We are people eager to know and do God’s ways…
To loose the chains, untie the ropes, set the oppressed free.
Yearning for a deeper relationship with God and with each other…
To share our bread, extend compassion, satisfy the needs of the afflicted.
Longing to respond to God’s call to Sabbath rest and restoration,
remembering the One who frees us from bondage…
Ready for our worship to be reflected in our lives together.
Light breaks out, healing springs forth…
Refreshed in the Lord, we experience renewal of body, mind, and spirit.

REFLECTIONS ON ISAIAH 58
Closing Reflection of NOAC 2013 - Jonathan Shively

This reflection on Isaiah 58, penned by NOAC planning committee member Gene Roop, might well serve as a summary statement of our week together. I was considering how to summarize a summary and lift some examples from our shared experience this week. Awake late last night, I was replaying images, sounds, words, and touches of the week.

What did it mean? What difference has it made? Perhaps what it means, and whether or not our being here this week makes any different at all, is dependent to some extent on how we reflect on our week. Perhaps as Rich Mouw suggested, we will best appreciate our week together if we view it as a work of art, if we see what has happened here through the lens of love. How will we remember the long lunch line, or the moving piece of music, or the provocative word, or the reconnecting handshake if our reflection is guided by love.

Or how will our memories of NOAC of 2013 be shaped if we engage them during a Sabbath rest, an imaginative time hallowed by God, deepened by rest for the body and the blessing of the mind. Where in this week have you experienced delight in God and one another? When in the days and weeks ahead might you take the time for Sabbath reflection?

Or what shape does our reflection take if it is seen in the glow not only of a glow stick, but the illuminating light of life. Once we were in darkness, but this week serves as a reminder that we are not only in the light but are in fact a part of the light itself. It is this light, given testimony to and witnessed in its brilliance here this week, the very transcendence of God, that reaches beyond what we view as a given reality toward a moral imagination of what might yet be. It is this quest to understand not just this week but rather the fullness of our lives, that compels us to write the stories which give us our truths. We do not forget the joys and sorrows of our lives, but we do write a story about them. As Christians our narrative is shaped by the reconciling, healing love of God extended to us through Jesus the Christ. How does your story tell of this love?

As we leave this place, there are many things to hold onto, experiences to write into our story: the fellowship and friends which are so dear; the beautiful melodies and harmonies both shared in and received; the breaking of bread at the dinner table and around the word; the pulsing of life as we walked and stretched and played; the exercise of our minds with idea, word, and image; the shaping of
our souls in prayer and caring concern; the laughter of sacred space and the tears of holy wellsprings.

There is much to remember and cherish. Our text for the week reminds us, however, to treat what we know and have seen with humility and reverence. There is a difference, you see, between the histories that build a future and the nostalgia that stifle life.

Diana Butler Bass tells us that to remember too fondly in a manner that limits our hope for the future is only nostalgia, the deadly condition of giving up on the possibility and expectation that God can and will still do a new thing in our life and in this world. The loss of hope means that we have given up on the promises of healing for ourselves, our communities, God’s church, and the world.

But this week we have given testimony to a belief and participated in a confidence that God STILL has the power and the purposefulness to loose the chains, untie the ropes, set the oppressed free, extend compassion, to overcome the forces of this earth, to confront evil with its own destructive purposes, to heal the sick and comfort the broken-hearted.

To hold hope is to recognize the healing that springs forth, to be warmed by the light that shines out.

To hold hope is to know that (as Dr. Ed Wheeler said) “We are God’s children, and we are loved, and we are sent out into the world because God needs us to love it back.”

To hold hope is, as Ted Swartz encouraged us, to reach out, to grab hands, and to hold on.

It has been a blessing to be together this week, to celebrate this Sabbath period, to rest and be blessed and soon to return to our ordinary lives, hallowed, consecrated to the work of hope, refreshed in the Lord, renewed of body, mind, and spirit, fountain heads where healing springs forth.