

Epistles from Other Yearly Meetings and Organizations

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Alaska Friends Conference

Greetings to Friends everywhere, from the Mahala Ashley Dickerson Friends Center, located on the traditional lands of the Knik Dena'ina people. Alaska Friends celebrated the opportunity to gather with COVID-19 precautions in spirit and in person after a year and a half of isolation. In order to support the health and well-being of everyone, we engaged in a number of firsts. We insisted on immunizations, wore masks in indoor spaces and provided blended online opportunities. We also celebrated the purchase of the Dickerson property, the many improvements and the amenities for housing and support that the home provides. Daily crane, loon, hawk calls, and a lynx sighting brought great joy.

Our program included a report from Alaska Quakers Seeking Right Relationship with Indigenous People committee on their work and learning. We responded to some of the four invitations from First Alaskans Institute in 2019, which were: 1) Learn your institution's history as it pertains to Alaska Native people; 2) Share what you are learning about the history and present-day concerns and strengths of Alaska Native people to your peers and in your circles: help us "pull back the veil"; 3) apologize; 4) Make reparations. (Examples were: Since you took away language, perhaps fund language revitalization; Since you took away dancing, perhaps pay for drums.) Here are the questions of us:

- 1) Who are you accountable to as you do this work?
- 2) What is it about your practices or outreach that is not reaching Alaska Native people?

In response to our progress in these areas, we were invited to be an accountability partner with First Alaskans Institute in 2020.

We heard about readings on the Quaker missionary presence in Alaska and readings on Native experiences and impacts of colonization. Learnings were hard to hear and acknowledging Quaker involvement and complicity was very painful. This causes us to lean on faith to find new openings for healing and transformation. We also heard about the experience of being an accountability partner with First Alaskans Institute, and our involvements with Native Movement and Decolonizing Quakers. A highlight of our time together was visiting with a representative of the Knik Tribal Council of the Dena'ina people, Isha Twitchell, learning about their work in the community and how we can be good allies.

We strengthened our resolve to act by articulating our intentions in an AFC Commitment to Racial Justice.

We heard updates on the Dickerson Friends Project and cemetery and considered next steps in development and where they may lead us. We spent time naming gifts within our meetings and how we can make our meetings more welcoming to newcomers.

We reconnected with one another, communed around the campfire, caught up on our lives in the last two years, shared children's scavenger hunt findings from the surrounding woods, and enjoyed the tranquility of the lake.

Unique aspects of the gathering were that we leaned heavily on technology with a borrowed Meeting Owl, a blended online and in-person approach made accessible by our technology-savvy millennial Presiding Clerk, Laura Herman. Also, new to this Annual Session were paddle board excursions on the lake. We had three unexpected human and one cell phone baptism in the lake.

We look forward to Alaska Friends Conference gathering next year and in future years and hope it will be without need for COVID-19 restrictions.

Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri held online 28 April to 1 May 2022

Greetings to Friends everywhere.

Some 100 Friends in Aotearoa New Zealand gathered online under the care of Christchurch Monthly Meeting and the Yearly Meeting Arrangements Committee. After the lingering Covid pandemic had made it unsafe and inequitable to gather in Christchurch as planned, we were moved to attempt as full a Yearly Meeting gathering as possible online.

We felt delight, excitement, and some trepidation, and also gratitude for the advantages of meeting online. We missed the face-to-face conversations, as we explored being able to make the most of our first completely online Yearly Meeting, yet we had confidence that the Spirit would lead us.

While not being able to be in Ōtautahi Christchurch we were treated to a partly bilingual presentation focusing on the history of Ngāi Tahu, the tangata whenua (indigenous people), of the land on which the city was built, and Tahu Pōtiki their important ancestor. We were reminded of the trauma from the land loss and colonisation that followed. There was also an overview of recent events which continue to shape that land and its people.

The online format allowed us to welcome visitors from Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) and the Asia West Pacific Section (AWPS) of FWCC. We were reminded of how much stronger we are from our international connections, made more possible with the online technology. We heard from our visitors Aletia Dundas representing Australia Yearly Meeting, Adrian Glamorgan the new Secretary of AWPS, Tim Gee, General Secretary of FWCC, and YangSu Park and Hyun-Duck Bae, from Seoul Monthly Meeting, AWPS. They spoke of their own journeys, the people who had inspired them and the concerns they are working on in their part of the world. Tremendous energy is going into AWPS to build on the work already established and into exploring effective ways to nourish connections and collaborations in an area that holds half the world's population with many different languages. We are reminded of the necessity to work towards more language inclusiveness. We were inspired by hearing about the many activities arising out of concern, and ways of connection that are being planned and tried.

Continuing the theme of connections, a tour of the riches of our website quakers.nz offered us an insight into its potential for inreach and outreach and encourages us to take advantage of opportunities for adventures in the online world.

We are grateful for the vitality, insight and generosity shown by our Young Friends who are engaging in a way that their energy and numbers allow. Our current statement of affirmation of same sex relationships, written in 1992, is now being revised. Young Friends reminded us that the fact that we are a reconciling and affirming church needs to be highlighted to those searching for a spiritual home.

It was good to hear how the Loxley Award is supporting the Action Research of Jeremy Simons into how Restorative Justice social movements can help repair the harm from violence on the ground and in the online world.

“Children are important to our Society and to the world, not just for the future, but for the joy and wonder that they share in the present. Children remind us of the value of love, of fun, of the spirituality of play and of God in our bodies.” *Tracey Bourne 2014 Backhouse Lecture*. We have been thinking creatively about how to engage better with our children and young people. This has resulted in the creation of a new paid role with a support group which will facilitate this process. The All Age Worship on the Sunday morning, based on the Faith and Play story of Gifts led by Melinda Wenner Bradley,

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, left us spiritually enriched and feeling grateful for the insights which children can give us.

As we leave this Yearly Meeting we are mindful of the thoughts attributed to George Fox “Do not simply look at the temptations, confusions and corruptions of the world, but at the light that discovers them. For looking down at corruption and distraction, you are swallowed up in it; but looking at the light that discovers them, you will see over them and with the same light stand against them. ‘There,’ he said ‘is the first step to peace.’”

In Peace and Friendship

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anne Hall" and "Alistair Hall" written side-by-side.

Anne and Alistair Hall
Yearly Meeting Co-Clerks



**Yearly Meeting 2021
of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia
Greetings to Friends Everywhere**

Australian Friends send warm greetings as we meet in the southern winter for our second virtual Yearly Meeting from 3 to 9 July 2021. The pandemic has continued to affect the ways in which we create and experience community with the Spirit and one another, although with fewer impacts in Australia than in much of the world.

N’arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs, a Boon Wurrung senior elder, welcomed us to country and invited us to ‘come with a purpose to our beautiful home’. We meet during NAIDOC week, in which Australians celebrate the cultures of First Nations Peoples. Aunty Carolyn reminded us that this year’s theme for NAIDOC week is ‘Heal Country!’. And Australian Friends feel called to healing of many types—to heal country, heal community and heal the Earth—as we continue to live with the legacy of colonisation and racism, the ongoing disruption and separation caused by the pandemic, and the climate emergency.

Yet as we are called to do more with a sense of purpose, our Society has continued to age and the numbers of members and attenders to decrease. In the State of the Society report we were challenged to better illuminate the path to the meeting house door for seekers, and to work at the accessibility and inclusivity of our message. Whether Friends see the ‘glass’ as half-full or half-empty, we have much left in the bottle. We should continue to embrace the future with ‘steadfast fidelity to our guiding lights and not fearing opprobrium or reproach’.

Our ‘Friendly School’ included timely consideration of the place of Quakers in the world and how discernment leads to action, being to doing. This has been reflected in the amazing amount of activity by Quakers across Australia over the past year. Brisbane Friends helped to plan and implement action against an arms trade fair. We have continued to work to improve the ways that we protect children and adults in our meetings. The Asia West-Pacific Section of the Friends World Committee for Consultation has increased its efforts to contact isolated Friends throughout the area. Individual Friends continue to work with others for the cause of peace, for the repair of our environment and to reduce and buffer the serious impacts of the climate emergency, and for the relief of refugees. At the same time, we hear it is becoming more difficult to fill committee positions. We continue to feel the prompting to ask: is our committee work supporting us to be grounded in the worshipful waiting that leads to meaningful action in the world and brings us inwardly into the Light?

Uncertain times have also led to innovation. Our annual Backhouse Lecture took the form of a panel discussion for the first time, as five Friends reflected on the topic ‘Searching for Truth: Friends in a “post-truth” world’. The panellists spoke to Friends’ understanding of ‘Truth’ and our habitual discomfort with acknowledging differences as we seek to avoid conflict. Can we find a way to cultivate the capacity to live with difference? Is our love big enough to celebrate both our similarities and differences?

This was our second Yearly Meeting by Zoom and, by and large, our technical skills have improved. Finding the ‘sense of the meeting’ online has sometimes proven more challenging, although we have experienced some deep listening and discernment. We have reorganised our system of managing business so that we

make as many decisions as possible closer to the local level. This has been a good discipline for us. While we continue to lament that this is not the same as meeting face-to-face, we have made as much space as possible in our timetable for social contact.

We grieve to hear of the suffering and pain of many Friends around the world during the pandemic, including in your epistles and in the silent epistles of those who have been unable to meet. We send our love and sympathy and hold you all in the light.

We are being reminded of the things that matter, and there may be possibilities for spiritual 'deepening' arising from the challenges of the past two years whereby 'all the members of the spiritual body, the Church, might watch over and be helpful to each other in love'.

Australia Yearly Meeting

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Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Approved at Ninth Month 2020 Called Interim Meeting
Ninth Month 26, 2020

To Friends Everywhere,

Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) started our 349th year together as we gathered in Spirit electronically for annual sessions following the theme “Courage, Faith and Hope to Love Across our Differences.” In this virtual format, we found new ways to connect deeply with Friends who joined us from nearby towns and from thousands of miles away. Entering Meeting for Business in silence, with microphones muted, encouraged deep worship. Even as we grappled with technical challenges, we found Spirit in small groups for bible study, worship sharing, and play. We celebrated that Friends of Color created new daily gatherings during this annual session that included Friends from unprogrammed and programmed meetings within and outside Baltimore Yearly Meeting. Unstructured gatherings at lunchtime and at the rise of Meeting captured some of the serendipity of encountering Friends on campus. We delighted in the community found by our youngest Friends, but sorrowed that our high-school Friends were not able to join us. Our time together has re-immersed us in the richness of our BYM community and given us the strength to continue our quest to love across our differences.

Our opening retreat was a safe space to share our grief, pain, confusion, and hopes. We acknowledged we are living in a perilous time of five pandemics, causing dis-ease and death worldwide: Covid-19, racism and bigotry, police brutality and militarization, climate change, and extreme economic inequity. Margaret Benefiel described this as the liminal space of the in-between times: what was normal is gone and the new normal has not yet emerged. We hold her advice to us: that we stay grounded through daily personal spiritual practice; that the hard work of being in community is itself a spiritual practice; and that community is fundamental to discernment as we ask, “What is mine to do? What is ours to do?”

Together, we seek the courage to stand in this ambiguity, attempting to respond faithfully to the Light we have, listening and discerning, moving step by step. We have long opposed racial injustice in the wider society. Last year we declared that we aspire to be an anti-racist faith community. As we looked back over this first year, we reviewed our good faith efforts and acknowledged some recent failings. Friends shared experiences of deep wounding related to racial power dynamics among BYM Friends. White Friends are still becoming aware that they must face their own complicity with the powers and principalities of racism and white supremacy: not only the transgressions in our imperfect Quaker history, but also continuing transgressions in the present moment. A Friend of color expressed pain that while some White Friends acknowledge the difficult work before us, others are reluctant to talk; their hearts are not open. In this liminal time, Friends diverge widely in understanding our individual and corporate roles in the pain of racial injustice, yet we know that failing to act is still action nonetheless.

As we wrestled with this work, we acknowledged our strength and fragility and our need for both courage and faith. Our clerk ministered to us about our tendency to recoil from conflicts within our Yearly Meeting. He suggested that this grows out of our association of anger with violence. He named that we are in conflict over misunderstandings that occurred during the urgent financial crisis faced this year. He acknowledged pain, frustration and anger among BYM Friends and our staff. We heard in our opening plenary that the blessed community we yearn to create requires us to move past logic and rational thought and into contemplative awareness. We know that our faith is shown by our works. When we have the courage to abide in discord, we can break open our hearts, hear each other’s anger, and feel each other’s pain.

What is ours to do is grounded in our relationship with each other. Our work is not just making decisions, but the act of “being” a yearly meeting. Being in conflict in community takes on an aspect of holiness because we labor together, as if “together” is the only option. Community builds hope and, like courage, hope is contagious. Our hope that Baltimore Yearly Meeting will in time be a truly just religious community sustains us in this work. Many Friends have voiced a prophetic message that forgiveness and repentance requires us to change course. Our newly-formed Reparations Action Working Group has opened consideration of a Truth and Reconciliation process. We are sitting with the recognition that just as Zacchaeus’ first act upon repentance was to pay reparations, we may also be so led. We also aspire to be accessible to a wider community of Friends. As we work together to ensure the future of our yearly meeting, we hope that this year’s experiments with pay-as-led and with gathering online will prove viable so that we can welcome Friends from all income levels, locations, and digital access.

We closed our week together with the Carey lecture where Bridget Moix asked us, “What is Ending? What is Essential? What is Eternal?” As the old order ends, we stand in the Refiner’s Fire, experiencing the searing, searching Light as we seek Way forward.

Our history as a loving community is long and deep. We enter our 349th year together enriched and emboldened to love each other and all people across our differences. Our work is grounded in courage and sustained by faith. Our time together nurtures the hope that this love will yet lead us to the beloved community.

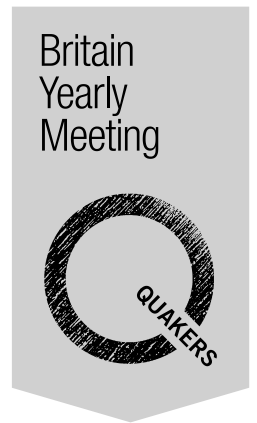
In the Light,

Friends of Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

At Yearly Meeting Gathering held online

19 July–8 August 2021



Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering, held online from 19 July to 8 August 2021.

We send loving greetings to Friends everywhere

We have no time but this present time

Friends in Britain have gathered online at this time of great upheaval, amid the pandemic, climate and environmental breakdown, and increasing social inequality and division. We are grateful for technology, and the hard work of Britain Yearly Meeting staff, Agenda and Arrangements Committees, the Woodbrooke team, and others in bringing us together.

At this Yearly Meeting Gathering Friends have considered the *theme* “*For our comfort and discomfort: living equality and truth in a time of crisis*”. We have been wrestling with what it will mean to be truly committed to anti-racism and faith-based action for climate justice. We have thought about how to better affirm gender diversity in our meetings. We have discovered the challenges of attempting to make statements as a unified ‘we’ in a way that acknowledges the different experiences among us.

We have greatly missed the opportunities of being together as an all-age community that we would have had in a face-to-face Gathering. We held a worship session during which the children and young people shared their exploration of community, climate, equality and truth. Junior Yearly Meeting asked how we could centre justice and equity in our anti-racism and climate justice work. Only when all are listened to equally, may all be treated equally.

As in the days of early Friends, we sense this is a time of prophecy and want to uphold the prophets in our midst and in the wider world. We must heed the Spirit’s call to urgent action. Prophets are visionaries, calling out those in power, and reconcilers stand in the middle of conflict: in this both run great risk.

A Friend of Colour spoke in ministry:

All I have ever wanted for the longest time is to feel equal,

and again, here in this room, I don’t.

I hear people talk all week about George Floyd but we are here now,

in the UK, in your meetings, feeling like outsiders every day.

This is not the experience I was promised.

Racism is systemic. To most white people – including white Quakers – it is largely invisible, like the air they breathe. As long as it stays unrecognised, systems and institutions that perpetuate white power are left unchallenged. Racism and oppression are often daily realities for those without the advantages conferred by white skin.

As a Yearly Meeting in session we have declared our commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist faith community.

Our theologians and historians are helping us to root our action in our faith, reminding us of the examples of Friends of the past who have listened to the voice of the Spirit and followed the inward Light. They challenge the complacency of some white Friends' perception of themselves as 'good' people.

We have heard trans and non-binary Friends and their loved ones talk about their gender journeys and of being in Quaker community. Acknowledging trans or non-binary identity can be compounded by unfamiliarity, ignorance and prejudice. Providing support can lead to greater self-acceptance, enabling Friends to flourish and contribute. Belonging is being accepted as one's true self. Who are we to resist what God has created and continues to create in all their glory?

As a Yearly Meeting in session we lovingly acknowledged and affirmed the trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming Friends in our communities.

It is ten years since Britain Yearly Meeting in session committed to becoming a low carbon, sustainable faith community. Friends across the world have long held a concern for us to live in right relationship with creation. We grieve for the planet we love – our home – but we have no time to despair. We must act with urgency and imagination – the consequences of inaction are upon us.

For those experiencing injustice, the need for transformation is urgent. We know those who have contributed least to climate and ecological breakdown are the most affected: the poor, the global majority, and vulnerable communities everywhere. We recognise and abhor the legion of violent, deadly impacts of economic and exploitative systems on both the people, other species and lifeforms, and the body of our Earth. The climate crisis is fuelled by a system based on growth, consumption and systemic inequalities. If life on earth is to survive we must push for a more democratic, compassionate and equitable world.

Britain Yearly Meeting has asked its central committees to emphasise the urgency of work on climate and ecological justice and to cooperate with others across the world in this task.

Our individual tasks are our Quaker spiritual discipline: loving our neighbour – on our street and across oceans; and caring, cherishing and protecting our natural world. Let's not be self-conscious about speaking of the Quaker faith that underpins our action.

Friends have talked about the need to let go of stories we tell ourselves about our shared near 400-year history and hold fast to the essence of the Quaker way. Is it time to look

afresh at systems, structures, processes and procedures – and possessions like meeting houses that might hold us back? We're already starting to address this by agreeing to change some committee responsibilities next year, and through our Simpler Meetings project.

Our Quaker forebears were wild about their faith. And they challenged the establishment. Suggesting that anyone could have a direct, unmediated relationship with the Divine, and that our relationship with God should not be confined to the steeple house, was revolutionary and upended the status quo. Is it time to rewild our Quakerism?

We will often get things wrong. But we have been comforted by the reminder that Jesus' disciples often did not understand, they argued with him about who he was and what he should do. When Jesus said, "Feed these five thousand", they said, "you must be joking?!" When it got to the really difficult stuff, they ran away.

Faithfulness is not about always getting it right, it is about committing ourselves to carefully seeing and listening. We need to walk together in the Light, so we can see what we are meant to do and find the strength to do it.

We have been heartened to hear through their epistles that other Yearly Meetings and faith bodies are grappling with the same issues. It is vital we work alongside and be led by Friends and others across the world. We do not have to do things on our own and have learned the value of sharing our skills, resources and insights with each other. We have enjoyed welcoming international and ecumenical visitors, exploring with them common areas of concern. One of the things we have gained through the pandemic is new ways to meet with one another, so that we are no longer limited by geography.

We can meet one another on kinder ground, in our personal relationships, meetings, wider communities, and on social media. We can help create listening spaces using our skills and resources. We can help create a climate where the pursuit of truth is not about becoming dug into our rigid positions.

We need to quietly listen, and tenderly explore difference, disagreement and areas of discomfort, and thereby avoid a false peace. A commitment to truth requires us to be open to new experiences with a readiness to learn, while weighing up what we hear and see through the light of our faith.

There is so much to do but we have been inspired by the prophetic voices we have heard throughout our Gathering. We have pledged ourselves to continue to be a 'gentle, angry' people who dare to live for truth and justice in such a time of crisis.

Our Salter Lecturer told us "I didn't choose politics, politics chose me". She asked us: *what work is choosing us at this time?*

Friends, we have no time but this present time. We should now do what love requires of us.

Signed in and on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting

Clare Scott Booth, Clerk

Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting held Online, 7 – 9 May 2021

*And truth flourishes as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns... for the seed Christ is over all (George Fox, 1663):
Discerning how we rebuild and grow with hope*

To Friends everywhere, greetings:

Dear friends, kjære venner, chers amis, liebe Freunde, lieve vrienden, queridos amigos, cari amici, kära vänner, kære venner, rakkaat ystävät, kallid sõbrad, drazí přátelé, dārgie draugi, dragi prijatelji, Kedves Barátaim, drodzy przyjaciele, a chairde, Salamaat Asdiqa.

One hundred and two Friends from all corners of Europe, the Middle East and further afield met together online from 7-9 May 2021 to share and worship together. We spent our time thinking more deeply about what the future holds for Friends in our Section. We welcomed Friends visiting from all other sections of FWCC as well as many speakers, who enriched our meeting with their valuable insight into Quaker work taking place within the Section and the role that EMES plays within it.

As Friends, we rely on each other to serve and further the work of our Society. Service connects us with each other and nurtures our spiritual growth. Many of our meetings have faced challenges in maintaining community in a pandemic, and we heard how EMES has helped isolated Friends to connect, creating space for Quakerism within a new and enthusiastic community. We wondered how to take advantage of this technology, without leaving behind those Friends who don't connect online. We struggled with the paradox of opportunities offered by online meetings while acknowledging the absence that remains when we hold our meetings online.

The pandemic has also created challenges for Quaker work that relies on holding space for private discussions, for example at QUNO and QCEA. It has strained the links between organisations working beyond the borders of Europe. The events of the past year have shown how such insights can offer important support for efforts to tackle the global climate & health crises we find ourselves in.

During our sessions, we were reminded of those specific experiences the Quaker community has long held as true and central to our service: experiences such as the need for a levelling of hierarchies, or the need for dialogue and building bridges. Woodbrooke showed us how they responded to a year of challenges and changed plans, by offering increased access to online courses and worship to Friends throughout Europe. Young Friends showed us a video of how they used jit.si technology to build and maintain community during lockdown, and we heard about international Quaker work linking climate policies with peace and human rights concerns.

The FWCC World Office shared their work addressing issues of sustainability, connectivity and diversity. The FWCC World Office and QUNO will attend the UN Climate talks taking place in Glasgow in 2021, liaising with others to put our faith into action. The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust described how they have responded to the powerful surge of calls for social justice in the course of 2020. They have

acknowledged past involvement in slavery and colonialism, opening a path to an apology and a commitment to action.

Speakers from Brummana and Ramallah reminded us that lilies do grow among the thorns of conflict. Brummana High School continues to live out Quaker values, touching the lives of its students and their families intellectually and spiritually, whilst holding space for community in the midst of the profound challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and Lebanon's political stalemate and economic collapse. Ramallah Friends Meeting told us how they are dealing with the combined pressures of dwindling attendance and the pandemic in the face of persistent conflict. They asked us to consider the relationship between charity which alleviates suffering, and social justice which addresses its causes. We were deeply moved by the plight of our friends in the Middle East and have discussed how we might best support them as we continue to hold them in the Light.

We have been challenged and encouraged to identify the seeds of hope and change and how we can nurture them and make changes in our own lives. We recognise the privileges that many of us have in Europe & endeavour to think & act as true fellow citizens taking a global view, sharing each other's burdens and not just protecting ourselves. We have been reminded of the powerful tradition of Friends to take radical action in advance of society around them. Letting their lives be examples at moments of transition in the world.

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised, is faithful. Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."
Hebrews 10, 23 & 24

In Friendship, i vennskap, i vänskap, i venskab, ystävydessä, bien amicalement, in Freundschaft, in Vriendschap, en amistad, in amicizia, v přátelství, u priateljstvu, draudzība, a barátságban, sōpruses, w przyjaźni, le cairdeas, fi alsadaqa.

Signed
Ethel Livermore
Clerk FWCC-EMES



Yearly Meeting of Quakers in France
October 2021, La Solitude, Bordeaux

Epistle

To Friends everywhere

French Quakers spent a joyful and inspirational week-end in the calm of the community of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux, at their spiritual centre 'La Solitude', set in beautiful parkland surrounded by a sea of vineyards. We took as our challenge 'How to advance our aims and beliefs in such a needy world'. This sea of vineyards reminded us that France is the third exporter of wine in the world, but also the third exported of arms. We have work to do.

The Meeting was in both English and French, organised with great joy and energy by the newest of the groups in France - 'Nouvelle Aquitaine'. This group found that the times of Covid, requiring all encounters to be online, had in fact brought their geographically scattered community much closer together.

We listened to the story of Sophie Sturge, an English Quaker at the end of the 19th century, who when she learnt of the suffering of impoverished families in Ireland went to found a network of cottage industries in basket weaving to bring them a new means of living. « May action follow hard on the heels of conviction » was her motto.

The majority of French Quakers are committed to various local actions and larger charity organisations, and we don't have many actions under a Quaker banner, but the sharing of concerns between us brings renewed strength to our individual actions. When we fully commit to a work providence works with us.

The Meeting was shared by Friends on Zoom, which also allowed us to listen to two fine examples of our values in action. Terry Waite, well known for his work for reconciliation and peace, is a member of the Anglican Church as well as a Quaker (a 'Quanglican' he says), and a sometime president of EMAUS UK. He led several difficult and dangerous negotiations over the years for the freedom of political hostages and shared his learning of the importance of respecting the other, in whatever situation, and the essential of listening to understand an opponent. Hearing his story of surviving five years of solitary imprisonment was most inspiring. A witness to the vital place of faith and peace within, which then cannot be swayed by ones outer emotions or circumstances.

The second speaker, Bruce Kent, a one-time Catholic priest also gave witness of faith in action. He is well known for his stance against nuclear armaments and his work with CND (the

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), although seldom supported by his church. His personal engagement springs from both his deep moral conviction as well as his optimism for humanity – echoing the opening sentences of the United Nation charter. When we admitted a feeling of impotence when demonstrating against the entrenched ‘powers that be’, he laughed and replied “Wake up! And study history!” All great changes have been the fruit of a few who will not give up, that is what drives transition.

In various workshops some of our members presented their individual activities. The climate crisis has been driven by human activity and its now our personal imperative to limit energy consumption, change our habits, and not be shy to talk about this to neighbours turning a blind eye. Other Friends are members of Amnesty International and encourage our letter writing in support of the persecuted, and to keep the abuse of power in the public eye. There was witness to running a commercial enterprise on ecologically responsible methods. On this day of the opening of COP 26 in Glasgow we joined with an initiative of several other churches in a prayer of love for the earth, and that there maybe a real engagement to the necessary changes in society from our political leaders.

The Epilogue on Saturday evening gave a deeper reply to our question ‘How should we act ?’. George Fox has said “Walk in the light and you will shine”. Thus if we rest anchored in the Light within, we will always know what to do next.



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Dear Friends,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:3).

Loving greetings from the FWCC World Office in London. We hold you in the Light and our prayers as you gather for your Yearly Meeting.

Last year in her greetings my predecessor Gretchen Castle pointed us to the apostle Paul's words: "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-9)"

Neither could the COVID 19 pandemic separate us from loving God, as demonstrated by our community's presence, service and the ways we love our neighbours.

Speaking to Quakers in Southern Africa recently, Friend Marie Odendaal spoke of 'three pandemics': not only coronavirus but also human violence and global heating. Yet even in this context our community generates hope. From the local level to the UN, Quakers are doing all we can to make this world more equal, more peaceful and more just.

If we didn't meet though, in our Local, Area and Yearly Meetings, our work for a better world would simply be that of informed individuals rather than carrying the hopes of a faithful world community. If we didn't build trusting friendships through Yearly Meetings, global gatherings and intervisitation over decades, we wouldn't have the strong relationships that enable us to do the kind of work we do.

On this theme, this coming 2 October will be World Quaker Day, a time to make an extra effort to connect with our global Quaker family. We're encouraging every meeting that wants to, to send or receive a visitor to another Quaker Meeting or Friends Church. There will be online and hybrid Quaker worship in every section of the Friends World Committee – Africa, the Americas, Asia West Pacific, and Europe-Middle East, open to all. If you would like to visit another Meeting in person we can help make introductions as well.

Do send us your epistle when it is ready, which we will share with others,, and please know that Friends around the world are holding you in the Light.

In peace and Friendship,

Tim Gee
General Secretary
Friends World Committee for Consultation
timothyg@fwcc.world

Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Germany and Austria Epistle

Bad Pyrmont, 16 Oct, 2021

"In the world you have tribulation ... (John 16:33)." Like a magnifying glass, the Corona pandemic has brought our uncertainties sharply into focus, while major concerns like injustice, global warming and the nuclear threat have been upstaged. We yearn for unity on our Quaker path with Friends worldwide, to whom we extend our warm greetings. Our 91st Yearly Meeting took place under hygiene guidelines we had repeatedly wrestled with in order to make it possible for everyone to participate. Indeed, around 100 of us took part, including a handful of delegates from other yearly meetings, some in the Pyrmont Quaker House (all tested), some alone or in groups in front of connected cameras and screens. We missed the physical presence of our children and youth groups, but they still had their own small programme. In addition, a large group of under 18-year olds had gathered in Benkendorf to share the days immediately preceding the annual meeting.

"Friends on the move – shaping a shared future!" was the motto of our gathering.

How can we make a difference as individuals and as a community in the face of all threats, how can we limit their influence, and how can we stand alongside those who are most affected? Many of us are grateful to be able to join local initiatives such as the vigils for nuclear disarmament in Büchel, or actions to protect livelihoods from strip mining in Lützerath. We want to overcome relationship issues and put aside our personal sensitivities and open ourselves trustingly to new forms of organisation aimed at increasing sharing and community.

Our inner attitude of awareness and respect with regard to all ways and forms of life can reach out to and inspire those around us. In the course of the Yearly Meeting we listened to many a personal witness from the lives of Friends. This enabled us to take heart and gain in confidence.

In this year's Richard Cary-Lecture „Genesis continues,“ Stefan Mann showed us through his own life experiences and drawing on political events, that our actions, even as individuals, may have an impact. By taking small steps, having the courage to contradict and to offer ones own ideas, all of us can contribute to a positive development. He argued that the abolition of factory farming in the 21st century may turn out to be equivalent to the abolition of slavery in the 19th century. While many issues remain unresolved, it is encouraging that "our quakerly values - from peace to equality - provide the right tools for us to stand up not just for small improvements, but also for major change" (Stefan Mann). Speaking out of the silence after the lecture, we understood that we are in the process of an empathetic conversation with each other regarding our dealings with co-creatures. In spite of a sense of our own imperfections, we may nevertheless sow the first seeds, some of which may germinate only later and - combined with the efforts of others - allow us to see the broader picture.

Based on an initiative within the Protestant Church of Baden, Ralf Becker presented us with a scenario for a purely civil German security policy. The proposal includes a design for fair external economic relations, civil peace building to replace military interventions, and strengthening democratic values. The insight that violence always breeds further violence, is now even shared by former proponents of military operations. Co-operation and peace can only have lasting success if we „lay down our arms,“ and are willing to trust others with our

vulnerabilities. The German Yearly Meeting will join the support group of the "[Sicherheit neu Denken](#)" (Re-thinking Security) initiative. We intend to offer an active and critical support of this initiative.

We had asked a coordinating group of Friends to establish a participatory concept to protect our children and youth in Quaker events from sexualised violence. The process of developing the protective guidelines is in itself part of the prevention: we want to hold the unspeakable in the Light and take joint responsibility for our social interactions, free from abuse of power and from violence. In the coming year, the concept will be presented and reviewed in our regional meetings.

We continue to engage with the future of our Quaker House, with regard to which we had clarified some different possibilities for its maintenance and use. Following last year's decision to preserve this historical building with its literally "moving" history, the Committee of Clerks and the working group „Quaker House Future" presented concepts corresponding to the different possibilities. We will now commission a preliminary plan, with a view to redesigning the building to be used more flexibly, while staying within our means.

After one of our meetings for worship, a Friend shared an experience she had had in the early hours of that day: she was heading towards the Quaker House, which is on a slope. Downhill she saw fog and a gloomy atmosphere, uphill warming sun rays and clarity. She compared this situation with our spiritual lives as Friends: we see the dark and gloomy, yet we turn toward the Light and let it guide us.

Anne Pommier

German Yearly Meeting, Clerks

Jochen Dudeck

Epistle from the Heads of Quaker Agencies meeting held in London, 6–8 December 2021

Eleven of us from seven international Quaker organisations have come together at Friends House London and online for a three-day gathering. We meet at a time of transition. The Covid pandemic has changed our lives and the societies we live in amplifying the inequalities which were already present. The work of our family of Quaker organisations is also developing and evolving, responding to these changes and to the new leadings we are given to follow. And it is a time of transition in the leadership of many of our organisations – five of the seven will have new leadership from 2022.

We gather because our work is connected. As Quaker service agencies we stand together in our witness to the world. We know that a just and peaceful world is possible, and that by working alongside one another we bring it closer than if we work alone. We seek relationships of trust and collaboration between Quaker organisations, bringing the strengths of each to the work we are all called to. Our legitimacy to speak and act on behalf of Quakers stems from a process of discernment, discovering as best we can God's will in the matters before us. Anyone can be part of this discernment, Quaker or not, and we all benefit when diverse participants are involved. Others can see things and bring insights we do not; we understand the importance of taking a lead from those most impacted by oppression.

In reflecting back on our work together we value the opportunity our Heads of Agencies group allows us to share experiences, providing a source of support and spiritual grounding. Our connection provides the space for us to think about how we connect with Quaker voices around the world. One of our organisations can often offer deep expertise or subject knowledge on behalf of all of us. At times we are challenged by issues of scale as it can be difficult for our smaller organisations to maintain many relationships. Tensions that arise could be resolved if we go one level deeper, name what we're trying to achieve, and share each other's theories of change.

Together we have celebrated the steadfast and faithful service of Diane Randall, Andrew Tomlinson and Jonathan Woolley, each of them leaving after more than ten years in post. We have learned much from their experience, their generosity with their gifts and their friendship, and are full of gratitude for their public ministry as well as their relationships with each of us as inspiring colleagues. They leave with our thanks, and our love.

We have welcomed too those taking up positions of leadership in our organisations, and those who are looking after organisations during times of transition. Our meeting has been much enriched by the opportunity to bring together in one place the insights and experience of those laying down their service with the energy and

openness of those taking on new responsibilities. We wish Sarah Clarke, Tim Gee, Bridget Moix and Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge well as they take up this work.

We have explored the difference between climate justice and sustainability. We recognise the need to look at the climate crisis holistically, as a social, political, ethical and spiritual issue, beyond a focus exclusively on emissions targets and personal lifestyle change. We see that those who are most affected are the least responsible, and that their voices are often silenced. We place the need for justice at the heart of our response, advocating solutions that redistribute power away from dominant states and commercial interests, and centre the most affected. We shared examples of taking a justice-based approach to climate action in our work and reflected on the positive impact of a strong Quaker voice at COP26 in November 2021.

We have been led to explore how we are called to engage in ‘peacebuilding at home’, what that may entail in our different contexts, and how it relates to closing space for civil society and dismantling systems of oppression. We recognise a need to confront the violence that exists in global North countries and to work to address the root causes of violence and injustice wherever we engage in peacebuilding efforts. We see advancing justice as fundamental to peacebuilding and the need to listen and learn more from those most affected by violence and injustice.

We reaffirm our commitment to dismantle and prevent the presence of institutional oppression within the lives of our organisations. Walking alongside one another, we commit to doing better in creating welcoming, affirming and supporting work environments for staff and volunteers, both in policies and practice. We have explored what it means to be an anti-racist and anti-oppression organisation and recognise that more work is essential to build our shared understanding. We emphasise the need for staff initiatives to go hand-in-hand with intentional and accountable governance efforts; while encouraging and allowing space for discomfort and difficult conversations. While centring the leadings of those most adversely impacted by oppression, we acknowledge that we should not overburden them with the work that needs to be shouldered by those holding power.

We have considered the future of multilateralism, where countries can work together for the common good, beyond their self-interest. QUNO is part of this, helping build understanding, using human connections alongside technical knowledge, finding opportunities for cooperation not conflict. We recognise threats to the legitimacy of the multilateral system whether by disruptive state actors or the experience of those in situations of conflict that the UN is just a ‘guest walking by’. In seeking a vision of how we could help improve international relations at the UN and reform the ways its institutions work, we are reminded of its powerful original vision to “save future generations from the scourge of war” and of justice as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As we reach the end of our time together we call on Friends to be humble and to be bold, to be faithful and determined, to work inwardly and outwardly, within our Quaker communities and outside them, to build the just and peaceful world God tells us can be ours.

In peace and with love,

- Joyce Ajlouny, General Secretary, American Friends Service Committee
- Atiaf Alwazir, Head of Peace Programme, Quaker Council for European Affairs
- Sarah Clarke, incoming Director, Quaker United Nations Office New York
- Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, incoming Director, Quaker United Nations Office Geneva
- Susanna Mattingly, acting General Secretary, Friends World Committee for Consultation
- Bridget Moix, incoming General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation
- Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, Britain Yearly Meeting
- Diane Randall, outgoing General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation
- Oliver Robertson, General Secretary, Quaker Peace & Social Witness
- Andrew Tomlinson, outgoing Director, Quaker United Nations Office New York
- Jonathan Woolley, outgoing Director, Quaker United Nations Office Geneva

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Hong Kong Monthly Meeting

State of the Meeting Report 2021

Hong Kong Monthly Meeting (HKMM) held a threshing session on 3 April 2021, with nine Friends in attendance. We considered two queries: *What changes did HKMM experience during the past year and how effectively did we respond to them?* and *How do we hope to see HKMM developing in the coming year?* Our State of the Meeting Report for 2020, which includes a summary of HKMM's history, had been circulated in advance.

One of the most significant changes over the past year has been to our membership. Two adults (our co-assistant clerk, Greg, and our librarian, Brian) and four children applied to become, and were accepted as, new Members of HKMM. At the request of the four children, we had a joyous welcome party on 21 June 2020. One of our core families—Coryn (our former Assistant Clerk), Wes (one of our two elders), and their daughter Maya—moved back to the USA later that week. Several other attenders have also either left Hong Kong or have been attending infrequently for other reasons. However, we welcomed various visitors throughout the year, and several have become attenders.

Like the rest of the world, the pandemic presented one of our greatest challenges throughout the past year. Due to changing government restrictions on gatherings, we experienced three periods, covering a total of 30 weeks (29 March through 3 May, 5 July through 20 September, and 29 November through 14 February), when face-to-face meetings were not feasible. During most of those weeks, we held Meeting for Worship online, via Zoom. Attendance at the Zoom-only Meetings was often lower than for in-person Meetings: usually fewer than five and often only one or two. However, near the end of the first period of Zoom-only Meetings for Worship, an inquirer joined from Shanghai. When we were able to resume our face-to-face Meetings for Worship, we continued broadcasting them via Zoom as well, so that Isaac, as well as any locals who preferred not to attend the in-person Meeting during the pandemic, could still join us. As a result of adopting this hybrid approach throughout the year, we had several visitors join us on Zoom without being present in Hong Kong.

Due to the pandemic, the plans announced in last year's Report, to hold regular activities to supplement our Sunday Meeting for Worship, were largely set aside. We did enjoy a well-attended walk in March 2020 and have had several gatherings for meals. But the government restrictions on public gatherings put a damper on our plans to begin service-oriented activities such as beach clean-ups or assisting in the work of other local charities. Friends agreed that we should move forward with those earlier plans as soon as the pandemic allows.

A major change occurred on 11 October 2020, when we began meeting at The Hive in Sheung Wan on Sundays. At first this was on a three-month, trial basis, as our monthly donations at the time were not sufficient to cover the monthly rental fee. However, The Hive has reduced the fee slightly and donations have increased. So in February 2021 Meeting agreed to regard The Hive as our permanent venue for the foreseeable future. It is more centrally located, more attractive, and much easier to enter and leave than was our previous venue at Hong Kong Baptist University. Meeting for Worship takes place in a conference room with eight chairs and sufficient space for several extra chairs to be brought in, as needed. The children meet in a carpeted area at the opposite corner on the same floor. When Friends wish to stay for Afterthoughts or for a Meeting for Business, we move to a set of comfortable sofas located on the third floor.

Friends expressed the hope that we as a Meeting can be more welcoming to newcomers in the coming year. As many Quaker Meetings do not have an Afterthoughts time following Meeting for Worship, some Friends expressed the concern that, if we move too seamlessly from the silence to a time of open sharing, then some who attend might feel awkward if they prefer to leave shortly after the silence. Also, some might decide not to share a Voice Ministry during the silence, knowing they can wait until the Afterthoughts. Friends agreed that we should henceforth treat the conversation time less formally: shortly after the children join us near the end of the silence, we will allow time to share concerns, with a view toward holding each other in the Light more effectively throughout the week; we will continue to allow time for brief announcements before we break for refreshments. Those who wish to continue in friendly group conversation will gradually move upstairs. Friends noted that the topics of our conversations during the Afterthoughts have been more wide-ranging in recent months and encouraged everyone to keep in mind that the conversation is not restricted to any one type of topic.

Since late August, we have had a rota for sharing a brief reading or other spiritual reflection during Meeting for Worship; although we remain an unprogrammed Meeting, Friends agreed that this minimal bit of structure is appropriate and has been helpful in various ways. At our February 2021 Meeting for Business, Friends agreed to set up a rota for bringing light refreshments to share at rise of Meeting. The more we can share in fulfilling such tasks, the stronger HKMM will be moving forward.

Friends expressed continued concern over HKMM's gender imbalance. Since this was raised during last year's threshing session, no women have been attending regularly. Friends expressed the hope that scheduling different types of activities to supplement the Meeting for Worship will address this concern. Activities that are likely to interest locals and/or families would be preferable. Walks, casual meals, midweek study groups, and talks given (perhaps once per quarter) on Sundays following Rise of Meeting were all suggested as possible activities that could help in this regard. Friends are welcomed to suggest any such activities when they see fit; for one-off events, prior approval at a Meeting for Business is not needed.

Since we began holding face-to-face meetings at The Hive, Greg has been organizing children's lessons and other activities almost singlehandedly. Recently the children have been learning about Jesus' parables. Through June 2020 three Friends took turns organizing a First Day School for the children. Friends expressed the hope that we can return to an arrangement where these duties are shared by several people in turn, so that no one person has to miss significant portions of the Meeting for Worship each week.

HKMM's financial situation is now stronger than this time last year. Motivated mainly by a desire to be able to afford a more suitable meeting venue, a number of Friends have been donating regularly throughout the past year and plan to continue doing so. We recently opened a new bank account that has no monthly fee, and this allowed us to close the old account, which was incurring a hefty monthly fee. With our monthly donations now greater than our expenditures, and an ample amount saved for more difficult times, Friends agreed that we should be starting to consider how best to employ our remaining finances for charitable purposes other than sponsoring Meeting for Worship every Sunday.

Epistle to all Friends
From Intermountain Yearly Meeting
June 16-20, 2021

To Friends Everywhere:

As we gathered virtually again this year, we began by considering some of the core beliefs we share as Friends. We may be socially distanced, but we are still in relationship with one another and with the Holy Presence that inhabits all people. We missed the company of younger Friends and look forward to being with them next year. We lament the passing of so many Friends and neighbors over the last year, which makes the opportunity to be here together, despite the limitations, all the more precious. We commit ourselves to humble self-reflection, as individuals and as a community of faith, so that we might align our actions to honor the lives of all people, regardless of heritage or background. We gather to listen for guidance, inwardly and from one another, so that we might better live out of our testimonies in the service of the Spirit and justice for all.

The theme for this year's gathering was *Race and Faith*. We were reminded that those who are marginalized in our culture have much to teach us about the world we live in. We want to listen for these voices, learn from them, and join them in pursuing justice. We can begin by acknowledging the people who have inhabited these lands long before they were designated as the states in which we now live. Indigenous people have hunted, farmed, traded, fought, lived, loved, and prayed on these ancestral lands for thousands of years. They have resisted attempts to eliminate their languages, cultures, and ceremonies. We lament this history. We also acknowledge Indigenous peoples' presence as sovereign nations, their enduring love for the land, and the valuable contributions they make in our communities today.

We are mindful that such acknowledgements are only a beginning, but as members of Fort Collins and Boulder Monthly meetings have demonstrated, the process of consulting with our Indigenous neighbors and drafting statements honoring their communities and heritage can initiate ongoing relationships. Members of Boulder Monthly Meeting, for example, have helped initiate Indigenous People's Day celebrations with the Arapaho (who view the Boulder area as their home), advocated for the return of native lands, supported the renaming of public sites, and developed educational programs about Indigenous history and cultures for area schools and the general public.

As we plan for our 2022 gathering at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, we are encouraged to deepen relationships with our Indigenous neighbors. This year, Intermountain Yearly Meeting (IMYM) passed a minute supporting the establishment of a Truth and Healing Commission to address the historical trauma experienced by Native American and Alaska Native children who were forcibly removed from their homes between 1869 and the 1960's and placed in Indian boarding schools. Quakers collaborated with the federal government in operating Indian boarding schools where children were taught to reject their languages, cultures, and spiritual practices in order to "assimilate." This minute urges Friends to learn the history of these Quaker Indian schools and to consider ways of supporting Native-managed healing initiatives.

Intermountain Yearly Meeting also approved a minute supporting the American Friends Service Committee's *No Way to Treat a Child* campaign "which seeks to challenge and end Israel's prolonged military occupation of Palestinians by exposing widespread and systematic ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system." We ask Friends and their Meetings to educate themselves and their communities on these violations of international law, and to call on their elected officials to support legislation that protects Palestinian children and eliminates funding that may be used to oppress and violate human rights, especially children's rights.

Our plenary speaker this year was José Santos Woss, the Director for Justice Reform at the Friends Committee on National Legislation, who shared some of his encounters with racism and invited us to consider our own experiences. In small breakout groups, we were tendered as we did so. We continued, in worship sharing sessions, to consider the ways that our faith might inform our understanding of privilege and racism.

As a Black Latino Quaker, José Santos Woss recalled being deeply moved by candid conversations about race he had witnessed among Friends. After many years of seeking community, it was his experience of Quaker faith in action, working with both the American Friends Service Community and Friends Committee on National Legislation, that led him to his spiritual home. If we want our meetings to be more diverse, he suggested that we live out of our faith and work for justice in our immediate communities so that others will find out who we are, what we hold to be true, and how we put that into practice.

Following our faith into action will present many challenges. If, as our faith tells us, there is that of God in everyone, how will we challenge racism in our midst? How will we do so as "a motion of love"? We are grateful for these and other queries inspired by this year's speaker, which we will carry into the hard work of racial conciliation that lies ahead of us.

This kind of work can only be sustained if our faith and our meetings are strong. To that end, time spent at our yearly gathering offers opportunities for nurturing one another and building community. This year, one of the ways we did that was "walking in the light." Each day, some Friends temporarily left their computer screens for a "pilgrimage in place," which involved walking in prayer or engaging in other grounding and centering activities. Though separated physically, Friends carried an awareness of one another in the Spirit and found connection and community later in the day, sharing, as pilgrims in the Light, their insights and reflections.

We are all pilgrims in the Light and we continue to reflect on the kind of mutual care required to support one another on the journey. Different ways of understanding the Divine are present in Intermountain Yearly Meeting. It is important that these differences not be ignored for the sake of superficial agreement. When they are recognized and understood, we can broaden our awareness of the spirit flowing through and among us. Our community is maintained through faith and fellowship with each other as we wait in the Light for the unity that draws us together.

In Friendship,
Gale Toko-Ross and Valerie Ireland, co-Clerks
Intermountain Yearly Meeting



Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative)

7/25/2021

To Friends Everywhere,

Our theme for this Yearly Session was “Tapestry of Transformation: Sharing our Light.” In the evening plenary session we were invited to share our encounters with poverty and injustice and then reflect on whether this current world order is under God’s plan. Our Bible study continued this theme of right relationship focusing on how deep knowledge and reverent attention to the natural world sustains us and is necessary to our survival. God invites us to love all our neighbors. As we reflected on how we might more rightly share the world’s resources, address systemic violence including racism, and repair our relationships with the natural world, we were reminded that we do not need to be afraid. We do not walk alone. May we learn to trust in God’s love and the leadings of the Spirit as we discern our individual and collective responses to these issues.

Our beloved Scattergood School and farm continue to be a central part of sharing our Light in the world. We feel awed and blessed by the ministry of the school, the care and dedication of its staff, the loving care of the farm and the many committees which support its work. Classes for middle and high school continued both in person and remotely while keeping staff and students safe during this year of the pandemic. In a major decision, the Yearly Meeting agreed to add air conditioning to both the dormitories in addition to its continuing financial support.

The State of Meeting reports from our 13 constituent meetings testify to our efforts to safely continue worship and remain spiritually connected during the Covid pandemic this past year. While some Friends have not felt clear to join worship on Zoom, it has allowed others living at a distance to participate more frequently. Opportunities for participation in midweek worship, Experiment with Light Groups, Bible study groups, the Yearly Meeting Spiritual Sharing groups, worship with other meetings including Pendle Hill and collaboration on the work of racial, social and climate justice have all contributed to our spiritual growth and connection. There is a sense that we have remained connected to the three legged stool of the Divine, our blessed community and our work in the world. We have missed the participation of our children and youth at our annual session this year. The pandemic has made it especially hard for these young Friends to remain connected. We look forward to the day when all meetings feel safe to resume worship in our

meetinghouses, but feel blessed by the many ways we have maintained our life together in the Spirit of Love.

We enjoyed an evening of song and conversation with John McCutcheon. As we bring our annual session to an end, we invite all Friends everywhere to unite with the words of George Fox: "Sing and rejoice ye children of the day and the Light, for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt; and the Truth doth flourish as the rose, and lilies do grow among the thorns and the plants atop the hills, and upon them the lambs doth skip and play."

In love,

Carol Gilbert, Clerk

On behalf of Iowa Yearly Meeting Conservative

7834 Jackson Street

Omaha, Nebraska, 68114-5316

11th April 2021

To Friends Everywhere,

We send warm greetings from Ireland Yearly Meeting, held online from 8 – 11 April 2021. Only a short time ago how strange such an arrangement might have seemed. Friends sitting in little (equally- sized!) boxes in a virtual space using buttons to ‘unmute’ and ‘chat’, with their ‘padlet’ of documents to hand! Clerks seeing who wishes to speak and instantly sharing documents on screen with everyone!

Our gathering is testament to the way we have adapted to changed circumstances since the cancellation of 2020 IYM last April and demonstrates the many positives we have been able to draw from adversity. While we agree that online meeting cannot replace the fellowship of meeting in person, it has allowed many more to join us at Yearly Meeting and has saved many hundreds of carbon miles of travel!

The IYM theme, A Time to Act Together in Faith and Hope, speaks to that enduring spirit of resourcefulness. Those reporting on the two pilgrimages Irish Friends made to 1652 country in 2019 told of the debt of gratitude we owe our founding fathers and of the sense of community and continuity found in worshipping together in Swarthmoor Hall. We learned too of the visits Stephen Grellet and Elizabeth Fry made to Ireland in the early 19th century and the legacy to this day of their pioneering work for social justice.

We were reminded that the connection between faith and action has been a constant feature of Quaker witness and challenged as to how we take forward our Testimonies of peace, equality and simplicity in our own Meetings. In considering what is distinctive about the contribution Quakers make to social action, we reflected not on what Quakers do, but how and why – the spiritual imperative of hearing and healing the world’s wounds that is part of being close to God.

We have heard how fresh energy has been injected into our well-established vehicles for social action and charitable outreach. Quaker Service has appointed a new Chief Executive who outlined how the charity has adapted successfully to the provision of services to vulnerable families, children and prisoners in Northern Ireland during the pandemic. Irish Quaker Faith in Action has set up a website with a facility to receive online donations which has given a new impetus to their ability to support Quaker work at home and abroad.

We have been encouraged to support campaigns that reflect our Peace Testimony – ‘Stop Fuelling War’ and ‘Campaign to Stop Killer Robots’ – and we agreed to sign an interfaith statement that urges UN member states and all people of goodwill to commit to preserving meaningful human control over the use of force, and to enact a pre-emptive ban on fully autonomous weapons.

The enormity of the issues we have to confront may seem overwhelming. However, in our discussion on sustainability, we were reminded that hope is the decision not to give up. We were encouraged by the experience a young Friend shared of her work for climate justice: focus on the solution; approach with a sense of community; bring love into the equation and hope flourishes.

As we explored how we act together in faith and hope, we were reminded of the importance of our relationships. How do we nurture relationships within our own Meetings to take our testimonies forward, to build community and to create opportunity for all to become involved? What are we doing to confront the difficult issue of the lack of diversity within our worshipping communities? Do we do enough to make links with other organisations and to speak out about our concerns? How do we connect with each other and with the natural world?

These are all challenging questions, but our experience of meeting via Zoom has taught us that we have been able to develop and build our relationships even in an online space. Indeed, Young Friends have shown us how to enjoy a 'virtual hug'!

Our individual and personal relationship with Christ was at the heart of the Public Lecture, 'Resurrection and Personality', delivered by our Friend Eoin Stephenson from Limerick Meeting. We were reminded that the resurrection is core to our faith, and that Jesus of Nazareth is experienced as a friend in ordinary life, by us as ordinary people, each with our different personalities. In this relationship, in this encounter with a living presence, it is possible to grow as open personalities, balancing our positive and dark aspects and addressing the challenge of fear. And it is this quiet presence that we hope is with us in death, experienced as if we are coming into a new life.

We hope to meet next year in person, taking with us the positive lessons we have learned from the unique experience of this online Yearly Meeting.

Signed on behalf of Ireland Yearly Meeting,

Denise C. Gabuzda, Clerk, Ireland Yearly Meeting
Elizabeth Dickson
William D. A. Haire and Philip McDonagh, Assistant Clerks, Ireland Yearly Meeting

Dear Friends Worldwide,

The annual gathering of Japan Yearly Meeting, hosted by Tokyo Monthly Meeting, was held from November 20 to 21, 2021. Blessed by a clear blue autumn sky, we took as our theme Ephesians 5:16-17: “Redeem the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” While the COVID-19 infection rate is lower, caution is yet necessary. Still, thanks to Divine Providence, 58 of our 87 members were able to participate: 19 gathering in person, 17 by Zoom, and 22 deferring to the sense of the meeting. We were glad to see the faces of many who are unable to join in person due to distance, and hear their voices.

Official business focused on approving the activity report and financial report for 2020, and the activity plan and budget for 2021. We also approved the new slate of officers and committee members who are now poised to make a fresh start.

In our first panel discussion, representatives of each monthly meeting shared their experiences with outreach in an era of declining membership. Osaka Monthly Meeting has been responding to requests from attenders for activities such as a study group reading George Fox’s Journal, and long-time members familiar with the work have been stimulated by refreshing new perspectives. Tsuchiura Monthly Meeting endeavors to make their meetinghouse a welcoming space for all who enter, treating each individual with care. In Tokyo, hosting of annual Young Friends activities has been curtailed due to the pandemic, but young adult members have arranged online gatherings on their own initiative. Mito Monthly Meeting has adapted to the given situation by renewing their sense of being chosen by Jesus and renewing their awareness of the value of getting along with mutual respect. We were cautioned not to be overly concerned with numbers but rather to trust that we all have our own direct connection with God, and to look forward in hope, with gratitude for the blessings we are given.

After sweet fellowship at mealtime, we proceeded to discuss the current condition and future of Friends Center and Tokyo Meetinghouse. We confirmed the importance of viewing the future of these two properties in commonality, and will continue to explore responsible plans.

The gathering was followed by a period of open conversation, paying special attention to the voices of young members and attenders.

Conscious of our connection with Friends around the world, we were careful to turn our thoughts beyond local concerns to the troubles and trials of Friends in neighboring countries, and to ponder what is ours to do from where we are. We pray that we may devote our time effectively to doing God’s will, “being not unwise.”

Machiko Takeda, Clerk
Japan Yearly Meeting
November 21, 2021



To Friends Everywhere:

We greet you from our homes in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan where we have gathered virtually for a second year. We are palpably aware of the skills, time and love of Friends with gifts in web-based organization and facilitation who make this kind of gathering possible, as well as the foibles of individual internet connections and interfaces.

Our theme this year, "Healing through Truth," was woven throughout our program. Our Bible study leader opened up texts of terror, shame and oppression that moved us to consider the wrongs of our current societal environment and reminded us that seeking alignment with Truth is both healing and transformative. Afternoon workshops encouraged us to seek truth and healing as individuals and as a corporate body. We considered the disruption our lives might encounter when we ask Spirit to guide us and lifted up the healing available when we take action in the world.

We have been grateful to start and finish our days with worship. Worship sharing times have been rich, deep, and revealing of the complexity and uniqueness of each Friend. The sense of connection, of profound engagement in the themes of healing and truth telling, both individually and communally, was evident throughout. We discerned together how the tender input from others helps us tell the truth and moves us toward healing.

While we met virtually, we recognize that we live and worship on lands that were taken from native people including the Potawatomi, Seneca, Cayuga, Shawnee, Odawa, Ojibwe, Delaware, Chippewa, Ottawa, and many others. Some of the stories of colonization, Christianization, and genocide of native peoples were brought to life by our plenary speaker, Paula Palmer, who led us in a profound and interactive session titled "From Truth to Healing with Native Peoples". She drew attention to our particular, local history of land acquisition for farming and Quaker management of three of the many Indian boarding schools in our region. Paula promised healing for the colonizers as well as the colonized if we engage in the work before us, and offered a powerful path to health that she received

from Indigenous leaders - speak truth, acknowledge the harms done, apologize, forgive, atone and repair. She encouraged Friends as individuals and collectively in our meetings to experience the fruits that come from actively engaging with this traumatizing aspect of our past; a release of guilt, new relationships, and joy-filled alignment with Spirit.

LEYM registrant data holds up a mirror to racial, gender, ethnic, and age imbalances that naturally influence our culture. We recognize our lack of diversity and seek to wrestle with our racism and other oppressive habits, traditions, and practices that separate us from those who seem different. How can we continually interrogate our norms, leaving room for and supporting new experiments and openings? We are encouraged to deepen our friendships across monthly meetings, share our ideas, experiences, longings and stories. We are inspired by the possibility of transformation through our encounter of Truth as we hold ourselves accountable to stay open to continuing revelation.

While web conferencing continues to provide desirable accessibility to many and reduced carbon impacts from travel, we notice and grieve the erosion of personal connection across our community that arises from enforced physical distance. It's hard to be present in our life together when duties at home are calling us to walk the dog, go to the grocery store, or even attend to work email. Breakout groups offer a welcomed space for deeper sharing, but there are not the impromptu chances to catch up with Friends when we meet in person, share meals, and immerse ourselves in community. We had no children's program this year as our young Friends are not interested in web-based interaction. We feel a huge loss of the vitality and perspective of children and young families. We also notice reduced collective energy of Spirit in our business sessions, partly evidenced by much lower participation. On screen it is harder to know when we are in unity.

Like other yearly meetings, we are a unique set of people with unique gifts to leverage towards the world's healing. We recognize that some of us are impatient for change while others of us need time to process information and experiences, especially the difficult issues of white colonialists genocide of indigenous peoples, our own racism, and the on-going genocide of the people of Palestine. We encourage Friends to start from the premise that we are all children of God. From there we seek a personal relationship with Truth where we can align our beliefs with our actions. We leave our LEYM gathering, virtual though it was, a bit more refreshed, steeped in the joy of seeing familiar faces on screen, and with new information and new and renewed leadings of the Spirit.

Jo Posti, Presiding Clerk

Carolyn Lejuste, Susan Loucks, Susan Towner-Larsen, epistle committee

Epístola

“Esperanza a pesar de todo”

(English version below)

A los Amigos y Amigas en todo el mundo,

Bajo este lema, la XLIV RGAM fue albergada por la Junta Mensual de la Ciudad de México. Debido a la pandemia, se realizó por primera vez en su historia a través de Zoom. Esta tecnología aproximó a personas de múltiples países de América en una celebración del compañerismo, en un ambiente de amistad y respeto, entre cuáqueros silentes y pastorales ampliando los campos de experiencia espiritual de unos y otros.

Durante los tres días de actividades, más de cincuenta personas pasaron por las salas de reunión y convivencia. En este tiempo fuimos llamados a estrechar lazos, vivir en paz y a encontrar en el silencio una oportunidad para asumir el desafío de la transformación personal, con un gran énfasis en el amor. Se nos trajo a la memoria la celebración de Pentecostés, tiempo en que los Apóstoles recibieron el bautismo del Espíritu Santo. Se nos invitó a seguir la guía de la Luz interior, a mantenernos en comunidad, con virtud y en verdad.

Fuimos bendecidos por representantes de organizaciones cuáqueras como la Junta Anual del Pacífico y el Comité Mundial de Consulta de los Amigos. Raúl Pérez de El Salvador, por parte del Comité de Amigos Latinoamericanos, nos compartió la energía de los Amigos Evangélicos en Centroamérica y Sudamérica invitándonos a cruzar los caminos comunes a unos de otros.

Nos sentimos profundamente conmovidos con el poderoso mensaje de Karla Jay Moran, de la Junta Unida de los Amigos sobre la esperanza, que nos recuerda “que no habrá oscuridad por siempre”. Hemos vivido quebranto, pero también tiempos de generosidad, creatividad, ayuda, cuestionamiento del consumismo y cuidado del mundo. Por su parte, Francisco Burgos, de *Pendle Hill*, un centro de estudios cuáqueros en Pennsylvania, EUA, nos llevó a explorar algunos sentidos de la revelación como una voz o llamado que podemos reconocer. En ese proceso, el corazón nos ayuda a estar listos para “ver cómo se cae todo aquello que nos cubre”, al tiempo que la verdad nos es revelada. Esto sugiere el cambio progresivo del individuo debido a la acción del Espíritu, que se manifiesta en nuestro día a día.

Nuestras niñas y jóvenes reflexionaron sobre los documentos personales como fuentes de nuestras jornadas espirituales recibiendo el aliento para escribir sobre sus experiencias espirituales tomando como tema central el viaje. Recordamos que los diarios, autobiografías, cartas, actualizaciones de estados en Facebook y blogs potencian el autoconocimiento, preservan con más nitidez la memoria individual y ensanchan la memoria colectiva de la Sociedad Religiosa de los Amigos. Reconocimos cómo el Espíritu se nos muestra en la compasión, la comunión, la fraternidad y la solidaridad y que al ser tocados nos sentimos motivados para la acción.

Recordamos con profunda tristeza las pérdidas sufridas durante este difícil año y compartimos nuestra fe en la conciliación en Casa de los Amigos, siempre con la mirada puesta en un futuro, en el que la Luz nos siga guiando e iluminando.

Comité de Epístola de la 44 RGAM
Mayo 2021

XLIV General Meeting of Friends in Mexico (RGAM) – May 21-23, 2021

Epistle

“Hope in spite of everything”

To Friends in all the world,

With this theme, the 44th session of the General Meeting of Friends in Mexico was hosted by the Mexico City Friends Meeting. Because of the pandemic, the meeting was held virtually, on Zoom, for the first time. This technology brought together people from several countries in America in a celebration of fellowship. Silent and pastoral Friends enjoyed an atmosphere of friendship and respect, broadening the spiritual experience of all.

During three days of activities, over fifty people came through the meeting and conversation rooms. We were called to form bonds, enjoy our time together and, in the silence, find an opportunity to take on the challenge of personal transformation based in love. The Pentecostal celebration was brought to our memory, a time in which the Apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We were invited to follow the leading of the Inner Light, and to stay in community together, in the truth.

We were blessed by the presence of representatives of Quaker organizations such as Pacific Yearly Meeting and the Friends World Committee for Consultation. Raúl Pérez of El Salvador, on behalf of the Committee for Friends in Latin America, shared with us the energy of Evangelical Friends in Central and South America, and invited us to more frequently cross the borders that separate us.

We were profoundly moved by the powerful message of hope of Karla Jay Moran, from Friends United Meeting. She reminded us that “the darkness will not last forever.” We have lived through sorrow, but also through times of generosity, creativity, mutual aid, earthcare, and the questioning of materialism. Francisco Burgos, of Pendle Hill, led us to explore various meanings of revelation, as being similar to a voice or a call that we can recognize. It is helpful, for this purpose, to stay oriented in our hearts, and to be ready to “watch as what covers our vision falls away” as truth is being revealed to us. This suggests a progressive change in us as individuals, owing to the action of the Spirit as shown to us in our day-to-day lives.

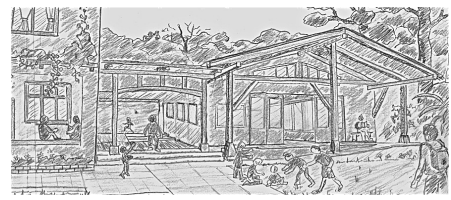
The children and young people among us participated in a workshop in which they received encouragement to write about their spiritual paths, using the idea of a journey as a central theme. They were asked to reflect on personal documents as some of the primary sources of their spiritual journeys. Diaries, autobiographies, letters, and Facebook and blog posts can strengthen our self-knowledge, preserve our individual memories more precisely, and expand the collective memory of the Religious Society of Friends. We recognized how the Spirit is shown to us in compassion, communion, friendship and solidarity, and then when we see it, we feel motivated to action.

We recalled together, with deep sadness, the losses experienced during this hard year. We shared our faith regarding a conciliation at Casa de los Amigos. Our vision is directed at the future, in which the Light continues to guide and shine on us.

Epistle Committee – 44th session of the RGAM
May 2021

Monteverde Friends Meeting

Monteverde 5655
Puntarenas
Costa Rica
MonteverdeQuakers@gmail.com



July 2021

*Being faithful in the little light received, in that light I saw more light; and by it I was taught to trust in God in all my ways,
and to consult him to direct my paths.
~ Increase Woodward*

Dear Friends Everywhere,

This year we celebrated our 70th Monteverde Day, the anniversary of the arrival of Quakers to Costa Rica. This was the second year we were not able to gather in-person and while we continue to feel the upheaval of the pandemic, we also see the Light and resilience of our Meeting and Community. While more of us are gathering for in-person Meeting for Worship, we continue to enjoy Hymn Singing, Meeting, and Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business via Zoom.

Monteverde Friends School, our primary ministry, transitioned from online to hybrid classes, as needed several times. Thanks to the dedication and extraordinary efforts of our school administration and staff, fundraiser, families and donors, students were able to attend despite the economic hardships of the pandemic. We, as a Meeting community, both here and abroad, were able to participate in Quaker Education and pre-Meeting with high school students. Technology has also allowed us to connect with a wider body of Friends around the world through participation in the FWCC Section of the Americas and AFSC Annual Meetings, worship with Pendle Hill and other Friends Meetings.

We continue to encourage submissions to our monthly newsletter, *Seeds* and a committee has been working on an updated version of our Monteverde Jubilee Family Album. We have also successfully managed the legal changes required by the revised fiscal year mandated by the government.

This year we rejoiced as several long-time attenders became Meeting members. We also mourned the loss of beloved Meeting and community members Paul Smith, Sylvia Smith, Linda Moller, and Gregory Paradise.

In the Light,

Carol Evans, Clerk
Lesley Laing, Recording Clerk

*Peace is a gift, but it does not come magically through our passivity. Only in our faithful response to God's call do we receive God's peace.
~ Sandra Cronk*

2021 Epistle Committee: Wendy Rockwell, Nicolette Smith

Netherlands Yearly Meeting

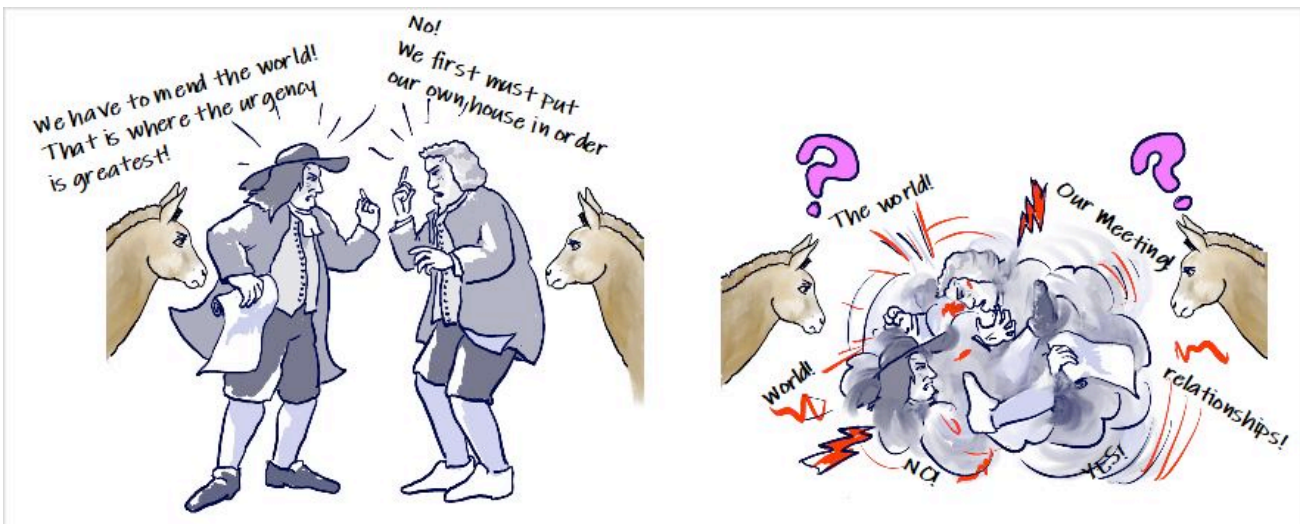
Epistle 2021

Dear Friends, lieve Vrienden, teman-teman yang baik, kjære venner, chers amis, liebe Freunde, queridos amigos, cari amici, kära vänner, kære venner, rakkaat ystävät, kallid sõbrad, draží přátelé, dārgie draugi, dragi prijatelji, Kedves Barátaim, drodzy przyjaciele, a chairde, Salamaat Asdiqa; marafiki wetu wapendwa; 親愛的朋友們, E hoa ma;

We send you warm greetings from the Online Annual Meeting 2021 of the Dutch Quakers. Too bad that again this year, we can't meet in person. Online we were still able to see each other, speak, inspire and discuss urgent matters. There was technical support for those less familiar with Zoom. We also received help from Elders specially appointed for this, to uphold the Quaker way of doing business when meeting in digital form. Many Dutch Friends have gained experience with this in the past year, both among themselves and internationally, so that we could hold a good digital Quaker meeting.

Our theme this year is: "Let us then try what love can do." (William Penn)
"Our life is love, our life is peace, our life is tenderness and bearing with each other, and forgiving and helping each other with a tender hand." (Isaac Penington). Appropriate words nowadays, with the global threat of disease and its potentially long-lasting consequences.

We began with these words; this was our guideline. It made us look at ourselves. A Friend produced a parody animation of the fable of the two mules, of which 2 pictures shown here:



He showed us that within our mutual relationships we do have some "homework" to do with our egos, so that we can respond to each other out of love. For example, within our annual meeting there are people with much or little affinity for figures, financial risks, opportunities and positions. There are also very different insights into how to deal with our possessions as a "good Quaker". It's great that at this Annual Meeting we could see from the smooth handling of the agenda items, that we learn from things that are not going well. We are taking significant steps towards closer cooperation.

The group of Friends within the Netherlands is small in number and big in dreams! We have to rely on collaboration with other organizations. This is visible in;

1) "Working on the world" is something we like and enthusiastically do in eucumene with other faith communities in the Netherlands. 2) We like to think at European and global level. Quakers play a unique role in "silent diplomacy" at both levels. We wholeheartedly support this from the Netherlands.

The two speakers at this meeting showed us opportunities and growth in that area.

Kees Nieuwerth (Neth.YM) talked about his religious anchors in his work in Africa and his many years in the Council of Churches, both in the Netherlands and internationally. That work reaches far!

Timmon Wallis (QCEA) showed us his development from persistent activist to silent diplomacy worker at our European Quaker organization. He mentioned the special power of the Quakers to stand for what we believe in: the Divine in every human being. It is important to work with this without being co-opted into other ways of thinking. This takes courage and gives confidence in the reliability of Quakers. In the Sunday meeting we read a prayer that a Friend drafted and that is spoken today in many churches in the Netherlands for the refugees on Lesbos.

Our Dutch message to friends worldwide is that everyone can play their own role, no matter how great or small. QCEA, FWCC, QUNO, the Council of Churches, these are organizations that focus on simplicity, peace and equality in word and deed. Our Annual Meeting was hopeful.

With Friendship, in vriendschap, dalam persahabatan, i vennskap, i vänskap, i venskab, ystävyydessä, bien amicalement, in Freundschaft, en amistad, in amicizia, v přátelství, u prijateljstvu, draudzība, a barátságban, sōpruses, w przyjaźni, le cairdeas, fi alsadaqa, tunatuma urafiki wetu, 在友誼中, i te whakahoahoae

Peter Spreij

Netherlands Yearly Meeting, Clerk

New York Yearly Meeting

Dear Friends everywhere,

New York Yearly Meeting met for Summer Sessions July 24–July 31, 2021 (again on Zoom in this second year of the Covid-19 pandemic) and acknowledged the lands of the many First Nations we inhabit across New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Two hundred and fifty Friends were registered. Of these, 54 were first time attenders and 36, including 9 of the first timers, identified themselves as young adults.

For three weeks before we met in sessions, 47 interest groups attracted 230+ Friends and explored climate change, racism and anti-racism, spiritual accompaniment, and many other ways to live into our testimonies.

The Sessions Committee made the decision not to offer programming for children and youth during our summer sessions based on Zoom fatigue among our young Friends in 2020. We missed our children, and we will be sending out a mailing of activities for youth and families in the yearly meeting over the next few weeks.

Our Bible study, every morning of the week, helped us explore sanctuary as the place where God dwells, in the First Testament as a physical place—where Jacob wrestled with his angel, the burning bush that Moses saw, and the movable Tabernacle—and in the Second Testament as living water within us.

We examined our theme, “Becoming a Sanctuary Where Spirit Dwells,” especially as it relates to our work toward becoming an anti-racist faith community. Our plenary speaker, Emily Provance, told us that “To embody sanctuary is to rest in the overwhelming presence of God.” But she warned that true sanctuary is not always calm, well-behaved, and safe; being searched by the Light is a wrenching experience. Are we ready to learn and to be changed? To reach beyond what’s comfortable? We need to keep reminding one another that “We all live by grace.”

White Friends felt that discomfort as we all were challenged to search for a way to confront patterns of oppression and micro-aggression, which White Friends may not even recognize. How can we “call each other in” to faithfulness to our ideals with justice, mercy, and love? Our Clerk warned us that “we” can be a dangerous word, and she encouraged us, when we hear something that hurts us, to tell the body Ouch, to let the assembled Friends know that there was an injury. In the same way, we could say Oops to acknowledge our own hurtful words or deeds. Some Friends later shared their pained concern that this practice might damage our community.

Steve Mohlke, our General Secretary, told us that he sees some progress toward inclusivity: our “Pay as Led” program makes it easier for everyone to attend Summer Sessions; this year all the clerks of our Meeting for Discernment were young adults; we say “white Friends” when that’s what we mean, instead of “we.” He gave us a new goal: 100 Friends from around the yearly meeting to attend a weekend of deep anti-racism training.

Our State of Society report this year told us that our vulnerability can bind us together and ended with a question: “How will we grow into the future?” This is difficult work, and where we are right now

doesn't feel comfortable. We were encouraged to practice "shame resilience"—acknowledge the micro-aggression we have committed, feel the shame, and get over it.

Our Meeting for Discernment, a full day of worship with queries about our experience of sanctuary, included written responses from our worship groups among incarcerated men, who told us their experiences in this year of pandemic.

We approved a minute to urge the Government of Japan not to release highly radioactive water into the Pacific from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

We approved a minute in support of the Truth and Healing Commission for Native Peoples, which confronts our complicity (as a nation and as Friends) in the atrocity we called "Indian Boarding Schools."

After we heard the epistle from the General Meeting of Friends in Mexico in English, one of our members read the epistle to us in Spanish con mucho gusto and told us how vividly it rekindled her memories of her time among Quakers in Mexico. The epistle spoke of their loss during the pandemic and reminded us of the plight of Latinx migrants.

Diane Randall of Friends Committee on National Legislation talked about the difficult but exciting work of connecting over time with people she disagrees with and her appreciation for the nurture and support she has received by traveling and worshiping among Friends during her decade of service with FCNL.

Two afternoons were spent looking at racism among us and how to become an anti-racist community. These sessions searched us and our practice and challenged many of our assumptions about ourselves as Friends. They helped prepare us to consider in our monthly meetings a proposed statement of this intention: "As a yearly meeting we commit to work toward becoming an actively anti-racist faith community. May we be faithful."

With the loving assistance of God and one another we seek to be faithful, remembering that we all live by grace.

In loving Friendship,
Elaine Learnard, Clerk
New York Yearly Meeting

To Friends Everywhere:

Friends from Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana gathered virtually, from July 14 – July 18, 2021, for the 49th Annual Session of the North Pacific Yearly Meeting.

Friends throughout North Pacific Yearly Meeting have faced the past year with courage, resiliency, humor and creativity. The Coronavirus Pandemic has challenged everyone, and Quakers have reached deep into the reservoirs of love to affirm community, respond to injustice, educate themselves, help others and remain faithful to our deepest convictions.

This was our second year to meet on-line instead of in-person because of the pandemic, and we found valuable ways to take advantage of the situation: We stretched out our time together by meeting for worship groups and interest groups for several weeks before Annual Session. We also organized a variety of opportunities for small group socializing, which took some of the sting out of not being able to give and receive hugs, and optimized our efforts to (in the words of our Presiding Clerk) *"renew and strengthen ourselves and our communities so that we can be the Quakers the world needs"*.

We welcomed visitors from Friends General Conference, Friends World Committee on Consultation, Friends Committee on National Legislation, and Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends. The clerk acknowledged that Friends are committed to uprooting racism, and at this Annual Session we concentrated on stopping the harm done by racial microaggressions, also called micro-assaults. We used the practice of calling out such instances by saying "Ouch!" if we feel them, "Whoa!" if we observe them, or "Oops" if we make the mistake ourselves.

Our theme this year was *"Courage in the Face of Fear — Faith, Hope, Love"*, which we explored during worship sharing with queries such as *"What are the stories we tell about the past year of heat, smoke, pandemic, social, political, and environmental challenges? How have you cared for others in these hard times? What might a right*

relationship with the living world be like for you? What have you learned over the past year that informs your vision of a new future?"

Our Finance and Legal Committee spent this past year transitioning to a new Treasurer, and revising the NPYM financial procedural manual. Our Faith and Practice Committee is working on creating an audiobook copy of Faith and Practice, starting with a series of podcasts that could be combined later.

Our Friend in residence was Cherice Bock, a former co-clerk of Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends. Cherice works as the Creation Justice Advocate at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon through which she voices her witness on ecotheology. Cherice spoke about *"Courage, Fear, & Care: Creating Resilient Communities to Meet Climate Justice."* She asked, *"What is an appropriate response to an emergency?"*

Friends have experienced adversity and challenge during the last year, as has our Earth and all life on this planet. We have lived through a pandemic, the rise of fascism, continued injustice, infrastructure failures, and growing climate chaos, threatening all life on Earth. Friends have worked to acknowledge and increase awareness of our historical responsibility for these conditions. Cherice spoke of the response to immediate crisis as flight, fight or freeze and asked *"What do we do when the emergency is not instantaneous, but is slow moving, drawn out, a low-lying and impending level of threat that continues for months, years, lifetimes? What is an appropriate response?"*

In responding, she reminded us of the experiences of early Friends—The Lambs War, the well-known “Valiant 60” and lesser known “Boring 600”—exhorting each of us to do our part; to discern what we are uniquely led to do to meet the current emergency. She asked us to recognize that we are part of the beloved community with whom we discern, labor and grow together. She called us to walk into our fear with courage.

As we mourn the losses of those people close to our heart, and of countless other members of the living world, we recognize that we humans are profoundly out of balance with the rest of the life on

Earth. Many Friends have made a commitment to changing that relationship. Cherice suggested that we need to strengthen our empathy muscle and practice radical care for each other and our Living World. We are at a decision point—the old “normal” was not just or sustainable, and we cannot go back to business as usual. We must change radically so that we can come to live in right relationship with the living world.

Cherice left us with these queries: *Where in your life are you noticing the Divine breaking through in glimpses of the Beloved Community? How are you feeling invited to courageously take the next step toward participating more fully in that community? What is currently holding you back? With whom are you being drawn toward deeper relationship so you can partner to form a more just and resilient community?*

Friends expressed a need for a new vision. We look both to our youth and to our creative community for that vision. And we recognize that we must each be faithful to the leading of the Divine Spirit and do our part on behalf of all life on Earth to build a peaceful and just community.

On our second day, we heard a presentation from Robin Mohr and Simon Lamb, of Friends World Committee for Consultation. Robin is the Executive Secretary, Section of the Americas, and Simon is Clerk of the World Central Executive Committee of FWCC. Robin reminded us that the FWCC is made up of representatives of all Friends around the world, and their mission is to bring together different traditions of Friends, find the commonalities, and consolidate our message. Quakers are a deeply diverse group but we build bridges. Simon praised NPYM's faithful participation in FWCC over the years and encouraged us to continue to serve the world community of Friends. They invited us to participate in a story-telling project for World Quaker Day on October 3 this year.

We also heard from Andy Cross and Steve Aldrich from the Friends Peace Teams, a spirit-led organization working to develop long-term relationships with communities in conflict all over the world, to create programs for peace-building and reconciliation. They have

experimented with presenting Alternatives to Violence Project training online until it is safe to meet in person again. They invited us to get involved in outreach, or in local Peace Teams, or become an AVP trainer or a Right Relationship facilitator.

We heard a moving report from our Junior Friends (High-School-aged Friends) with a long list of what they miss about meeting in-person for Annual Session and Camp, including Cuddle-Puddles, and falling out of hammocks. They asked us to share memories of our times as young Quakers and also to offer ideas for creative ways to have a greater connection now to each other and to the adults. The older Friends shared verbal support and some suggestions for locations to meet in-person, but also acknowledged a need to better understand what kind of support is truly needed.

Our Youth Committee seasoned last year's draft Youth Safety Policy through the monthly meetings and worship groups, and brought a revision to Coordinating Committee in March 2021. Coordinating Committee reached unity to approve the revised policy, but our Yearly meeting continues to struggle to find a balance between safety and autonomy for our youth that we all can find unity with.

On day three, we approved a minute to support HR40. In part, it states that *"North Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends supports HR 40, which is a resolution to establish a commission to examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies. We believe that the establishment of this commission is a good first step in encouraging a national reckoning and determining appropriate remedies."*

We have been fortunate to come together this year as Friends with many diverse gifts and leadings and to go forward with renewed energy, focus and unity. Many look forward to an in-person gathering in 2022 with the hope that we can have an accessible virtual option for those unable to travel.

Friends Church of North Carolina (FCNC)
Epistle to All
August 13-14, 2021

Dear Friends,

We, the members of the Friends Church of North Carolina (FCNC) attending the 2021 Annual Sessions, send our greetings and best wishes to our sister yearly meetings and organizations. We were very thankful to be meeting in person this time at Quaker Lake and virtually, despite the Covid 19 pandemic ravaging our world. We rejoiced being again able to see Friends and acquaintances, and thankful we could also worship and conduct worship for business. Roll call indicated that 20 of the 28 member meetings of FCNC were able to send representatives in person or virtually.

In listening to reports from both the Committee on Clerks and the Nominating Committee we realize that there is much to be done and sometimes it seems few do the work. Remarkably most of the committees have enough willing volunteers to begin this work. In Superintendent Mike Wall's report we were challenged to be "fishermen" just as were Jesus' disciples. They all became Christ's fishermen, receiving their training during Pentecost. So we should be stepping forward to fill the roles and jobs to be done within the Friends Church of North Carolina.

We finished the first evening in worship with songs by Bob Spencer on the guitar and an inspiring forward looking, challenging message by Ron Bryan, Friends United Meeting Clerk. "It doesn't help to argue about the faith. Communication will probably happen when you are honest, genuine and share your own story. Your story will speak to other people."

On Saturday morning we appropriately began in worship with Tommy Sluder and morning praise. We then returned to listen to reports from committees within the yearly meeting and beyond.

Coming from this year's work of the FCNC Administrative Oversight committee, and approved during these sessions, we accepted the proposed changes to Faith and Practice concerning the yearly meeting committees. Also, one copy per monthly meeting of a directory listing each meeting, address, contact information was distributed. Remembering the past, it was approved to form a committee to plan for a celebration in 2022 of 350 years of Quakerism in North Carolina. And looking to the future, the renewal of a yearly meeting internship program was approved, giving experience to future church leaders. We heard of the activities done and planned by the Ministers Association; that the Young Adult Committee has a beach trip planned, and that Beulah Gullion is the new Friends Campus Ministry coordinator working with college groups in Greensboro, NC State University (Raleigh) and expanding to others. There is much hope for the future.

Jenny Gullion, FCNC's Social Media Coordinator, announced the development of a monthly E-News Letter that will be available to all interested. It will include recent and upcoming activities, what we believe statements, social media tips, etc. Jenny also manages the yearly meeting FaceBook pages.

Missions has always been a strong interest of the members of FCNC. The yearly meeting financially supports work Friends United Meeting does in Belize, Africa, Ramallah and Jamaica. We are proud to be personally involved in these areas. Connections and financial assistance is also given for the work in Matamoros, Mexico area where the village pastor Hilda Martinez leads their own meeting mission work to the island, Isla

Fantasia. The FCNC Missions Committee once again had a silent auction fund raiser during these yearly meeting sessions.

Members of the FCNC are interested in work done through many organizations affiliated with Quakers. This yearly meeting we heard from Katy Moran about Kaleo Academy and Barclay College, from Kindra Bradley about Quaker House in Fayetteville, NC, and Friends Homes updates from Brent McKinney. Gwen Erickson sent information about Quaker Archives of Guilford College. Heather Varner met with us, live, virtually telling us about the successful camping program this summer at Quaker Lake (where FCNC is meeting). There were also displays from a few other organizations. FCNC Literature Committee had books for sale; NC USFW had the USFWI 2021-22 reading list books for sale.

Annual Sessions is a time for cherishing the memories of those who have died. Each meeting within each quarter holds dear the memories of those no longer with us. These names were respectfully read and then honored with “Amazing Grace” beautifully sung by Gloria Simmons.

Worship is also a time to celebrate: we took time to celebrate the recording of these pastors who have completed their studies for recording. Recommended by the Recording Committee and approved during these annual sessions were Patrick Mitchell See, Gloria Rose Simmons and Charles Thomas Sluder. We also rejoice that there are three others continuing with their quest to be recorded. We honored Rusty Parsons for his more than forty years as a pastor and the retirement of Ben Hurley and his fifty years of pastoral work.

Workshops by Karla Jay and Ron Bryan gave us an opportunity to learn more about Friends United Meeting and their activities in the US, Belize, Ramallah (Palestine) and Kenya. We learned of their potential and how we can become involved. Jenny Gullion, FCNC Social Media Specialist, led a workshop that advised and illustrated tips about the use of social media. This workshop is pertinent for our meetings, many who are now using this media more as an outreach to all, and not just to those “for whom there is no other way” to be a part of a meeting for worship.

Friends Church of North Carolina (FCNC) concluded these annual sessions with a cookout hosted by the NC Quaker Men and followed by vespers music by about 20 youth from around the yearly meeting singing a collection from the Quaker Lake Camp songbook. Ron Bryan’s closing message used stories: his own life story, from George Fox, Stephen Crisp, and others. “Speak as if you are speaking the very word of God. If we practice our faith, hang onto the hope, and putting it into motion we will meet the challenge of hope for the future.” Our hope is in the Lord.

Friends Church of North Carolina is alive, striving with hope to fulfill His work as was the theme for these annual sessions “My Hope is in the Lord”, Colossians 1:5

Rausie Hobson, Rocky River Friends, Western Quarterly Meeting

Brenda McKinney, Clerk, Friends Church of North Carolina

2021 Epistle: ***Gonna Keep on Movin' Forward***



Greetings to our Beloved Friends, from Northern Yearly Meeting, with 33 Quaker Worship Groups living on the Upper Midwest Lands of many Native Peoples:

In our second year of virtual sessions, we have learned to see through our own computer screens into the gathered group, but screen time is still taxing. Our clerks deftly organized reports and other information outside the online session, bringing to discussion only actionable items. With Zoom captions, we could match up names, faces and locations of 163 adults, 10 teens and 7 younger children attending.

In the opening plenary session, we learned how New England Yearly Meeting is “Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness.” They use nonjudgmental prompts to call out unintentional exclusions that reinforce unjust existing power dynamics. We can learn these tools to notice how our own “-isms” hinder us in this hard work of love.

In worship with attention to business we carried this query: “How do decisions support our goal to be an anti-racist faith community?” Our time being short, unresolved issues were given to committees for further discernment. For example, lack of racial diversity was raised in discussion of the trial introductory Nimble Responders committee. Recognizing how NYM’s racial homogeneity limits us, we undertook to question practices that may be obstacles to diversity.

The finance committee recommended we spend down our \$65,000 surplus to fund NYM travel and young people’s programs. Other proposals asked us to renounce the Doctrine of Discovery and to broaden our use of the anti-racism query, but we were not of one heart. Further work will dive into emotional and real world consequences of moving forward on these issues.

Many had watched the film *Stories I Didn’t Know* prior to the workshop on the history and present situations of Indigenous Peoples of our area. Acknowledging the lack of awareness that many of us bring to encounters with Native Peoples, the Native presenters generously lifted up the value their Nations place on the Great Mystery and on the truth of not knowing. We heard examples of listening actively through differences in family, culture and community. Encouraged, we came away with queries about moving toward healing in right relationship with peoples of the First Nations.

Other remarkable workshops also led us to “live our lives as doers of the truth,” as individuals and as the Religious Society of Friends in our time. Zoe Mulford's song-writing workshop presented the creative process as a spiral, circling around to pick up what might have seemed useless before, like the process of life, or of Quaker decision-making. Attenders learned creative strategies to "Keep on Movin' Forward."

In a workshop with the Friends Committee on National Legislation, we brainstormed about cutting Pentagon spending, knowing power cannot protect us from the deep fears that motivate our military might. In another, a friend in Korea spoke at 6 a.m. her time to describe movingly the nonviolent protests on Jeju Island against a US military base. In another, NYM Quakers shared services with our evangelical partners in El Salvador: “We are blessed by each other’s prayers, sharing of hymns. We love sharing the same God.”

At times we stepped away from work for inspiration and relaxation. Drop-in virtual potlucks focused on leftovers, nettles, pastas, hostas, dandelion science and silly jokes. In the wise second plenary session, Jan Stanley challenged breakout groups to consider their own responses to the pandemic, urging us to thrive resiliently by intention. “Well being can lead to well doing.”

Among the poetry, music and pandemic songs of the talent show, we saw a puppy twirling as its young owner sang commands. A children’s-time book described a young woman centering herself, feeling one with the Earth. A listening child drew a picture of the globe, with long dark hair and dark sparkling eyes. Having so few children with us online, these images are precious.

Sunday morning’s memorial service brought silence, poignant memories and a singing of “Keep on *Lovin’* Forward.” Mulford’s heartfelt concert later that day featured her song, “The President Sang Amazing Grace.” She gave joyous voice to historic moments and courageous actions that inspire us.

In the summary State of Society plenary, we watched film segments from six meetings about losses, struggles, growth and triumphs of the past year, and then met in breakout rooms to share. Hoping to meet face to face soon, we are exploring hybrid meeting technologies to continue to include Friends who cannot join us in person. We trust in our testimonies to guide us in moving all our decisions forward.

To Friends everywhere

Norwegian Quakers, gathered for their 203rd annual meeting June 26-27, 2021, send greetings to Friends everywhere. We are still in the pandemic which prevents us from gathering physically as has been our custom for over 200 years. Even so, this weekend 38 Quakers from all over Norway, of different ages and including guests from Sweden and Finland, gathered in the Spirit to share ideas, meet for business and enjoy song and play. During the past year and a half, we have held most of our meetings digitally, and we are happy that this time technology helped us connect and maintain our sense of community. Unfortunately, we were unable to offer a separate children's program this year. This is the second year running that we have had to hold our annual meeting digitally, and we are looking forward to 2022, when we will be able to join Friends from other Nordic countries in Kungälv, Sweden, for a joint gathering of our annual meetings.

We are grateful that the covid-19 pandemic has not affected us quite as badly as we feared. But our thoughts and compassion go to people in other countries where the situation is much more dramatic. We hold them in the Light, hoping that joint efforts worldwide may overcome this frightful disease. Our privileges as citizens in a peaceful and affluent part of the world, oblige us to work for a more just distribution of resources and more careful management of our common environment and climate.

Through his PhD thesis, Hans Eirik Aarek has examined the development of the Norwegian Society of Friends in the 20th century. His theme for the keynote lecture was: "What is it that maintains the identity of the Society of Friends over time?" Up until about 1970, the Norwegian Society of Friends went through extensive change and modernisation, in tension between being a "sect" and being a more "ordinary" denomination. Aarek found that the Society of Friends has done both – stood firmly on fundamental principles while both influencing and adapting to development in the general society, depending on the issue at hand. This valuable knowledge will help us understand ourselves a little better, as well as our relations to the world around us. We gathered in smaller breakout rooms to explore these perspectives in more detail.

The annual meeting also heard from Quaker Service Norway, which is facing new terms as the Norwegian Government stopped funding them through NORAD*. This will affect projects in Palestine and Great Lakes, Africa, that Quaker Service Norway has supported for many years. The organisation finds itself in a demanding situation of change, adapting to the new, reduced terms.

During the last few years, Norway Yearly Meeting itself has met new demands from Norwegian authorities in the form of increasing requirements regarding reports and structural details. In our business session, we discerned and approved our new constitution which will enable us to meet these requirements without compromising our traditions. Recruitment and work for children and young members remain issues that we return to regularly. We want to strengthen this work to ensure that our community will continue into the future.

We feel refreshed and strengthened in a deep and loving community with one another and with Friends worldwide. Our Society of Friends provides us with a spiritual home in which we can breathe freely and share thoughts and inspiration as well as meet challenges. We acknowledge this with joy and in deep gratitude.

Signed in and on behalf of Norway Yearly Meeting
27th Day of 6th Month, 2021

Hanne Hognestad
Clerk

* NORAD- Norwegian Agency for Development

Dear Friends,

The pandemic experience has been one of physical separation. Human contact, so essential to our wellbeing, became dangerous and at times deadly. Most of us learned new technologies in order to see each other and sustain our communities and our work together. We have had to make do with virtual contact and experiences - video conferencing for worship and gatherings of all sorts. While we miss the hugs and the tears, we have learned to feel love through our screens and socially distanced visits. Vulnerability, a familiar feeling to many of us, became the norm for all of us.

Unfortunately, the virtual experience was alienating for a few, and they chose to wait until we could meet in person again. We also stopped seeing many of our children and families because they needed to take a break from too much video conferencing for school and work.

The theme of the 201st annual sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting, held virtually June 16-20, 2021, was *From Revelation to Revolution: Walking Together in Radical Love*. What does walking together in radical love mean in this time of pandemic?

From its earliest years, our society has been listening carefully for the voice of God, tenderly discerning where it is pointing us, and trying to faithfully follow those leadings of the Divine. The pandemic has made each part of this difficult and has hindered us in doing the work God has called us to as a body, so this year, we took time to listen to the stories of our individual ministries. A common thread in these stories was how the workings of God's radical love on our hearts has transformed our labors into acts of radical love in the world.

One Friend shared her experience of being called beyond her perceived capabilities in helping an immigrant family when the head of household ran afoul of the law and was incarcerated. She testified to her transformation from an ordinary person with what she thought was an ordinary capacity to love. As she lived up to the Light she had, more was granted her and she became able to love in a radical way. She felt way opening, granting her the grace and courage to respond.

Another spoke of his years working with incarcerated youth and the joy he found there. By opening himself to the transforming power of radical love, he found himself guided to service he never expected.

A Young Adult Friend told of the transforming effects of service in the Peace Corps, the unexpected blessings received, and how life has unfolded in the time since.

Another Friend serves as a hospice chaplain. He told us that a terminal diagnosis can be the spark for personal transformation. Even when a cure is out of reach, spiritual healing is possible. Moreover, he reminded us, you don't have to be dying to invite wholeness into your life.

The pandemic has exposed rot in our society and radical love is our response. Friends believe that the kingdom of heaven is present here and now. Even our grief can help us to feel the in-breaking of God's grace and can empower us to help build that blessed community. When we open ourselves to divine revelation, we are emboldened to give up the ways of this world and pursue spiritual revolution.

Our sessions took place at the time of the first formal national recognition and celebration of Juneteenth as a holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. In her welcoming, our Presiding Clerk prayed, "May the Divine Light that is in each of us illumine and transform this body as we undertake the work of decolonization and anti-racism." In these sessions we looked deeply at our roles in racial injustice. European American Friends,

accustomed to white privilege, found the capacity to begin to look honestly at our biases and at the structural injustices within the Religious Society of Friends here in OVYM. An African American Friend assured us, "Relationships are where it starts. Love and care of each other. We will get there."

Radical love manifests itself differently in each person. Radical love will lead to compassion and compassion fosters radical love. We cannot possess radical love, only let it possess us. When we have opened ourselves to it, that love has guided us to work we would not have thought to choose, serving people who don't look like us, and brought profound joy. Join us in this revolution.

Epistle from the 75th Annual Session of
Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
2021

Epistle from Pacific Yearly Meeting Annual Session July 23-28, 2021

“...i remember you with marigolds...
place me at your altar, i am there...
though i never knew you, i worship for you
and i remember you with gold flowers
i remember you with marigolds”

From “Worship on a Mass Grave” by Gabriela Portillo Alvarado

“...We have been here before
We know the Hanging Tree, the rope
The rape of our bodies, our Cultures
The theft of our Songs & our Children...
We’ve been through it all before
And we can get through it all again...
We have been here before & together we can heal!
I know we can!!!”

From “.....I KNOW WE CAN!!!” by Avotcja Jiltonilro

To All Friends Everywhere:

We are called to both love and justice. Led by our Racial Justice Subcommittee, we began the process of creating a sacred space in which healing and transformation can occur. The initial step is to learn to recognize and express when one is hurt by bias or microaggression (“Ouch”) or has caused hurt (“Oops”) or has witnessed another’s being hurt (“Whoa”). Vocal ministry during meeting for worship included expressions of “Ouch” or “I’m sorry” or “Whoa.” The subcommittee held a time each evening for debriefing our sacred space process, and the Ministry Committee listened to people’s reports of hurt.

We were deeply moved by the poetry and stories of the keynote speakers, Gabriela Portillo Alvarado and Avotcja (Avacha) Jiltonilro. Both of them wrote of the multi-generational trauma of being nonwhite in the United States. Gabriela recounted their pain experienced while researching the human skulls of nonwhite persons, including Native Americans from the early 19th century, in a collection at the University of Pennsylvania. These remains have not been repatriated, and Gabriela’s poem “Worship on a Mass Grave” spoke of the day they sat in worship above the storage room.

Avotcja described herself as a believer in perpetual revelation and as one to whom the Creator usually speaks in poetry and music. She wrote and distributed a love poem, “Street Children of the Night,” to children outside at night near her home, and was later amazed when a small girl hugged her on the BART subway system and recited the poem verbatim, expressing gratitude because, as she said, “nobody ever talks to us.” From the poem that Avotcja wrote in response to the 2016 presidential election, she led us repeatedly in a chorus of everyone’s voices declaring, “I know we can!”

We were excited to see the faces of Quakers from California, Nevada, Hawai’i, Mexico, and beyond. This was our second annual session held online via Zoom, and this year has brought

Epistle from the 75th Annual Session of Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends 2021

other changes as well. We grieved the loss of 50 Friends at an extended memorial meeting. Our total membership is 1,173, down 36 from last year, and our Nominating Committee encouraged committees to set goals of a size appropriate to the strength and light of current members, because no big influx of new people is occurring. In this age of more digital communications, the administrative work required has expanded even as the available volunteer energy has declined, and we approved hiring a half-time administrative assistant. Simultaneously, the Ministry Committee will be listening widely and deeply to discern the Spirit's call to the yearly meeting -- and the structures that would support our heeding that call.

Discussions about love and justice continued throughout our time together. Most people when they spoke included in their introductions an acknowledgment of the indigenous people of their region. In Bible study, we were reminded that the instruction in Micah 6:8 is "to do justice" -- not just to talk or to read about it or to expect someone else to do it. How are we doing justice? We heard Quakers' stories of advocating for racial justice, housing equity, farmworker rights, and environmental justice, as well as providing financial support of undocumented students.

The life of our Quaker communities can be nurtured by eldering, and the process can be one more tool in creating sacred space. The Eldering Subcommittee of the Ministry Committee created a schedule of elders for holding the space of each meeting for worship or plenary. For each keynote speaker, the presiding clerk, and some other individuals exercising their gifts of ministry for our community, an elder provides prayerful and sometimes practical support. At an interest group, the subcommittee encouraged participants to practice this holding of space while a group worships or an individual presents or ministers. Doing so helps grow the good in our meetings. Eldering can contribute to the work of decolonization, in that the elder sets aside their own ego and their needs in order to be in service of the spiritual growth of another.

We know that we join many other Quakers in wrestling with issues of racial justice. We encourage Friends everywhere to give up the expectation of comfort: in conversations about race, discomfort is natural--it means that we are growing. Let us create ways to help each other be brave. Let us take time to connect with the indwelling Spirit that connects us to one another and to all of creation. Let us break the bonds of racism by continuing to learn, and continuing to tell the truth, and becoming willing to make repairs. We can then take the next steps into sacred space together. We know we can!

Note: In "normal years" there would also be epistles from younger Friends in Pacific Yearly Meeting, but as the 2021 Annual Session was conducted online via Zoom, there were no such epistles this year.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

To Friends everywhere:

Greetings from the 341st Annual Sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), held for the second year virtually via Zoom. The pandemic continues to affect the ways in which we find community, but we joined together excited to spend time with our Quaker family and engage with our work.

Annual Sessions began with a retreat offered by the Spiritual Formation Collaborative. Rooted and grounded in Spirit, we listened to each other deeply, remembering that in all our differences and diversities we are family. Our theme was “Uprooting Injustice, Rooting Justice,” and the opening plenary exhorted us to “Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6.8).

Over the course of six days we gathered to worship, attend to our business, and deepen community in Bible study, affinity groups, and worship sharing. Our youth gathered separately for their own programming. We miss spending time with them each day to hear updates and share in worship. We look forward to the return to gathering in person, so all ages can be together.

Our keynote presenters invited us to transform ourselves and our Quaker communities. Nikki Mosgrove, our first speaker, invited us to engage with oppressed communities and our neighborhoods through equitable investment. On the second night, Pam/Tommy Greenler shared their inspiring spiritual journey to full identity. They shared the courageous insight that, “We’re all born naked and the rest is drag” (RuPaul Charles). The following evening, Mai Spann-Wilson shared a cycle of poems from his experience as a Black man. He challenged us to reflect upon inclusiveness through education for all ages in “radical truth” on an even playing field.

In the first keynote on Saturday, Cherice Bock asked us to think about “What do we as Friends require of each other?” She motivated us to think of our place in our watershed as we act to become “hubs of community resilience” answering climate change. Later that evening, Sa’ed Atshan delivered a dynamic talk about constructive conflict and the metaphor of the dance to describe his experience with Friends Central School, the occupation of Palestine, and his identity as an LGBTQ+ activist.

Our business sessions took up major proposals on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Climate Change; and Membership and Belonging. Each sprint came well prepared to build upon the work from prior sessions. These three sprints proposed the following:

- a course of action for our anti-racism work and commitment to engage in real, tangible measures to transform our communities;
 - a one-year trial of at-large membership, an effort to welcome and embrace those who have not found a spiritual home in a monthly meeting;
 - adoption of climate crisis and climate injustice as a yearly meeting ministry, complete with comprehensive playbooks for individuals, households, monthly and quarterly meetings, and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.
- With divine help from the Spirit moving among us, we enthusiastically approved each proposal.

We have seen the working of Spirit this week. We joyously celebrated hearing a Minute of Declaration and Commitment of the new Ujima Friends Meeting. The Worship and Care Committee led us through an exercise that helped reveal the value of deep listening to racial and social injustice. Throughout these

Annual Sessions, we have heard a call to grow, change, evolve, and transform, both individually and collectively.

We leave Annual Sessions with an awareness of the work ahead of us and a commitment to move forward with our transformation. This is when we begin to apply the lessons, use the resources, and uplift the members of our community who have identified themselves as ready to serve. We recommit ourselves to the necessary work to help build the beloved community as we embrace the discomfort of growth and transformation. We are more than just Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, we are family.

2021 Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting Epistle

Sixth Annual Session, Fourth Month, 2021

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

As the Covid-19 pandemic continued to grip our world, the 2021 Piedmont Friends Spring Retreat met virtually April 9-11 for a weekend of fellowship, worship and the Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting (PFYM) annual sessions. Friends gathered from Piedmont Friends Fellowship (PFF) and PFYM monthly meetings and worship groups in North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina. Guests from other meetings and Friends organizations were warmly welcomed. The theme for the retreat was *Cultivating the Garden of Diversity and Inclusion*, with Friends reflecting on the query: *What is most on my heart as we cultivate the garden?*

The Friday evening roll call of participating meetings included a Native American Friend reading names of the nations and tribes whose ancestral lands the meetinghouses currently use. Small groups reflected on queries that focused on the retreat's theme, offering opportunity for sharing, rich discussions and making personal connections.

The Saturday morning session welcomed author and educator Niambi Jaha-Echols speaking on the topic *Healing the Illusion of Our Separateness: Cultivating the Garden of Diversity and Inclusion*. The deeply thoughtful workshop led Friends into an exploration of colonialism in the Quaker community and to re-imagine Piedmont Friends as a blooming, flourishing diverse society. She shared her own persuasion of being "pro-inclusionist" toward combating racism; to acknowledge that each of us carries within us not only "that of God," but inherited trauma and attitudes that we must address and heal. Friends were deeply grateful for Niambi's insightful presentation and the gift of our time together searching for and celebrating our oneness.

The retreat included an intergenerational art activity centered on the Hamsa Hand, an ancient Middle Eastern symbol of the Hand of God. Participants traced and illustrated their own hand's silhouette while the deeper meaning the symbol holds within major religions was explained.

All gathered into a spirit of worship for the Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting annual session. Friends shared in the work of the yearly meeting, received reports from PFYM representatives to various Friends organizations, and reflected on the year's accomplishments, including our individual and meeting adaptations for the pandemic. It was reported that Piedmont Friends, under the spiritual care of PFYM, will serve as the host for the 2022 FGC Gathering in Radford, VA.

The 2021 Piedmont Friends Spring Retreat closed with Sunday morning meeting for worship. Guest Ron Echols concluded worship by filling the space with the healing tones of his singing bowls. Friends departed holding a deep sense of gratitude for the weekend together, for deepening personal connections, and for the contributions of Piedmont Friends in the larger Quaker world and in the Religious Society of Friends.

Shared in peace,

Sally Freeman and Paul Klever, Co-clerks, PFYM

Epistle of the QCEA General Assembly, 12-13 November 2021

To all Friends everywhere,

The QCEA General Assembly has met for the first time in a hybrid format with some Friends gathering in person at Quaker House and others joining virtually. While everyone felt a strong spirit of worship, the opportunity to meet in the same room has been greatly appreciated by those who could attend in person.

The reports that we have heard made it clear that the past months have on many levels been a difficult time. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to present a challenge for the work of organisations such as QCEA. It also continues to add a level of stress to our personal and professional lives. At the same time, Europe and its residents have been facing a number of difficulties, such as Brexit, increased militarization, an inadequate response to the climate crisis and the inhuman treatment of refugees, all of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

In addition to these broader challenges, many members of our community have been challenged mentally, emotionally and spiritually by a recent multi-layered and complex organizational conflict as well as the sincere, continuous struggle to find a resolution. The statements that were confidentially shared with the Assembly have brought into the light a considerable amount of hurt, anger, and layers of sadness.

We reaffirm our trust in the Executive Committee and appreciate the care and dedication with which they have carried out the work entrusted to them. At the same time, we collectively recognise the need to reflect in depth on the events of the past months, and to enter into a process of healing and rebuilding trust. We are aware that the task before us is crucial for the future of QCEA, and it is a challenge that we can only face together.

Despite the challenging nature of the exchange around these topics, it also became clear that the well-being of QCEA is a matter very close to all our hearts. Over the course of our Meeting, we affirmed our commitment to our shared values, to the work and the people of QCEA, and to an honest and open process that will allow us to learn and move forward from the events that are still weighing heavy on our hearts and minds today. We continue to be inspired by the important work QCEA do on Peace and Human Rights. We agree on the value and potential of work that takes a holistic approach and is rooted in Quaker values and practices. We are united in our firm belief in QCEA's vital contribution to our witness as Quakers at this time in history.

The conclusion of our Assembly marks the beginning of a new path we are embarking on together. Will we manage to move on from past events with grace and without causing further harm to anyone presently or formerly involved with QCEA? Will our commitment to QCEA and to our shared values sustain us through the long and arduous process of rebuilding mutual trust?

We hope so.

To Friends near and far:

The ongoing pandemic compelled Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends to gather via videoconference between June 18th and June 20th, 2021. Our technical difficulties were negligible but we look forward to meeting in person. It is harder to discern God's will from our separate boxes than when we are physically present to each other. Many members and visitors came who would not have otherwise been able to attend. Friends from California, the District of Columbia, North Pacific Yearly Meeting, Baltimore Yearly Meeting, New England Yearly Meeting, and Conservative Yearly Meetings in Ohio and North Carolina joined us. We are especially grateful to Friend Dorene Cornwell of NPYM for her tech support and reminders to continue the work of including Friends with disabilities. We hope to exchange visiting Friends with other Yearly Meetings next year.

Our business was minimal, with a fun family trivia time the evening of the 18th leading to corporate worship on the 19th and 20th. Ministers spoke on the Parable of the Mustard Seed and a version of the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:26-32. and 1 John 4:7, 11-2, about God's Love and how that love can dwell in us.

Acceptance of God's love for us is a covenant to love God and seek the Beloved in others. To abet or ignore the abuse of those who bear God's image is to deny Christ. Friends Jade Souza, Mark Pratt-Russum, & Erin Wilson continue their ministry to prevent the abuse of children and other vulnerable people in the church by creating policies and procedures for us to follow. Creating a culture which prevents abuse is part of our witness to peace and justice as Friends. How can we claim to be a Peace Church and preach nonviolence when we leave room for violence in our systems? Nonviolence in daily life informs and nourishes our ministry to worldly powers.

We also considered a proposal from Friend Gil George to record and compile a history of the Yearly Meeting's origins before our stories are forgotten. Others expressed a call to accompany Gil in this project. This is an important witness for the Church/Yearly Meeting as we reflect on the schism that brought us into being and how the Spirit is already active among us. Our hope is twofold: First, that we may discern the pattern of the Spirit's movement so that we can better attune our actions to the work already active among us. Second, that any document produced would be useful to other congregations and Yearly Meetings facing, or who have been through, similar division. While the path we walk has had its share of difficulties, it is a worthwhile path.

This year we recognized the loss of many dear Friends to COVID and other causes. In our time to pause and reflect we remembered their gifts and held space for all affected by their loss.

We recorded the ministry of Jazmin Miller-Price, ordained by God as a person called and equipped to minister among us.

Underneath our meeting was a longing to be present to each other in person, and it is our hope that we do not forget these years of separation but let them serve as a reminder of just how deeply we love each other.

May that love be felt by all who read these words,

Mike Huber, co-clerk
Sarah Katreen Hoggatt, co-clerk
Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends

Epistle Committee:

Gil George

James Hibbs

Julie Peyton

June 2021

Epistle from the South Central Yearly Meeting 2021 Annual Sessions

28th Day, 3rd Month to 4th Day, 4th Month, 2021 via videoconferencing platform Zoom

To Friends here, there, and everywhere,

Greetings in the name of peace, love, and the Light! The South Central Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) met via Zoom this year for our annual sessions. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic gave us little alternative but to meet virtually again in 2021 to worship God together, enjoy fellowship, and conduct our business, all from the safety and comfort, albeit isolation, of our own homes.

We continued last year's theme of "Loving in the Light: Quaker Engagement in Times of Crisis, Part II." One of the week's workshops focused our attention on indigenous peoples who once cared for the lands we now inhabit, and Friends were encouraged to identify these tribes in their Zoom screen name.

Friends from our Arkansas-Oklahoma Quarterly Meeting discerned the need to revisit this theme and challenged us to dig deep, be bold and love fiercely as we sought guidance from the Spirit to address the crises of today that we, as people of a shared faith, must meet with integrity, unity, love, and peace.

We discussed race relations in our country, climate change, police brutality, economic justice, extreme political polarization and political violence. We acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected us as individuals, monthly meetings, and as a yearly meeting. Throughout our sessions, we aimed to act in love, peace, and charity, guided by Spirit and our shared faith.

One seasoned Friend noted that people embrace the idea that Friends collectively discern a way forward, and that there's power in having the strength of that communal discernment to illuminate our path. The wisdom of these sage voices continues to bless us as we walk in unity to seek Truth.

Quaker author and activist Eileen Flanagan guided our week-long session events and delivered the keynote speech. In it she shared her insights and experiences on how we as Friends are called to engage with the world we live in, and to work for the world we want.

Eileen shared stories of her path in activism, particularly her work with the Earth Quaker Action Team opposing mountaintop-removal coal mining. It gave us a new perspective for the crises we face and how to approach them. She also reminded us of our responsibility—our duty even—to listen for God's call by challenging injustice and laboring with love and perseverance until we achieve a society and a world where peace, harmony, unity, charity, integrity, and equality are the norms, not the outliers.

She recalled the struggles of the civil rights movement and shared the wisdom of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when he said, "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice; and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

We saw that while we stand at an inflection point in the climate crisis, we see the growing urgency of the danger and injustice faced daily by people who identify as black, indigenous, and people of color. We must now act with love and finally do the work to create that just, peaceful, and equitable society for all. And then we must sustain it with love. We call on Friends everywhere to answer God's call and join us in this work.

Our Peace and Justice Forum brought two minutes forward. We aligned with the "No Way to Treat a Child" campaign, which seeks an immediate end to the unlawful and unconscionable military detention of Palestinian children by Israeli Defense Forces. This minute recognizes that our own government also detains migrant refugee children. SCYM denounces such practices and calls upon our elected leaders to abolish them.

The other minute we endorsed asks for no-knock search warrants to be banned by all levels of government for all levels of law enforcement. We recognize more work remains for us to do, addressing policies and practices; we must recognize these moral imperatives and act when the Spirit leads us.

The Peace and Justice Committee further requested that the Yearly Meeting make a discretionary gift to the Olympia (WA) Friends Meeting (North Pacific YM) in support of their efforts in Quaker outreach and social justice in Uganda. Several of our monthly meetings and many individual Friends have supported their efforts in the past, and this request was met with unified approval.

Of special importance this year, acting on the long-time work of the Youth Program Support Committee, we approved their Child Abuse Prevention Policy, which documents modern-day definitions, advices, concerns, and legal requirements for groups that work with children. We are thankful for their work and guidance on this important topic.

We received reports from representatives to various Quaker, interfaith, and activist groups, and the work that Friends have done over the past year continues to be a source of inspiration and hope in the midst of these crises we face. The Faith and Practice committee of our Yearly Meeting has been busy in the past year discerning the leadings of Spirit and continuing their important work in formulating a document that will serve and support Friends with grace, integrity, and love for many generations to come. We hold this committee, as well as all other committees of SCYM, in the Light as they continue to do the important work of Friends throughout the year.

Sadly, the past year has seen so much grief and loss, and Friends in our Yearly Meeting were not immune to it. At our final business meeting, we shared memorial minutes of nine Friends who had died since the last Yearly Meeting. We mourn their loss, but take comfort in knowing that their spirit and legacy live on and that joy cometh with the morning. Friends were delighted to celebrate the births of two children into the Friends Meeting of Austin and one child into the Friends Meeting of New Orleans.

We were blessed to have 101+ SCYM Friends from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas registered this year. We welcomed 18 visitors from the Britain, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Pacific, Iowa (Conservative), Lake Erie, Southern Appalachian, and New York Yearly Meetings, as well as FGC, FCNL, and AFSC. Several unaffiliated Friends also entered our mix. We participated in fellowship at virtual dining tables, participated in worship sharing, and had virtual sing-alongs, campfires, and a family story-time. Friends also shared their individual talents with each other at the Variety Show. We marked Good Friday with a reading of the Passion of Jesus Christ from the Gospel. We continue to be thankful for the work of the Yearly Meeting Planning committee in organizing this event.

Karen Takemoto (Fayetteville Friends Meeting) clerked our business sessions, Howard Hawhee (Friends Meeting of Austin) served as associate clerk, and Jessica Arjet (Friends Meeting of Austin) recorded our minutes. We are especially grateful for Friend Karen, who kept us on task and on time, all the while maintaining her gentle Friendly spirit, shepherding us through our work.

In this strange blend, the latest tech of Zoom meetings connected Friends from our far-flung yearly meeting to conduct our work and be “together,” while we stayed safely at home in our own “caves.” Our spirits and our screens came together in community, yet we miss joining Friends at Greene Family Camp. We wholeheartedly look forward to our next in-person gathering, date uncertain, for our Easter weekend retreats in the sweet spring countryside of central Texas. God has richly blessed and ordained the work of the South Central Yearly Meeting. We continue to be in community with you, each other, and Friends all over the world as we work for that sacred time when peace may prevail on Earth and in the hearts and minds of all who inhabit it. Sandra Cronk once wrote, “Peace is a gift, but it does not come magically through our passivity. Only in our faithful response to God’s call do we receive God’s peace.”

Southeastern Yearly Meeting EPISTLE 2021

Greetings Friends,

Our Yearly Meeting Gathering has come at a time when it is needed most. The enthusiasm for being together was evident; Friends found such joy in being together again, even if it was on Zoom. Registration was as high as our in-person Gathering, with 149 adults and youth attending online events that were spread out over twelve days. We welcomed many visitors from other Yearly Meetings and Quaker organizations--- from New York to California.

After a year of pandemic, social isolation and upheaval, we came together as a Yearly Meeting community with the theme *'What Now?'* Over the last year, we have changed. We have become different people. We have lived through loss, isolation, and having our lives and our communities disrupted. But there has been positive change as well. Friends have used this time of separation and solitude for spiritual growth, for deepening their spiritual practices, and renewing the witness that grows out of our faith.

Our Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups are looking forward to re-opening---but how? In our Monthly Meeting Forum, we heard that in the last year of meeting on Zoom, meetings have gained new attenders and members, while losing touch with others and grieving the loss of dear members to COVID. Some Meetings are moving ahead with becoming 'hybrid' meetings; some wonder how many people their space will hold with social distancing; some have had small groups gathering for worship outdoors, and others are looking for new worship space. Can we view the disruptions we have experienced as opportunities to try something new?

In our two retreats, led by Emily Provance, we learned that we need to tell our stories of living through multiple crises - COVID, racism, climate change, the election and insurrection, economic inequality, misinformation - again and again to put them in perspective. In the first retreat, *'Interruptions,'* we broke into small groups to share our most vivid memories from the last year. In the second retreat, *'Integrations,'* in small groups we considered who we were 13 months ago, compared to who we are now. Emily cautioned us [that](#) 'we are starting to make decisions about life after the pandemic, and without reflection, we'll go back to the way we were.'

We also shared stories of our spiritual journeys during the pandemic in worship sharing and in *'Awakening from Spiritual Lethargy.'* Friends have taken the social isolation as an opportunity to adopt helpful spiritual practices and daily rituals, such as trying new things, mindfulness, gratitude, intentional keeping in touch and bringing joy to others, being in nature, prayer and meditation.

This last year we have witnessed an awakening to the profound effects that racism has had on our country and ourselves. Some Friends and Meetings have joined groups such as Black Lives Matter, the NAACP, and other organizations, and have also been engaged in learning and reflection on racism. We feel strengthened in our commitment to equity, justice, and becoming an anti-racist community. FCNL staff led an amazing workshop - *'F/friends Reckoning with Racism, Justice Reform, and Election Integrity'* - a comprehensive presentation covering the historical foundations of systemic racism, its current forms, FCNL's work, and what Friends can do about it. In *'Mirrors of Identity: Personal Reflections on Racial Experience,'* the Committee for Ministry on Racism created a safe place for all Friends to reflect together on their early memories and life experiences with race. In Affinity Groups, one for Black, Indigenous, & People

Of Color (BIPOC), and one for Friends of European descent, we shared our stories of racism and what actions we are taking to build an anti-racist society.

During this year of social isolation, Friends have taken the opportunity to become more connected with nature, deepening our sense of the need to protect her. We shared our memories and experiences of nature in All Ages Worship Sharing. The songs of birds in our backyards, shared over Zoom, brought the presence of nature into our morning worship. In *'What Now for Earthcare in SEYM,'* Friends heard about three critical issues in our region, and considered what actions we can take. There is a lot of enthusiasm to do more work together going forward.

In our plenaries and Executive Committee meetings, we learned that some committees have been able to meet online during the pandemic, while others have not. The Peace and Social Concerns committee, which meets monthly on Zoom, has seen an increase in participation. Our Field Secretary for Earthcare has been very active, with virtual visits to Meetings, giving presentations, and connecting with a myriad of Quaker organizations, environmental organizations, and interfaith groups. We were inspired by hearing the latest news from visiting representatives from AFSC, FCNL, FGC, and Quaker House. We adopted a minute, brought forward by the Committee for Ministry on Racism, to support the establishment of a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools. We also heard sad news that a member, who attended our YM many years ago, was arrested for sexual abuse of a minor. While we know of no incidents within our Yearly Meeting, we spent time carefully discerning how to respond to this news and care for any who may have been subject to abuse as children.

We celebrated being together with some light-hearted fun and fellowship with several intergenerational events, including Laughter Yoga, the Talent Show, Playback Theater, and Quaker Bakers. Audrey Greenhall, Bookstore Manager for FGC Quakerbooks, joined us to chat about books, and provided SEYM with a 'Virtual Booktable.' Two opportunities for open fellowship were also added to our schedule. Teens and Young Adults attended *'Who am I going to be?'*--- two sessions with Emily Provance --- where they had rich discussions about spiritual gifts, what they are, how to know what yours are, and how they work in community.

Being together in person is such a vital need for young people. Over this last year, our youth have felt disconnected. The Youth Committee is searching for ways to help them re-connect with our community, and is starting to plan in-person events that can be done safely.

Friends were deeply moved by the Walton Lecture, *'Interruption, Integration, Transfiguration,'* presented by Emily Provance. Emily spoke out of the silence on how people process and adapt to crises, change, and uncertainty; and she offered some 'next steps' in taking care of ourselves, our community, and society. Understanding the impact of what we've lived through this last year will take time to reflect and tell our stories. She talked about Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs,' and how we first need to care for ourselves and members of our community with food and rest, security and identity, friendship and love. Simple acts of love and kindness have tremendous power to overcome extremism and divisions in our society; but we cannot meet those who distrust us (and who we distrust) with empathy - we cannot love our enemies - if our own basic needs are not met.

What Now? A quote from the lecture speaks to our condition:

*"We're not called to be the people we were before;
we're called to be the people we are becoming."*

Epistle from The Swedish Society of Friends 71st Yearly Meeting, 14-16 May 2021.

This year, as in Fall of 2020, our Yearly Meeting took place on Zoom. The Yearly Meeting lasted for three days, with about 40 participants from the whole of Sweden.

The theme was *Our methods – Beautiful façade or strong foundation?*

Our Yearly meeting's pedagogue Julia Ryberg introduced the theme. She stated that a house is more than a façade and a foundation – it consists, as well, of walls, roof, interior and of those who live and act there, and of the culture they create. Our Society of Friends is a house, and it has a tradition that offers good spiritual nourishment and promotes peace. When the façade mirrors those load-bearing walls of life, walls that have survived more than 300 years, then the façade is beautiful and there is no contradiction between the façade and a solid foundation.

Of course, sometimes a house needs renovation and rebuilding – but do not touch those load-bearing walls. Julia also meant that we, in these challenging times, must let the society outside the Quaker community know more about our tradition. We need to offer humans practice sessions in listening in silence and then making themselves heard. We spoke with each other about our thoughts regarding the theme first in selected small groups, later in a plenary session.

Julia's presentation apparently offered different listeners to assimilate different messages, from the façade as a sign to our tradition being the solid foundation.

One Friend read aloud epistles written by other Yearly Meetings and began the first evening by reading the epistle from the EMES (European and Middle East Section) Yearly Meeting, where she had been a participant. That way, one might say that she returned to the old Quaker tradition, when the Quakers made themselves living epistles, or couriers from one Quaker meeting to another. Our Friend gave a historic and geographical background, explaining how the tradition of epistles had developed over the centuries. We were also told that the inclusion of the Middle East section was more important than ever, since members of the Quaker Meetings in Brummana (Lebanon) and

Ramallah (The occupied West Bank/Palestine) gave harrowing testimony about a situation created by lacerations from war and repression, but paradoxically also about hope.

Our time is characterized by seriously great challenges. We have the Climate crisis which connects with the Ecologic crisis. There is also the crisis, which is caused by increased weaponry, with or without nuclear weapons. We found out that Sweden is one of those countries, which last year increased their military spending the most.

But crisis can mean hope *and* possibilities, and such is the case even now.

We see a need to share our Quaker values and methods, externally but even internally.

We decided to make an overview, about how we can, and should, communicate internally and externally in this new age with its new technical possibilities, and it was determined to have a work group draw up a holistic approach.

As an example of reaching out with our Quaker values, we mentioned our work on trying to convince the Swedish government to sign the UN Resolution against Nuclear Weapons.

Two of our Friends gave a wide and deep overview of the crises and possibilities of our time. Among other topics, they emphasized the importance of three eco-words: economics, ecology, and ecumenism, which have identical language roots.

The focus on economics has served us well, but now it is time to emphasize ecology, the huge but precious fabric of life, and ecumenism which was highlighted with a quote from the Norwegian quaker P. I. Haukeland's book *Himmeljorden (The Heaven's Earth)*. This quote puts light on how we all belong to each other, and how we all relate to The Whole, making this relation more important than any wealth.

To Friends everywhere, greetings from Switzerland Yearly Meeting 2021!

With delight, on the weekend of 21st to 24th May, 17 Friends were able at last to gather again in the familiar idyllic surroundings of the Herzberg, high above Aarau and the swollen River Aare in the north of Switzerland, looking out, when the clouds lifted, as they did on Sunday afternoon, upon the eastern Alps.

We were also joined online by a number of Friends roughly equal to those physically present, including representatives of Britain, France, Germany, and Ireland Yearly Meetings, EMES, and a guest from South Africa. It was pointed out that while there were only four women present at the Herzberg, the online participants redressed the balance.

We were thankful to note that despite the ravages of Covid-19, none of our Meetings had suffered the death of a member since our last business meeting, and that indeed among Friends in Switzerland for all the hardship this pandemic has meant for many of us, only a few have fallen seriously ill.

We were joined at the Herzberg by Jonathan Woolley, who will retire late in 2021 after over ten years as Director of the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), Geneva, and Joachim Monkelbaan, QUNO Representative on Sustainable and Just Economic Systems. Other QUNO colleagues who joined by Zoom were Laurel Townhead, Representative for Human Rights and Refugees, and Lindsey Fielder Cook, Representative for the for Human Impacts of Climate Change.

The COVID-cancelled 2020 SYM had been meant to feature QUNO staff, so we were fortunate that they were again free on the traditional Pentecost weekend this year.

Jonathan and his colleagues presented their work, and also spoke of the QUNO Peace and Disarmament programme, with an emphasis on its grounding in Quaker thought and sense of right ordering. Our testimonies, and in particular the belief that there is that of God in everyone, have guided QUNO's approach to migration policy, the human rights impact of climate change, fair trade practices, and many other international issues. QUNO follows a process of discernment, starting with patient listening to different points of view, before deciding what role to play in facilitating international discussions. Agreements on major issues are only achieved when delegates think beyond their national interests to what would be better for the world at large. QUNO prioritizes this shift in thinking and as a non-governmental organisation is often more able to access and influence decision makers in international negotiations for this reason.

On Saturday morning Jonathan and Laurel gave examples of how the work of QUNO brings out the spiritual elements of international diplomacy, as expressed in a quotation from Duncan Wood, who with his wife Katharine ran QUNO for twenty-five years from the 1950s to the 1970s. *“If we believe in the necessity of worldwide institutions to meet the needs of the whole human family, we have a duty to support and encourage those who work [with] them....our task is essentially to demonstrate the spiritual dimension of international relations.”* (We were pleased that their daughter Rachel was among those who participated online.) Jonathan drew attention to two recent landmark international agreements to which QUNO staff's behind the scenes diplomacy contributed—Lindsey at the Paris climate summit of 2015 and Laurel at the Global Compact for Migration (2018).

On Saturday afternoon, Joachim described his successful advocacy for and innovative ways towards realising sustainable and just economic systems. On Sunday, like her colleagues, Lindsey gave us an insight into how, with quiet diplomacy in off-the-record meetings involving much listening and ensuring that all voices were heard, QUNO achieves remarkable progress.

We also heard news from our Meetings. All had undergone a great digital learning curve and were now looking forward to returning to in-person meetings. We hope to make good use in the future of our new digital competences.

Our prayerful wishes are with you and your meetings as we all emerge from the trials of recent months.

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

To All Friends Everywhere:

Earlier this year, every Monthly Meeting received the Wilmington Yearly Meeting State of Society queries, based on the Yearly Meeting theme of compassion through action. There were three queries:

1. How has God's compassion been present in your life, and in the life of your Meeting?
2. In what ways is your Meeting feeling called to put compassion into action, both within the Meeting, and in your community?
3. Recognizing the Light in others is an act of compassion. How do you give voice to that compassion—both in your Meeting and in your own life?

Throughout these sessions, we found ourselves considering the second query over and over, applied at the Yearly Meeting level: "In what ways is the Yearly Meeting called to put compassion into action, both within the Meeting, and in our community?"

We found this query to be especially relevant in the discussions we held on how Wilmington Yearly Meeting relates to Wilmington College—how we serve and are served by that relationship. As we considered a request to approve new Articles of Incorporation setting forth a new relationship between the College and the Yearly Meeting, we realized the questions we needed to answer were deeper than the wording of a legal document. What are the most compassionate actions we could take for the College, and for the Yearly Meeting? Unable to come to a resolution of these questions, we have committed over the next three months to a process for further consideration of our relationship to the College. We are especially committed to discernment about whether this is a ministry to which Wilmington Yearly Meeting is still called, and, if we are, in what ways.

An underlying concern for compassionate action was also expressed in our discussion and decision on the fate of our three Quarterly Meetings. We eventually came to a sense that the Quarterly Meeting, when it has been valuable to Friends for fellowship and spiritual formation, may continue. In other places, we are able to release Friends from an obligation which carries no spiritual uplift or encouragement. We have left it to each Quarter to decide whether they want to continue to meet to carry out the business traditionally assumed by Quarterly Meetings; or whether they want to suspend activities, and use new pathways that allow the Yearly Meeting to fulfill the functions that have belonged to Quarterly Meetings.

We discovered the same deeper concern for compassion in action in the proposal that the Yearly Meeting gather four times a year: Will these meetings be meaningful times of worship, fellowship, and encouragement? We approved the proposal hopefully, amid much discussion about how to make sure these gatherings serve our souls and our spiritual life.

Our long discussions on proposed new procedures and processes is, at a deeper level, a consideration of this year's third query: "Recognizing the Light in others is an act of compassion. How do you give voice to that compassion—both in your Meeting and in your own life?" The question of how we recognize and encourage the Light in others is intrinsically connected with the questions raised by new processes: what are the purpose and mission of our Yearly Meeting? Is it to fulfill all the functions ceded to us by history and our forebears? Is it to discover new missions and functions? Little by little, through our consideration of all our business, and not necessarily by approval of specific Task Force recommendations, we are moving toward centering our concerns around our present world, and not

obligations to the past. How will we use our energy? How will we conserve our energy? How will we make sure that we spend our time together on ministry work and spiritual discernment rather than on set forms and obligations? How will we call forth ministry from our gifts, rather than our numbers? Not necessarily intentionally, but inevitably, these questions became part of all our discussions.

Joyfully, we discovered we were able to change our framing as we discussed a proposal to hire a Yearly Meeting Youth Minister. Rather than considering the proposal as a wonderful idea that “we don’t have the resources to do,” we discovered that it is possible to look at the question while mindful of the resources we already have. In fact, we found it logistically difficult to even approve authorizing the Board on Youth and Young Adults to hire a youth minister—not out of a sense of fear, but because Friends were so quickly offering potential resources and funding avenues.

In our USFW lecture, FUM Belize Director Nikki Holland taught us that when the New Testament speaks of “salvation,” the Greek word being translated is often *sozo*—which means “to rescue,” but also, “to heal.” When we say that Christ is our Savior, we are claiming Christ as our Healer. When we pray for healing within and among Friends, we are praying for that which will bring them salvation in the here-and-now. Healing is the power of Christ’s compassion in action.

We experienced the healing power of Christ in two very specific ways this year. As we began and ended our business, we offered heartfelt prayers for the healing and encouragement of some of our members, specifically. And we ended our Ministry and Counsel session with a time of worship-sharing on our Covid experiences, individually and as Meetings, and our Covid griefs of being separated from people important to us. There are some among us for whom “compassion through action” is a call to do, and to move forward now. There are some others for whom “compassion through action” is a call to yet sit in the ashes of grief, letting our presence—to others and to ourselves—be our action. Throughout our sessions, we noticed the tiredness and disconnection that has come to us alongside this pandemic. We experienced collective despair as we realized that restrictions on church and group gatherings may be reinstated in the near future. We long to sit down with each other in body as well as spirit, and pray that it will become possible.

Our first State of Society query, referencing our Yearly Meeting theme, Matthew 25:35–40, noted that a compassionate God is revealed to us in these verses. We were asked to consider how God’s compassion has been present in the personal lives of Friends and in the lives of our meetings. What we found in our annual sessions, in business and worship-sharing and fellowship alike, is the depth to which we are held in God’s healing compassion. We were able to pray fervently for healing, to consider potentially healthier ways forward, and—even through our own confusion—to envision a future of wholeness and life, in which we are clearly able to match compassion and action.

We pray for that same blessing for you, Friends: that you will be seeking and finding healing, and faithfully living Christ’s call to compassion. We pray especially for you in this time of Covid-19, that you are well and that your Meetings and ministries are prospering in the Light.

In Christ’s Compassionate Love,

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

(Epistle Committee: Jonathan Goff, Dan Kasztelan, Julie Rudd)

Eighth month, First day, 2021.