My Time in Washington

Mary Gilbert, QEW Representative to the UN

On Wednesday night, with the Pope to speak the next day, QEW Friends participated in the interfaith program and the overnight vigil organized by the Franciscan Action Network (https://franciscanaction.org/). Can you imagine a gathering of Jews from differing communities, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists, and Friends?

There we all were, paying attention and experiencing our common ground for hours and hours. There were speeches and sermons and songs, even some colorful religious garb.

At the end of all that was the hour given to us Quakers for programming, and our program was the practice of silence. Roy provided a reading, I sang one song (with my eyes closed), and Laura provided a statement she had considered, but then we explained silence and speaking from the silence and we sat down, leaving the live microphone turned on. It was slow getting going, and it did require another explanation of what we were doing together, but then speakers did approach the mic and say what was on their hearts.

You’ve heard of popcorn meetings, right? Our more-than-an-hour meeting had maybe a dozen and a half speakers, but the quality of reverence was not disturbed. There was some silence as one speaker left the mic to sit down, and the next decided they were actually going to stand and approach the mic and speak, but I think it was okay because we had all just spent hours together in various forms of worship. We were all present. And in our whole time together the Quaker time was the only place where individuals were invited to tell each other what was "not just a good idea you are having, but something on your heart that just might be ministry for all who are here." It was beautiful. I think it will be remembered.
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