

Epistle from the 2014 Pastoral Meetings Gathering

3/27/2014

Dear Friends,

We write to you, sisters and brothers, as fellow members of New York and New England Yearly Meetings. We have a story to share about new Life.

With a concern for the life and ministry of our pastoral meetings, we gathered at Powell House in Old Chatham, NY, from March 24 through 27, 2014.

We affirm to the rest of our yearly meetings the Life, Love, Truth, and Hope in our pastoral meetings. What was once a time for pastors to gather and support each other in their ministry grew in recent years into a retreat for pastors and the elders who supported them. This retreat has now become an opportunity for pastors, elders, and members of ministry & counsel to worship and grow together in the work of nurturing their meetings. We are continuing our journey into an emerging common vision, a shared ministry.

In our time together, we were blessed with music and laughter. We were reminded of the mutual nature of the service of pastors, elders, and ministry & counsel as together we liberate the life of the Spirit in our meetings. We are learning to be clear with one another about our expectations, boundaries, and roles in this work. We are blessed with deepened awareness of the circles of support that surround us.

Our two yearly meetings share a story of separating and coming back together. We find this in the condition of our local meetings as well. In these days, we experienced in a new way being *members one of another*. We are re-membering ourselves as part of one Body whose individual cells - our local worshipping communities - must be carefully nourished in order for the whole Body to thrive. We embraced mutual accountability for our work together, recognizing its power to enhance the gifts that each of us share.

In sessions facilitated by Colin Saxton of Friends United Meeting, we were led to look anew at what we are doing here - our purpose, vision, and common goals as pastoral meetings with our unique histories, gifts and contexts. We reaffirm the strength available to us in relationship with our wider bodies - our quarterly, regional, and yearly meetings, and our worldwide community of Friends.

We are stepping forward in faith to be yoked together, learning to carry our work in new and life-giving ways, with deepened intention and deepened commitment. We return to our home meetings with a sense of fresh empowerment, equipped with practical tools and resources to support a vital ministry of the whole. We recognize that we face many challenges. We are bringing home the invitation to overcome insularity and isolation, and to become true partners in nourishing the life of our meetings and our ministry as Friends in the world.

In the Life in which we have gathered,

Participants in the 2014 Gathering of Friends from Pastoral Meetings in New York and New England