise Wilson was definitely a presence among us throughout our time together.

In the opening worship one Friend shared a heartfelt message saying the Society of Friends is in deep trouble because we are not surrendering to the Holy Spirit. Another Friend said we were planting seeds every day and leaving the harvest to God. Schedules were then distributed that included the Monday morning that was empty, leaving space for the Holy Spirit, and the Saturday morning worship was extended in response to the Friend’s concern. Several Friends served as elders holding the gathering in the Light for an hour each morning before breakfast.

Paul Buckley spoke about “Restoring the Art of Eldering,” at its core: “see the Light, turn toward the Light, follow the Light.” Jennifer Elam tapped into our creativity as we played with clay and then wrote our impressions. Lucy Davenport spoke on “Laying Claim to our Calling” and Dan Davenport offered some resources and reflections on II Corinthians 12:1-10, after which we met in small groups to consider queries.

Fernando Freire facilitated a Spirit-led discussion of “Covenanting,” after which we broke into our same small groups to ponder passages from *Jeremiah* 31:31-34, *Hebrews* 8:6-13, and the *Journal of George Fox* on covenants and talk of our own experience about the possibilities to form covenants from this Colloquium. On Monday morning sitting we heard reports from those small groups and discussed options for forming covenants among ourselves. All presentations and other reflections from participants will be published in the Proceedings, which will be available online on the WCTS website <whatcanstthousay.org> after the first of 2018.

Evening sessions included an “Open-Mic” with poetry, essays, stories, and songs, and the second night of Interest Groups. John Edminister led an Interest Group on “Searching Early Quaker Online Resources with the help of the Quaker Bible Index and the Digital Quaker

Collection.” Paul Buckley led an Interest Group on Early Friends. Mariellen Gilpin and Judy Lumb led an Interest Group on the journal WCTS in which several themes were developed for future issues, along with volunteers to be Guest Editors for those issues.

One Friend summed up the Colloquium as a “Love Banquet” and we are all taking home left-overs.