

Epistle from the Pendle Hill Spring Term Cohort, 2025

To Friends Everywhere,

In the grace and light of our shared journey, we write to you from Pendle Hill, where we gathered in the spring of 2025 as a richly diverse community. We came from across generations, ranging in age from 18 to 84, and from many corners of the world, including Australia, Kenya, England, South Korea, and the United States (born on all continents except Antarctica). The diversity of languages, backgrounds, and ages in our group continually challenged us to slow down, wait before speaking, and consider the needs and contributions of everyone involved. Whether someone struggled with English, had hearing difficulties, or needed more time to express their thoughts in a lively group, we made space for each voice. In our classes, we frequently broke into small groups, triads, or pairs, allowing each person to speak from the heart while others listened with openness and a sincere desire to learn.

Our spiritual paths were equally varied: among us were those shaped by Evangelical, Liberal, and Conservative Quaker traditions, Buddhism, Unitarianism, Anglicanism, and non-theist perspectives. Throughout the term, we practiced deep listening and showed up with open-hearted presence, which united us in our shared commitment. As we dwelt together, we grew in our ability to honor the unique ways each person experiences the Divine Teacher alive, present, and at work within us all.

Each morning, we gathered for worship in the Barn alongside staff and a vibrant online community of 60-90 participants on Zoom. In the evenings, we held epilogues, planned by members of our cohort, which were spaces of reflection, silence, and shared presence. We visited local Quaker meetings on Sundays, each expressing the Spirit in its own unique way.

Our home base was the Firbank Library, where we held classes, community meetings, singing nights, meetings for healing, and evening epilogues. We gathered in Firbank for courses on Rest as Resistance, Discerning Your Call, Primitive Quakerism Revived, Right Time to Change, and Journey Inward / Journey Outward. Over time, the Firbank space evolved into more than just a classroom; it became a sacred place of growth, laughter, and community.

As a cohort, we came to know and care for each other deeply. We lived, learned, cooked, cleaned, prayed, laughed, and played together. Our group included students who attended for two weeks, four weeks, and the full ten-week term, each contributing to the rich tapestry of our shared experience. To honor each phase of our evolving community, we held not one, but three joyful Log Nights, creative celebrations filled with skits, poems, songs, spontaneous interviews, playful videos, and even a Korean bunny dance. Together, we marked birthdays with handmade gifts, hosted tea parties with home-baked scones and jam, and danced joyfully during contra dancing sessions. Each moment reflected the warmth, creativity, and spirit that bound us together.

We felt fortunate to gather on Pendle Hill's beautiful campus for this retreat and period of growth. Even so, our community discussions and worship services continually acknowledged the uncertainty, hardship, and upheaval unfolding worldwide, as well as the ripple effects of unprecedented change in the United States. We prayed for

those suffering in many places, including Africa, the Middle East, Ukraine, and other regions affected by conflict and crisis.

We walked wooded trails together on campus and at Swarthmore College. We taught each other songs and games. We practiced spiritual companionship and grew in understanding healing, presence, and shared responsibility. We sang around the campfire, made “s’mores,” and wrote prayer wishes for the world on pieces of paper, which we then released into the flames.

Many of us arrived carrying personal grief, transition, or loss. Through meetings for healing, prayerful silence, and heartfelt support, we learned to accompany each other with tenderness and courage. When a powerful storm swept through the campus early one morning, our collective cleanup effort became a symbol of the strength and beauty of community. Our “spring cohort” community grew in many ways, expanding to include the large and dedicated Pendle Hill staff, off-campus participants in our classes, sojourners, and the steady stream of people from the many outside groups who came to Pendle Hill to hold their programs. We particularly enjoyed working with Pendle Hill staff and volunteers in the garden, kitchen, library, and bookstore.

We faced hard conversations with courage. Our response to emerging tension or unintended harm was to speak the truth in love. These moments became opportunities for growth and transformation because we chose to forgive and listen, finding grace in the process. Near the end of our term, we took part in the Publishers of the Truth Gathering alongside over 60 Friends from the United States and the UK. Friends at this gathering asked each other whether we could rise together to face, with love and truth, the many challenges facing our world today. The courage and resilience we shared this spring suggest that we can!

Frances, our Director of Education, shared her thoughts following our final presentations:

“This term, we’ve been exploring where we come from, how we pray together, our reality, and what remains unknown in our future. I’ve been deeply moved by how this group has shown up for one another in times of grief, illness, joy, and celebration. We don’t know everything yet, but we’re learning that we can discover truth in one another. We can accompany each other through recovery, birthdays, dancing, and the miracle of simply being here together.”

We are deeply grateful for the presence of Pendle Hill’s director, Francisco, whose love, passion, encouragement, wisdom, and care have left a lasting impact on our lives. His reassuring presence became especially evident after the storm that brought down trees but spared us; during that time, he offered comfort and strength to the cohort. We will continue to hold Francisco and the entire Pendle Hill team in our prayers, thankful for how they welcomed us and made us feel genuinely part of the Pendle Hill family.

As we part ways and return to our homes and callings, we carry with us what we’ve learned and who we’ve become through our time together. We leave Pendle Hill more tender, courageous, and awake to the Light in one another and ourselves.

With gratitude,

Pendle Hill Spring Term Cohort, 2025

Ode to the Pendle Hill Spring Term

(A Poem for the Class of Rest and Contextualization)

*Oh, Pendle Hill, sweet, wooded ground,
Where silence sings and thoughts resound,
Where winter trees stood dry and bare,
Still whispering wisdom through cold air.*

*From Kenya came a brother bold,
In a short-sleeved shirt, it's too cold! Too cold!
He thought he'd landed straight from home,
But winter here made spirits roam!*

*And "Rest" was taught, what a surprise!
By Valerie Brown, so gentle, wise.
A class called Rest, could that be right?
We thought we'd nap, but learned to fight
For sacred pause, for breath and peace,
For stillness where our hearts could cease
They're racing through the world's loud song,
Oh, "Rest," you held us all along.*

*Then Emily, our slightest spark,
Lit up our class like fireworks in the dark.
A five-minute play? She made us roar!
Summed up two weeks, who needs more?*

*The storm then came with roaring might,
And turned the noonday into night.
Trees wept and cracked, the wind went wild,
And every student, teacher, child
Looked out and gasped, Are we okay?
The forest groaned, but made way.
Pendle stood, though trees were tossed,
Some tree limbs were broken, but none were lost.*

*But oh! The ticks they came to bite,
Small monsters marching in the night!
We danced, we scratched, we feared our socks,*

*No match for bugs in forest flocks!
And just when calm began to bloom,*

*COVID crept into the room.
Isolation, masks, Zoom squares,
Empty chairs and whispered prayers.
The virus tried to knock us down,
But Pendle folk don't wear defeat's crown.
We masked, we muted, rejoined the fight,
And made our rest a deeper light.*

*Then Contextualization came,
A course with quite a fearsome name.
An "animal" that dug in deep
Who knew theology made us weep?
It cut into our way of thinking,
Our pasts, our maps, our future days.
But still we laughed, and still we cried
Together, wounded, whole, and wide.*

*We came to rest, and wrestled still
But left with hearts more calm, more filled.
And as we go our scattered ways,
May "Rest" and "Context" light our days.
Pendle Hill, you hold us true
We're part of you... And you, too.*

—John Muhanji