

Epistle of the Western Half-Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Canada May 2001

Greetings from Western Half-Yearly Meeting in Sorrento, where Friends gathered from May 18th to the 21st, 2001 at the Anglican retreat Centre. We were welcomed by the director for our 27th year at this location. The meeting of old and new Friends was as warm as ever despite chilly weather and occasional showers. Large, changeable clouds advancing across the mountains and lake provided a metaphor for the movement of the spirit among us. A total of 169 Friends represented all the Monthly Meetings in Western Canada. Nearly a third of the attenders were children and teens. Thirty children were in three age groups in the children's program and twenty-five teens had their own program. There were also several multigenerational activities including the ever popular balancing and family night.

More than fifty Friends participated in a workshop of the proposed Faith and Practice for Canadian Yearly Meeting. Questions and suggestions were followed by an exercise introducing us to the challenge of choosing and evaluating entries for this large project.

Twelve special interest groups were held on Saturday and Sunday on a range of topics including chanting, the Intifada and non-violence, transformative justice, the issues of small Meetings, and Quaker outreach. On Saturday and Sunday mornings adults and young people began the day's activities with worship sharing in small groups. We worshipped together at beginning, closing and Sunday morning Meetings seeking closer union with one another and the Spirit.

A memorial celebration of life was held Saturday afternoon for Vanessa North, who died April 16, 2001 at age eighteen. Vanessa played an important role within Victoria Monthly Meeting and participated in the activities of Young Friends at Half-Yearly and Yearly Meetings. This was an important time for sharing tears as well as happy memories of the many gifts she gave us.

Saturday evening's program, "Leadings and Service," was a joint presentation by Bill Eastman for Friends World Committee for Consultation and Jane Orion Smith for Canadian Friends Service Committee. Bill brought alive our many connections with Friends Meetings around the world through his account of the F.W.C.C. Triennial Meeting last year in New Hampshire. Jane Orion, rather than giving us a recap of C.F.S.C.'s recent activities, explored the discipline of discerning and following leadings from which all service activities should originate. She closed her talk with the following queries which could apply to the entire weekend: Do I trust and abide in God's love? Am I willing to let God lead me?

In peace and loving fellowship,

Susan Stevenson

Clerk, Western Half-Yearly Meeting