

Compiled Epistles from Yearly Meetings and Gatherings

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Epistles can also be found on the FWCC website at https://fwcc.world/resources_cpt/epistles/

Alaska Friends Conference Annual Sessions 2024

Epistle to Friends Everywhere:

Undeterred by rain, 23 adults and 5 children gathered on site at Dickerson Friends Center, on the ancestral lands of the Dena'ina people, with another 8-10 attending online, including some from other states and one other country. We welcomed visiting Friends Johanna Jackson, Sayrah Namaste, JT Dorr-Bremme, Leticia Weber, and Elaine Emily. The theme of the gathering was, "Exploring What Alaska Friends Conference has to Say to the World."

Over the course of the weekend we reflected on the various ways that Spirit has moved among us and led us to action during the past year. This included a dynamic report from Alaskan Quakers Seeking Right Relationship (AQSR) describing relationships with Indigenous peoples in Southeast Alaska, Kotzebue, and Interior Alaska. In particular, Jan Bronson, Cathy Walling, and Scott Bell were invited to visit Kake, Alaska in January of this year for Kake Day. They were invited to offer the apology that was approved by AFC in 2022 concerning the harms done by Quaker-run boarding schools. The leadership of the Kake Tribe accepted our apology. They also accepted the donation of nearly \$95,000 that had been raised for the development of a Cultural Healing Center. (\$75,000 of this was donated by Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends; the remainder was donations from Friends in Alaska and other places.) At a later visit to Kake in July for Dog Salmon Festival, Jan and Cathy, accompanied Juulie Downs, a great granddaughter of a missionary to Kake, who returned cultural items to the tribe.

We heard an inspiring presentation from Sayrah Namaste from American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) regarding both her work accompanying Indigenous peoples in New Mexico and also the courageous work being done by AFSC staff in Gaza and Israel. A current program of AFSC, called "No Hunger Summer", provides food to children who receive food assistance during the school year. Currently there is no AFSC office in Alaska, and Sayrah encouraged Alaskan Friends to get involved, as we are one of several US States whose governors refused to accept federal funding for feeding children. She outlined how we could get involved through collecting signatures for a petition and contacting our Governor.

We spent some time considering reports from the Dickerson Project Committee, which oversees the day-to-day maintenance details of AFC's recently acquired 23 acres including Mahala Dickerson's home and garage apartment. At present there are renters in the home and apartment who generously contribute to the care and upkeep of the whole property. There is an expressed need for a vision for how this property might be used in the future, and steps were taken to revive the visioning committee. We were encouraged to take the time needed for this process, trusting that we will know when the time is right to act.

The Dickerson Cemetery Committee also gave a report about their work regarding the cemetery, which sits on the 11 acres associated with the Meeting House that Mahala donated to AFC. The Cemetery Committee queried those in attendance about possible next steps to plan for growth and provide direction for the cemetery. Much gratitude was expressed for the combined gifts of the adjacent Dickerson Project (23 acres and structures) and the Dickerson Friends Center (Meeting House, cemetery and 11 acres).

As part of the report from the representatives to Friends General Conference, Avis McClinton included the news that she spoke at the FGC Gathering about the 339 Manumissions and Beyond Project and as a result she received support from Earlham School of Religion. We felt joy at hearing the news about this important project.

Throughout the weekend, Tom Baring led the children in a variety of activities, including a natural science activity using a microscope. This led to a greater appreciation by all of us for the life within Ashley Lake.

In addition to reflecting on what Alaskan Friends have to say to the world, we spent some time with Elaine Emily about developing daily spiritual practices, and we experienced the joy of blessing and being blessed.

One visiting Friend said, “Despite your small size, you have an outsized impact on the world.”

Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri,
held at Sonninghill Hostel, Hamilton and online 24th – 27th April, 2024

"You have to look for the wonder, it will reveal itself". Jonathan Tailby (2020)

Kia ora koutou, greetings to Friends everywhere.

Yearly Meeting 2024 opened with worship as we gathered in the sunlight at Sonninghill Hostel joined online by Friends around the motu (country) and the world.

Our formal meeting followed a preparation day on the Theme of "Faith and Play: an experiential tool for spiritual reflection", which had led us into listening: moving out of the day-to-day bustle of everyday life and focusing on Quaker values, thoughts and history, as we prepared for Yearly Meeting.

We were welcomed to the Waikato, with acknowledgement of tangata whenua (indigenous people, the Tainui iwi) and a whakataukī (Māori proverb) of the Waikato River: "Waikato taniwharau, he piko he taniwha, he piko he taniwha." (Waikato of a hundred taniwha, on every bend a friendly taniwha.)

We were joined by Margaret Clark from Quakers Australia (online) and in person by Herrad Heselhaus, who represented Japan Yearly Meeting and as our visitor from the Asia West Pacific section of FWCC.

We celebrated with joy the Quaker Faith & Practice Revision Committee's completion of our new 2024 version "On These Islands: I runga i ngā motu nei". This was the culmination of two years of gathering new contributions, and discernment by the Committee and by Meetings across Aotearoa. It is an inspirational resource, in the Quaker tradition of 'continuing revelation'. While the work is done, it is not 'dusted' – it is up to us to "spread the dust" and the book around the motu.

The Website Oversight Committee shared their discernment of the options for us around our website and its functions: outreach, inreach and linked administrative document management systems. We are challenged to consider what we need as an organisation, and how we keep our foundations strong – balancing looking after ourselves so we can look after others. In a later session, we came together in open worship in Quaker tradition as we discerned the pathway forward for our electronic infrastructure and with careful discernment we supported the recommendation of the Committee.

Historical changes in our membership numbers and our capacity to maintain our major functions and enterprises remained a continuing theme of this yearly meeting. This reflects our aging population and the gap between numbers of available friends and our current expectations of ourselves in business and outreach.

This is not a new challenge but has become more pressing in recent times. We acknowledge the work of our committees to bridge this gap and look forward to future review of our level of activity. We appear to be at a pivotal point in time where decisions need to be made to ensure ongoing guardianship and sustainability of our major enterprises. We took comfort from the encouragement and support of our Australian Quaker whānau (family) who are in the process of reorganising their structures.

The 2024 Quaker Lecture: “A Queer Gift: Stepping beyond the mindset” – was presented by some of our Rainbow community who shared personal stories of struggles, courage, and joys. Although we may believe we do not suffer from prejudice, we were reminded that residues of prejudice remain within.

Climate justice is an ongoing concern from our Yearly Meetings and 2024 was no exception. In the context of governments and those in power we were encouraged to be strategic, innovative and joyful in an holistic approach to raising issues and advocacy on critical climate change issues.

A legend of the Quechua people from Peru was shared. It is about a hardworking and persistent hummingbird, though small, that continued to try to put out the forest fires, because to do nothing was not the answer.

In Peace and Friendship

Anne & Alistair Hall
Yearly Meeting Co-Clerks

Epistle from Australia Yearly Meeting 2024

From July 6th to 13th 2024 we gathered at West Beach, a suburb of Adelaide on Saint Vincent's Gulf, South Australia. We send greetings to Friends everywhere. We meet on Kurna land beside the white sands of Holdfast Bay, the eroding sand dunes held together by native plantings.

This was a hybrid meeting. We were able to gather together in-person in large numbers for the first time since 2019, to hug one another, to share a meal, sit talking across the table into the night. Friends came from all parts of Australia and beyond via car, train, plane, bicycle (perhaps) and ferry to be here, under the flight path of Adelaide Airport. Our technological skills have developed over the COVID-19 years and we are now able to include on-line Friends almost seamlessly with occasional blips.

The meeting was opened in Kurna language by the Kurna Elder, Uncle Rodney Midlah O'Brien who had to leave early to attend a NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) ceremony.

A wide variety of Friendly Schools was offered, some creative, some pacifist, some environmental, some spiritual. These themes were followed up by Share & Tell sessions. Some of these looked at nurturing our Society.

We heard in Bev Polzin's State of Society Address that even as we acknowledge the ageing of our members and the difficulties of filling roles, we rejoice that our use of technology has played a part in connecting each other across our big country. Isolated Meetings and Friends are brought into the centre. We express UBUNTU. 'I am because you are.' Following the disruptions of the pandemic we rebuild our community and grow from the challenges of COVID-19.

The theme of Australian Yearly Meeting 2024 is *Quakers in times of conflict and change*. We live in an 'Ocean of Darkness'. War and environmental catastrophe beset our world on every side. We were awestruck to learn how Friends are finding that Infinite Ocean of Light and Love within and are led to varied involvements in groups such as Friends Peace Teams, Raising Peace, World beyond War, Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), to name a few. We understand the importance of building partnerships and ultimately mass movements because we know we are a small Society and we cannot do it alone. We welcomed the newly employed Peacemaker, Jessica Morrison. The QPLC prepared a public statement focused on the following: First Nations' peoples, the climate emergency, Palestine/Israel, integrity, militarism and nuclear weapons.

The Australian Yearly Meeting endorsed The Climate Emergency and Species Extinction Working Group's travel guide and action plan. The CESEWG was established in 2021 for a two year term, later extended for another year. A new committee will be formed called 'Quakers Australia Earth Witness and Action Committee'. As the working group completes its task, they ask how the Regional Meetings and individual Friends will proceed with the implementation of this plan to reach wider society. This is the beginning, not the end, of this urgent work.

The 2024 Backhouse Lecture was presented on the birthday of James Backhouse by Jackie Leach-Scully, a bioethicist. The lecture was entitled *God's ways, not our ways: a dissident Quaker response to disability*. Jackie brings over 60 years of experience to her subject and 30 years as a disability activist. She asks the question: 'What might disability, difference and normality mean for Friends today?' as we enter a world where medical science now provides knowledge which allows us to decide who should be born and when they will die. We need to address the spiritual as well

as the moral and socio-political aspects of these questions. We are all limited, different and vulnerable, dependent on our communities.

We were lifted up to learn of the work of the Friends' School and to meet the new Principal, Esther Hill. She told us how Quaker values and practices are incorporated into the daily life at the school, addressing the prickly issue of privilege and the role of a private school to model a different kind of curriculum and do things that a government school could not attempt. We were pleased to hear of the large numbers of scholarships offered to children whose families who could otherwise not afford to send them to Friends' School. She was joined by Friends from the Quaker Values Committee and by some inspiring year 11 and 12 students who spoke lovingly about their school.

During the Meeting for Remembrance we were distracted by the flittering movement of a Willy Wagtail bird. Michael Leunig, an Australian poet, likens talking to God to talking to a bird. Attempts were made to encourage the bird to leave the room, but the bird could not find its way out until later. No one saw it leave.

On Wednesday afternoon we left the West Beach and travelled to destinations of Quaker interest around Adelaide. The Quaker opportunity Shop, which has been operating since the 1968, was a popular destination.

We heard about the ongoing work of Silver Wattle involving land care, sojourning and learning opportunities. We are grateful for the vision and the struggle of the founders of Silver Wattle and rejoice in the growing realisation of the dream to create a centre of learning and spiritual nourishment for our community.

Quaker Service Australia (QSA) has a new constitution and encouraged us to become members of the company and to donate to their projects to build positive peace.

We look around the meeting at the high proportion of white-haired Friends and we know we need to rebuild our young community. Young Friends and JYFs told us about their urgent need to meet in person regularly at AYM to build their own community and learn from older Friends. They want to remember cooling off in water fights as well as experience Quaker processes. We continue to discern the right timing of Yearly Meeting.

We were surprised by a visit from George Fox and some of the Valiant 60. and celebrated his 400th birthday with cake and singing the George Fox song. Later there was an enthusiastic concert.

'How can we make impactful action?' has been a reoccurring question and theme across this Meeting. What do we need to do now to continue to uphold our values of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and stewardship?

Baltimore Yearly Meeting
17100 Quaker Lane, Sandy Spring, MD 20860
Epistle Annual Session 2024

Greetings to Friends Everywhere:

The Hood College campus is a lovely place to nurture our Quaker community and do our Yearly Meeting business. The food is tasty and plentiful, the staff is welcoming, the dorm rooms are new and spacious, and the campus is compact. We welcomed many visiting Friends throughout the week. We enjoyed their presence and were enriched by their sharing.

BYM's retreat, led by Francisco Burgos, was rich with challenges. Participants were asked to notice when Spirit was challenging them individually, and recognize a collective call to each to be loving within this world as it is now. Participants were also invited to remember a time when they individually knew that Spirit was leading or speaking to them.

The youth were happy to be together. When asked what she liked best, one child, who looked to be about 8, quickly said "ice cream!" When asked what was second best, she said "games!" as she bounced up and down and smiled. Our youth program is small and growing; we still have not totally recovered from the pandemic.

The chapel's acoustics aren't great for business meeting, but they are marvelous for singing. A small group can sound like a great choir. For those who chose to sing – chanting around the morning queries or hymns after dinner - there was renewal from our time together. We had opportunities to deepen our faith through multiple worship settings. In addition to our periods of quiet worship around queries and meeting for business, we had the pleasure of participating in the vibrant worship sponsored by Friends Church of Baltimore. Also, we made space to recognize the Friends we lost in the last year, with remembrances of their ministry of availability.

All of this, along with the other morning groups and the cookie ministry of Right Relationship with Animals (a tradition of home-made vegan cookies), contributed to making a safe container in which we could openly share and be vulnerable, in both our business meetings and our evening programs.

There were several important highlights from our business sessions.

The camping program continues to grow and flourish. A beautiful video introduced us to Opequon Quaker Camp at Rolling Ridge. The campaign to fund the camp is going strong, and all Friends are invited to contribute to help complete our facilities at the new location.

The Indigenous Affairs committee shared their work to start a reparation process for the damage BYM Quakers did to the children of the Pawnee Nation. They have been in touch with leadership in the nation, written an apology, and proposed that we send \$20,000 over the course of two years to start to heal the harm we did when Quaker schooling deprived the children of their language, decimated their culture, and tore their families apart. An emotional and trauma-inflicting

discussion followed. It became clear that this was the first small step in potentially a much larger effort to compensate for a piece of the harm we did. We were reminded that we do not get to choose how reparation funds are spent; also, although we may desire to develop a personal relationship with those we've harmed, it is presumptuous to assume that friendship is possible.

This was followed by a moving presentation by Rania Maayeh, from Ramallah Friends School. She vividly described some of the horrors that are occurring in the West Bank and Gaza. And, she proudly shared how well the students at Ramallah are doing, despite the horrendous conditions in which they are currently living. The school has been a beacon of hope which nurtures the gifts and talents of the students and prepares them for the challenges of the world. The seniors all passed their International Baccalaureate exams this year, and most of them are going on to college.

Rania's presentation led the Peace and Social Concerns Committee to bring a minute to a business session for approval by the yearly meeting. Our clerk, Steph Bean, shared a concern that as we consider such minutes, we do so in a way that invites participation by the entire Yearly Meeting. Can this be done in a time-sensitive way? It was decided to send an immediate email to the entire Yearly Meeting with the proposed minute along with a minute on the Middle East approved at a called Interim Meeting in April; all were invited join the Sunday morning session. At that time, the minute was approved.

The wealth of projects being worked on by the yearly meeting has put an unacceptable amount of stress on both the staff and volunteers of the yearly meeting, which in turn is stress on the entire yearly meeting. A Friend reminded us that there are two empty positions due to lack of funding. How do we prioritize our resources going forward, so we wisely use our finances and wisely use the dedicated people working in the BYM office? We agreed that this is not a sustainable situation. The Trustees, the Supervisory Committee, and the Stewardship and Finance Committee will meet together to explore possible ways forward.

Our first night together we heard from three BYM Friends – Daquana Harrison, Ted Heck, and Zakee McGill - who shared their paths to activism in an open and vulnerable manner, which was very moving. They invited us to find our own paths. Chief Dennis "White Otter" Coker from the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware spoke to us on Wednesday evening. He opened with the Words Before all Words: The Thanksgiving Address. We were included as he asked us to say "and now are minds are one" after he mentioned each aspect of nature to be acknowledged and thanked. Chief Coker then spoke frequently about healing and honoring our Mother Earth every day. He also spoke about the excitement of reaching state recognition for the Lenapes, and the miracle that he is still on his homeland and practicing his culture.

The Thursday night intergenerational carnival was joyful and fun, as the children led their elders in play and lightness. This continued on Friday evening with the coffee house.

The Carey lecture completed our evening events. Francisco Burgos spoke on the topic "How does our faith respond to today's world?" He emphasized that love and justice are essential for our relationship to the divine, and our faith is a profound commitment to social justice. He also spoke about the importance of holding on to hope and caring for ourselves, so we can care for others, while we work on meaningful actions for transformation.

Epistle of Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting, 2nd to 4th May 2025

To Friends everywhere, greetings!

We met in the peaceful surroundings of Chant d'Oiseau, Brussels on Friday evening and felt welcomed into a safe place that allowed us to explore the theme of our Yearly Meeting, which was: "Freedom in a fearful world".

We welcomed representatives from the Yearly Meetings of Britain, Ireland, Germany, and also from FWCC, EMES and QUNO.

Any worries over unfamiliarity that we may have brought with us were quickly dissolved by the carefully planned friendly opening activities and the way in which our linguistic differences were attended to by giving translations, both spoken and written.

On Saturday, after a short Meeting for Worship, Antoinette Van Mossevelde, a teacher and engaged Christian who has worked in different parts of the world, told us of her rich experiences. She distinguished rational fear, which alerts us to real threats; and deep emotional fear, which can be used by the powers that be; and two different dimensions of freedom, both of which Jesus showed us: "freedom from" and "freedom for". We do well to be free from the restrictions of tradition and from inner conditioning; and thus free for the possibly unexpected actions to which the spirit leads us.

A mindful sharing session opened up space to speak of our fears, and the meditative movements of ZhiNeng Qigong helped our awareness of our mind-body-spirit relationship.

Friends from Ghent, part of our Yearly Meeting, introduced their active concern around our Peace Testimony. They wish to raise consciousness, and support others particularly in Eastern Europe, around such themes as freedom for conscientious objection. Different embodiments of the testimony were expressed, and new avenues for action were opened for future consideration. For example, "Walking the second mile" can be understood as more than just being patient or forgiving.

We participated in an activity called "Deep Democracy", which involved hearing many voices and perspectives. There was much lively conversation around how we might use this technique.

Later on, we experienced a session around "embodied worship sharing" practised in German Yearly Meeting. Seated silent worship was mixed in with gentle standing movements. This reminded us that we bring our bodies as well as our hearts and minds to our worship.

We leave with a renewed sense of the importance of embodiment for understanding both our fearfulness, and our freedom to act compassionately towards ourselves and other beings.

Signed: Jeremy Lester, Stefanie De Koker, Nick Rendle, Clerking Circle, 4th May 2025, Brussels
Submitted by epistle drafting committee: Simon Grant, Carmel O'Hara and Antoine Habiyambere.

BHOPAL YEARLY MEETING
AMEERGANJ SHAHJEHANABAD BHOPAL M.P.
INDIA

EPISTLE

Loving greetings to Friends everywhere. We gathered to gather with happiness for the Annual Meeting of Bhopal Yearly Meeting on 02nd Feb. 2025 in Friends Church Bhopal. We gathered 30 people, including Elders, adults, young adults and children. Friends met each other with a hope that our time together and our decision making be strong in the Quaker Spirit.

In the beginning, we remembered our members, who passed away during 2025 and FWCC Clarke Simon Lamb. Meeting started with reading of heart-warming greetings from FWCC, AWPS, EMES, Philadelphia Y.M. and many Friends individually. We appreciate and thanked them for holding us in the Light.

Our theme was UBUNTU. We came to the conclusion that we must work together for the peaceful world, supporting each other with love and care.

In our business meeting, officials and different committee members presented their reports and approved the activities for the year 2025.

It was happy moment, when new attenders of our meeting, were given the membership of Bhopal Yearly Meeting. New Members were welcomed by the Meeting.

Meeting was closed, thanking God's presence.

Ronald Titus



Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting

Held at Friends House, The Frontier Centre in Northamptonshire, and online from 23 to 26 May 2025

Dear Friends everywhere, we send you our love and greetings.

Gyfeillion annwyl ym mhobman, anfonwn atoch ein cariad a'n cyfarchion.

What is your message of peace for the world?

What brings you a sense of inner peace?

To explore these questions, around 1,000 Quakers met at Yearly Meeting this weekend as an all-age community. We are encouraged that for many this was their first time at Yearly Meeting. The contributions to our discernment from the thriving young people's programmes have lifted our hearts, as have the gurglings of the infant with us in our worship.

Recent Yearly Meetings have focused on Church Governance. We now see ways forward, as we develop structures that we trust will help our shared discernment. This year's agenda is firmly rooted in our historic peace testimony, and we have asked ourselves deep questions about what it means for us today. We have listened in hope, and have opened ourselves to new learning, trusting in the leadings of the Light.

We are reminded that the central message of the New Testament is one of love. We are called to challenge tyranny; and to love everyone, even those who do bad things.

This is an anxious time for the world, even more so now than when we met last year. We have been challenged to welcome, accept, and nurture the radical peacemaker in ourselves and in others. We have also explored how we, as Quakers, address violence and conflict in our communities.

To help our discernment, we have seen a film about the different ways in which Friends are called to bear witness to our Peace Testimony. We have also heard prepared ministry from a number of Friends, including those who have seen violence and oppression at first

hand while giving service in Palestine and Israel as human rights observers. Reflecting on what we hear and read about each day has inevitably stirred deep and painful emotions.

We have spent much time praying about the situation in Gaza. Quakers have a long tradition of speaking truth to power. We have done some heart-searching and some heart-breaking, and our discomfort contributed to deeply gathered worship. We have been moved by the Spirit to speak out. We urge Friends to read the full minute, which has been written in love for all those affected.

This year's Swarthmore Lecture, *A Testimony of Community*, has nourished our discernment. We have spent time in worship considering how we live together in our various communities; there are many things we might do to build peace within them. The work begins by finding peace within ourselves.

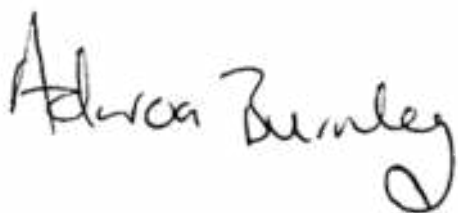
The promptings of love and truth in our hearts are pushing us to step outside our privilege, comfort and security. Can we do this in a spirit of adventure and joy? How radical can we be while retaining tenderness and not doing harm? We each have a different appetite and capability for radical peacemaking; we can all contribute.

We recognise that to secure lasting peace we must address the complex causes of conflict, including poverty and hunger, injustice and distrust, fear and disempowerment. To create a fairer world, we must get better at sharing. In doing this work we remember Jesus' advice to his disciples to be "as wise as serpents, as gentle as doves" (Matt 10:16).

As a final shared activity, many of us who were in London have taken advantage of being together to stand in silent worship around Friends House. We held signs which had messages of hope for world peace on the outside and hopes for personal peace on the inside.

This Yearly Meeting has been one of great joy at meeting each other in the spirit, deep sorrow at conflict in the world, and determination to live out our Quaker witness.

Signed in, and on behalf of, Yearly Meeting

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Adwoa Burnley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Adwoa" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and the surname "Burnley" follows it in a similar but slightly more compact style. The signature is positioned in the lower left area of the page.

Adwoa Burnley, Clerk.

Canadian Yearly Meeting Epistle July 2024

Loving greetings to Friends everywhere,

Laughter. Surprise! Delight. Challenges. Appreciation. Hope. Joy. Curiosity
Expectant Anticipation.
Careful Listening.
Deep Reflection.
New Insights (eureka!)
Shared Wisdom.
Pilgrims on a Journey.
Deep Connections.
Friends.

From July 24 to 31, 2024, Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) met for its annual session as a blended Meeting (online and in person) at Camp NeeKauNis in Waubesaushene, Ontario.

Bronson Black, who identifies as Metis, ceremonially opened the gathering in the way of his tradition, using a smudge of sweet grass and sage, fanned by an eagle feather, so that the gathering could go forward in a good way.

In addition to Friends who met at Camp NeeKauNis (116 attended in person 19 of whom were children—55 in cabins, 33 tenting, 10 in 4 trailers, and 18 offsite), there were 40 who joined online. At the public Sunderland P. Gardner lecture, the online attendance swelled to 90. The technology empowering the blended gathering was expertly managed by volunteers and staff.

We benefited from the updates to Camp NeeKauNis and the many hours of work ahead of time that allowed us to meet there. Our time together relied on volunteers for many tasks: dishwashing and meal set-up teams, the children's program, the Daily Quacker newsletter, Family Night host, and much more.

Friends attending in person held Meeting for Worship on benches and chairs facing the beauty of Sturgeon Bay. Friends participated in various online-only sessions, including daily Meeting for Worship. We were all able to join in Meeting for Worship for Business and other blended sessions, where online Friends were seen by those at Camp thanks to the large screens rented for the purpose. Friends online and in person shared an informal social time each evening.

"The Bible: How could this have happened?" series presented by Ben Bootsma followed the early history of Christianity, citing its origins in Judaism and the writings of the apostle Paul. The series dealt with the process and context by which selections were chosen for inclusion in the New Testament. The presentation explored the diversity of the early Christian communities, from the

Gnostics to the Christian communities in Greece and the region now known as Türkiye and even the varieties of opinion among early community leaders about who Jesus of Nazareth was.

As part of our daily Community Gathering, we learned one of Pete Seeger's last compositions, the song "Wonderful Friends," a powerful expression of the value and strength of community.

"When I think of the ways that I've grown,
I know I couldn't have made it alone
I owe a lot to the sharing, caring, daring
Wonderful friends that I've known."

When we sang "All God's Critters got a Place in the Choir," the youngest children quickly dropped their crayons and enthusiastically joined in, singing and clapping. Later, when the story of Eliza, a young enslaved person, was told, the crayons again dropped from their hands as they were drawn in by the power of the story.

During Community Gathering, we played the game, "Go Friends, Go," where Friends of all ages played musical chairs, moving if they had done or would do a certain activity or lifestyle choice that was consistent with living our Testimonies.

There were five versions of worship sharing: traditional worship sharing, worship study on our Bible Study series, as well as sacred chanting, meditative walking, and silent worship. Personal, heartfelt sharing during "The Movement of the Spirit in My Life" was deeply engaging.

At the first business meeting we approved the proposal to have a Clerks Table of 4 to 6 members to allow Friends at different life stages and experience levels to share the clerking tasks. We then approved 5 Friends willing to serve, one of whom at each session will be presiding clerk and one of whom will be recording clerk.

Presenting on behalf of Canadian Friends Service Committee, General Secretary Jennifer Preston chose to highlight one particular thread of the work. She explained the long and arduous process of challenging and aiding parliamentarians through quiet diplomacy, so that the Parliament of Canada would adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Establishing important relationships to make this happen involved Friends' circles, Indigenous allies, organizational coalitions, politicians, lawmakers, and international allies. She described the heartbreak of having a promising bill quashed at the last minute by a couple of filibustering senators. It took energy and resolve to move things forward, but finally a closely related bill was adopted by both Houses of Parliament, bringing the UN Declaration into Canadian Law in June 2021.

“Affinity Groups” were introduced this year as a way of bringing us together to share in small groups. They included groups titled “Gaza and Beyond”, “Channeling God?”, “Walking the Labyrinth”, “Who benefits from White Supremacy?”, “Nine Takeaways from Research on Near Death Experiences”, and “Quaker Earthcare Witness”. There were also Friends with an affinity to water who gathered at the lakeshore to swim, boat, and play under the supervision of four lifeguards (some of whom were Young Friends).

Margaret Slavin, in her Sunderland P. Gardner lecture “How to Walk Cheerfully?” told us that “Peace, too, takes courage.” George Fox’s own admonitions ranged from over-the-top shock treatments to something just pointed enough to prick the consciences of those he challenged. Margaret Slavin’s own travels in the ministry, reflections and gleanings rather than challenges, took her to almost every Quaker Meeting in Canada. Her lecture will be printed in a pamphlet in the Canadian Quaker Learning Series.

Two adult Friends, with their baby, came from Quaker Earthcare Witness to explain the work of this organization: helping individual Meetings to become carbon neutral, speaking out at international conferences, and funding small environmental initiatives.

Friends have long dreamed of holding our annual gathering at our own Camp NeeKaunis, but there was never a gathered momentum to make it a reality—until now. Many left after our week-long session with this dream: once it is Ontario’s turn again how soon can CYM Gathering meet at Camp NeeKauNis?

Throughout the gathering, both in person and online, Friends expressed heartfelt love and appreciation for the community that we are together.

Dear Friends all around the world,

Let me tell you a story about 50 Friends from 11 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, Ukraine, United Kingdom) and Australia. They met in the city of Budapest, Hungary and online to celebrate the first time they gathered from start to finish as the Central European Yearly Meeting. They even enjoyed some vegan birthday cake.

This story is about us, the youngest Quaker Yearly Meeting in Europe. We are basically newborns so we have the difficult task (and also the privilege) to define ourselves including membership procedures.

Ben Pink Dandelion gave a lecture about the key threads of the Quaker way and described what has changed over time and what has stayed the same. The following day we were encouraged to find answers in ourselves about what drew us to Quakerism, what could we do to deepen our spiritual life and what practical steps could lead us in this direction.

Kasia Kaczmarkiewicz shared with us a moving excerpt of her work regarding the archiving project about the nearly 30 year old history of Central European Gathering accompanied by a slideshow of photos from over the years. Tracey Martin from the Quaker Council for European Affairs gave us an interactive presentation about how they work, Irena Marušincová told us about her thesis regarding Feuerstein's method and we also had an interest group about the Image and Likeness of God. We did not forget to call attention to the climate emergency thanks to Arne Springorum and Pavel Marušinec.

We gathered for a two hour long Meeting for Worship, we had a silent walking worship and as every year we enjoyed singing together. One night a storyteller enchanted us with tales of Hungarian and other folklore.

We received greetings from Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation and Britain Yearly Meeting, Scotland General Meeting, Ireland Yearly Meeting, German Yearly Meeting as well as from distant individual Friends. We felt held in the Light by Friends spiritually supporting us from afar. We welcomed representatives from German Yearly Meeting and Britain Yearly Meeting. We are looking forward to seeing each other again next year in the Czech Republic (Litoměřice or Litomyšl), but even before that some of us will meet in Prague at our World Plenary Meeting Hub.

Stories accompany us during our whole life, we are living history at this very moment. CEYM started and grew strong as Border Meeting, Quaker Spring Regional Gathering, and Central European Gathering and we are grateful to the Friends who came before us. Now it is up to us to continue gathering and growing as Central European Yearly Meeting.

Greetings from the Cuban Quakers to all Quakers in the world.

United together from the 22nd to 25th day of second month in the year 2024 in the city of Gibara, Province of Holguin, Cuba, we have celebrated our 96th Annual Meeting.

Here on the northern coast of the immense Atlantic that borders the enormous rocks that are bathed by blue waters, amid this beauty rises a handsome pine tree that grew on its banks and has survived cyclones, tempests and here it is, alive because it has its roots among the rocks. Like the pine we have been whipped by material deficiencies, problems, exodus but our church remains sustained by the rock that is the Lord.

Aware that nothing nor nobody will be able to prevent the message of a full life and hope from being announced to the world: Our church, Quaker Friends in Cuba, will continue to be constant and faithful to the Christ of Glory. We are inspired by the text from Isaiah 60:1 "Arise and shine because the Light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen in you."

Amidst conferences, Bible studies, messages, work meetings, exchanges of ideas, important agreements have been made to sustain the work of the monthly meetings and missions. One of the most important moments was the recognition of the pastoral gifts of our sisters Yuliet Santi Fera and Adolfinia Núñez Muñiz and the ministerial gifts of Elina Aguilera Rodríguez.

A special service took place at night to give thanks for the life of our beloved pastor Julieta Pérez Pérez who in life was pastor and minister of this Yearly Meeting. In his tribute, her husband, the pastor and minister Heredio Santos Balmaseda expressed his gratitude to the brothers and sisters who, during the process of her illness, supported him with all that was necessary as much from the Yearly Meeting as from the monthly meetings of Banes and Miami. He bid farewell honoring her with these words: "Thank you for what you were, for what you are, and for what you will be in my life."

Near the close of our meeting, we saw with pleasure that four youths arose ready to do pastoral work where necessary committed to the great command of Jesus: Go into the world and preach the gospel to all people."

In other business, the Cuban Quaker Institute of Peace named a new board of directors to continue the training work and at the completion of Yearly Meeting Sessions the Alternatives to Violence Facilitator Training workshop will be held.

Our time together ended with us united in one sole idea: Exhort ourselves to move forward, in each moment remembering our Quaker principles of integrity, simplicity, humility and peace. As George Fox told us: Now the Lord God has opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the Light of Life.

In the Light,

Rosario Concepción Fernández

Lisdainy Rodríguez Fuentes

María Isabel Leyva C



Friends World Committee
for Consultation

EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

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Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting held

30 April and 8-11 May 2025

How do we live together as a community of Friends in Europe & the Middle East?

It seemed good to us, having come to one accord. Acts 15:25 (ESV)

To Friends everywhere, greetings:

Dear friends, annwyl cyfeillion, 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, дорогі друзі, дорогие друзья, kedves barátaim, drodzy przyjaciele, Shanovni Droozi, a chairde, Salamaat Asdiqa, ძვირფასო მეგობრებო!

The Annual Meeting of the Europe and Middle East Section of the Friends World Committee for Consultation sends you our greetings, light and love.

At the wonderful assembly in Warsaw and online, nearly 80 Friends gathered from the diverse FWCC EMES area from Austria, Belgium, Britain, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Ukraine, along with Friends from Kenya and the USA.

We come together as Friends, as individuals and as bridges. Our own histories and those of our countries and people live through us as we gather together to create a community for this weekend and for time to come. We are living in times of crisis and uncertainty in many parts of the world, yet we create together a model for how community can still thrive.

Emily Provance enlightened and moved us, speaking about Acts 15 as a story about discernment, and inspired us to look at what it means for a community to experience spiritual unity in the presence of big cultural and theological differences. We experience unity of purpose when we allow ourselves to be changed through listening for points of connection rather than for points of disagreement. Through this we can connect to that of God in everyone, get acquainted better, and encourage the inward light that could overcome even the deep darkness of suffering.

The wars in Ukraine and in Palestine have provided a heavy backdrop for our gathering; we feel deep grief for those who suffer, and we feel hope listening to stories of courage. We have heard of Friends within our section working to maintain the dignity and humanity of all people affected by war: those who fight and those who refuse; those free to stay true to their conscience and those

persecuted; those who stay and those who flee; those welcomed in new countries and those who are turned away. Our peace testimony requires us to act. We ask all Friends to lend their support in whatever way they can.

Many of our meetings are young with few Friends. As we heard about the Council of Jerusalem, following the leadings of our faith sometimes requires us to reconsider our customs - maintaining traditions of the past while also welcoming and accepting the new. In light of our commitment to simplicity, what accessible modern ways can we adopt to take care of proper Quaker process digitally and online?

Communication within any group of people is essential to establish strong relationships and we continue to explore how we can do that better to include more people. During many occasions of worship, we were asked to talk slowly and make pauses, that was helpful for deep and inspiring ministries, and we are grateful to our faithful interpreters for their help in understanding each other.

God speaks through every community and there is always a sense of the meeting. How do we listen and follow the leadings of the spirit? The bells ringing in the stillness, like the heavenly ringtone, call us to connect more deeply with the Divine and with each other.

In Friendship, mewn cyfeillgarwch, i vennskap, i vänskap, i venskab, ystävydessä, bien amicalement, in Freundschaft, in Vriendschap, en amistad, in amicizia, v přátelství, u priateľstvu, draudzībā, barāti üdvözlattel, sõpruses, w przyjaźni, Zi Droozhnim privitom, в дружбі, в дружбе, le cairdeas, fi alsadaqa, მეგობრული მოკითხვით.

Signed on behalf of FWCC Europe & Middle East Section
Ethel Livermore
Clerk FWCC-EMES



France Yearly Meeting Novembre 2024 at La Solitude, Martillac near Bordeaux

To Friends from around the world

France Yearly Meeting 2024 gathered in the Domaine de la Solitude (but not in solitude) in Martillac. To be welcomed into a religious community provided a setting that fostered a calm atmosphere, in an area of trees and vines with their autumnal colours. Our theme for this meeting was “Inner peace: going towards others in a spirit of peace and reconciliation.” Some 50 Friends came from all over France, but also from Switzerland, Belgium and the UK. Some Friends also joined us on Zoom. Sadly, there were no children present at the meeting because they needed to get back to school.

The meeting for worship which opened the meeting allowed us to apprehend this inner peace and to feel that it is the same experience of peace that we all have, and which links us together, even if this experience may be described in different terms. This experience of worship sharing gave us room to put into action the Quaker method of discernment, based on listening to others and to the Inner Light. We were able to see the extension of this worship sharing during the weekend, subsequent ministry being enriched by our discussions.

This inner peace is not a state, but a process which is not always easy to attain, but which can be cultivated. We were able to feel this peace in the words used during meeting for worship, a welcoming attitude to what everyone contributes but also in the body language, the calm voices which spoke distinctly, in turn.

The workshops about reconciliation and conflict resolution provided tools for bringing this peace to other people. For example, we were asked to reflect about what a Quaker can do during wartime. These workshops made us feel the difficulties we encounter when we get involved. They also helped us to discover how the collective enables solutions to emerge and to transform the world. We feel that there is a continuity between inner and outer peace, between individuals or between groups. These workshops showed just how indispensable communication, guided by love, is in resolving conflicts.

Even if attaining peace is a process in which we cannot control everything, to attain it we must make a commitment. Peace should not only be a feeling; it is also about taking action to help build this peace. These actions need not be perfect nor fully achieved, because peace can

come as a surprise, like an unexpected consequence of our involvement. However, it doesn't always occur, despite our actions.

These moments of shared peace bring hope and light in these troubled times. Like the pieces of a puzzle which don't apparently fit together, we can construct a unified image, common ground based on shared values and discernment. We also became aware just how much we inspired each other, whether it was during meeting for worship, the workshops, listening to everyone's experiences, but also during the impromptu worship at the end of our fête.

We hope that every Friend who reads this epistle and those Friends who were present during this Yearly Meeting may find while reading this an inner peace that they can bring to their entourage.

Epistle of the 94th German Yearly Meeting in Bonn, Haus Venusberg, 2024

What MOVES us, dear Friends everywhere,

Firstly, on the opening evening, the horrifying images of system collapse flickering across the screen. We flock into the main hall, having just greeted one another cheerfully, but now we take our seats, shocked and transfixed by burning forests, dead animals and destroyed houses. Looking away for even a moment: impossible!

The Young Friends, who have taken charge of preparing the theme of the 94th German Yearly Meeting, confront us with the existential threat to life on our planet. They want to give this fact the space it deserves – across the generations.

We 198 Friends, including many children, juniors and young adult Friends as well as guests and delegates from Belgium/Luxembourg, Great Britain, Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Central European Yearly Meeting, are facing serious changes. The Young Friends' contributions have been ambitiously woven into the very fabric of this Yearly Meeting: breaks for stretching and breathwork during the Cary Lecture, longer periods of silence during meals, experimental Meetings for Worship, space for feelings and emotions, blended participation and increased intergenerational exchange. Initial scepticism gives way to curiosity and respect. This has much to do with the lively way the Young Friends lead us into the Yearly Meeting, encouraging connection and participation by moving and singing together.

In their Richard L. Cary lecture entitled '***When everything is at stake – journeying as Friends in times of crisis***', Martin Höfflin-Glünkin and Dieter Müller-Nöhring express their personal co-responsibility for the multiple crises facing our planet and their consequences with unflinching honesty. Both share their 'holy terror' at their own failings, 'because the world looks very different from the 50th floor of the Westend Tower (in Frankfurt, ed.)' (Dieter). Martin takes us from our heads to our hearts by showing us the beauty and simultaneous vulnerability of the ecosystem using the example of the Mountain Alcon Blue butterfly (*Phengaris rebeli*). The lecture's central message: to see what is and – in the words of Thích Nhất Hạnh – 'hear within us the sound of the earth crying'. Dieter and Martin call on us to strengthen our relationships in the present in order to shape our future. The Inner Light can guide us on our 'wanderings through the desert' and give us the courage to leave the 'fleshpots of Egypt' behind us.

We seek resonance with one another in a new format – the Forum – in which we take part in parallel groups. Being witnessed without judgement, intense encounters and emotions held by the community. However, we realise we find it difficult to share our feelings and show our vulnerability. It is an experiment that met with a range of responses.

In various interest groups, we explore the pressing challenges of our time and our own attitude to them in through activism and through creative and artistic approaches. Our process also finds expression in the decision made in the Meeting for Worship for Business to support the Compass Collective's sailboat for sea rescue in the Mediterranean, initiated by our Friend Katja Tempel.

Despite our full agenda and the planned programme, the need to engage with the suffering and killing in Gaza, Israel and the Middle East becomes clear. After an intense, multifaceted exchange, the Meeting decides to support the call and statement of various international Quaker organisations on the Middle East conflict. A new working group is to be established to enable Friends to find their

own voice in response to this conflict, while doing justice to Germany's historically based position on and relationships to the parties involved.

In the spirit of inclusion, several cameras and microphones share the events in the hall live with Friends at home. The good image and sound quality means that those taking part digitally from a distance have a sense of true participation in the events in Bonn, including the reunions and emotions.

A MOVING Yearly Meeting comes to an end. After 8 years of successful planning and converting of our Quaker House, we are looking forward to welcoming Friends back to Bad Pyrmont next year and are glad to know that until then, our house will be filled with life in a rich variety of other ways.

Bonn, 3 November 2024

Anne Pommier (Clerk) and Stefan Mann (Clerk)

Translated with the help of DeepL.com (free version)

Great Plains Yearly Meeting - Epistle 2024

A Faithful Walk with God - 2 Corinthians 4:8-12

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying around in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who live are constantly being handed over to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.

The 117th Annual Session of Great Plains Yearly Meeting was held May 30-June 1, 2024 at Heartland Friends Meeting in Wichita, Kansas. God's goodness has been deeply felt and appreciated. As we met, whether in committee meetings, worship or over a meal together, Spirit was evident and known.

The fruits of Spirit were sweetly demonstrated in the relationships between Friends. Heartland Friends Meeting generously provided sacred space and hospitality that nurtured our gathering. Strong leadership from the clerk's table, workshops and committee work were beautifully prepared and appreciated. Friends were faithful when we gathered and settled into worship.

Not dwelling in the past but acknowledging God's work of healing in our lives, we felt Spirit's guidance as we labored on with the good tasks before us. Working in concert, we faithfully made decisions reflecting good stewardship of resources and support of our monthly meetings. We recognized with grateful hearts the foresight of ancestral Friends who set aside land and finances, giving faithfully for a vision of the future life and ministry of Great Plains Yearly Meeting. Spiritual nurture was encouraged through reports of visitation and a development of a year long plan to gather and discuss reflections on a book.

Hearts were touched and a call to prayer was inspired by workshops. Details were shared around the plight of our dear LGBTQ+ friends in Uganda those who care for their wellbeing. Awareness was heightened around the complexity of sharing the world's resources by the Right Sharing of World Resources representative.

As friends were remembered, stories told & songs sung, we experienced the comfort of God's mercy in a rich outpouring of Spirit among us.

We are reminded that in our journey of being formed and reformed by Christ's inward teaching, we will face troubles. Even as those challenges arise we trust we are provided with wisdom, strength, and joy to walk in step with Spirit and one another.

Our prayer for you is that you will be able to Trust in the Lord and to step out in Obedience.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Great Plains Yearly Meeting,
Sara Schribner, Clerk

Epistle to all Friends
From Intermountain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
Durango, Colorado / June 2024

To Friends Everywhere:

We send greetings from Intermountain Yearly Meeting (IMYM) at Fort Lewis College in southwestern Colorado. Here, on a mesa above the Animas River Valley, near the southern edge of the San Juan Mountains, we enjoyed alternating periods of rain and sun with some blustery winds in between. Being light on our feet and ready to change plans is a good practice in mountain weather, as it is when following the ways of the Spirit.

The indigenous traditions that are so deeply rooted in this region have much to teach us in this regard. This land is the ancestral land and territory of the Nuuchiu (Ute) people who were forcibly removed from most of their homeland by the United States Government. This land is also connected to the communal and ceremonial spaces of the Jicarilla Abache (Apache), Pueblos of New Mexico, Hopi Sinom (Hopi), and Diné (Navajo) Nations. It is important to acknowledge this setting because the dominant cultural narratives in this region have long been told without full recognition of its original residents who continue to inhabit and connect with this land.

It is also important to seek out opportunities for relationship and reconciliation with our indigenous neighbors. This year, some Friends paid a visit to the Kwiyaat Community Academy, a charter school in the Ute Mountain Ute town of Towaoc. Kwiyaat offers their students an innovative curriculum, which integrates Ute culture and language, and is deeply enhanced by the presence and participation of tribal elders. We are grateful for the ongoing opportunity to listen, learn and offer our support to this exciting project.

We were also grateful to hear from the Way Forward Working Group who have been listening to the needs of our yearly and monthly meetings and discerning a viable plan for their revitalization. We are not alone in facing issues like flagging attendance and an inability to fill volunteer positions. Nor are we the only religious community with concerns about the lack of young families attending our meetings and gatherings.

Barry Crossno, the General Secretary of Friends General Conference and our plenary speaker this year, helped us to understand the impact of various cultural developments on our monthly and yearly meetings. For example, most households with children have two working adults or a single working parent. Stagnant wages along with increasing household and healthcare costs over the last few decades have reduced discretionary income. Spare time is more precious. All of these circumstances make it harder for young families to attend meetings and gatherings. An awareness of the factors creating hardships for our young families relieved us of the illusion that the problems and challenges we face are ours alone or, for that matter, ours alone to fix.

The great poet Wendell Berry invites us to “practice resurrection” and perhaps that notion describes the process of bringing new life to our monthly and yearly meetings. Such a process begins with our life in the Spirit and, as Barry Crossno told us, that entails a willingness to surrender, to let go of old ideas as well as our egos. As much as we are able to do that, we can make room for the motion of love to heal and strengthen us. At our gathering this year, we set aside more time and space to worship together and, as always, we found connection and regeneration in that stillness and in our worship sharing circles.

It was clear that suggestions from the Way Forward Working Group were grounded in deep reflection and connection. They offered us many recommendations that felt like a Spirit-led map toward a more energetic yearly meeting. For example, they made several concrete suggestions to make it easier for young families to attend yearly meeting and to enhance their experience once they get here. Among them: create a youth and families advisory group to help build a vibrant and growing children’s program throughout the yearly meeting; second, strengthen our support, financially and otherwise, for childcare and for Youth Program Coordinators at the Gathering and throughout the year. While we continue to explore new ways of welcoming young families, we are so grateful for the continuing influence of those who are already part of our gathering.

The Way Forward Working Group left us feeling as though we have the means, under the guidance of the Spirit, to recognize the many strengths of our yearly meeting, while at the same time addressing our shortcomings. As Barry Crossno reminded us, any movement into a deeper relationship with the Spirit asks us to release our old leaves so that new growth may happen.

May we also find joy, as our children always do at yearly meeting, in playing together. This year, inspired by the final words of the Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer who was killed in a Gaza missile attack, some of us made and launched white kites into a very blue Colorado sky. We made and flew these kites holding the children of Gaza in our hearts as Refaat Alareer did in his final poem. In 1667, Isaac Penington imagined a peaceful and loving world in which we would help “one another up with a tender hand.” May it be so.

With Love and Gratitude,

Bruce Thron-Weber, Presiding Co-Clerk
For the Friends of Intermountain Yearly Meeting



IRELAND YEARLY MEETING

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Quaker House Dublin, Stocking Lane, Dublin, D16 V3F8

Phone/Answering – 01 4998003

e-mail – office@quakers.ie

To Friends Everywhere

It is with uplifted hearts and minds that we send our greetings from Ireland Yearly Meeting 2025. Given the theme of our gathering: 'A Learning Community', it was apt that Friends' School Lisburn, celebrating its 250th anniversary as a community of learners, should be the location for Friends from across Ireland and beyond, in person and online, to meet and share together.

James Nelson, who gave our Public Lecture on the subject 'Quakers, learning and education – using the future to rethink the present', reminded us that we are all teachers, and we are all learners. And, over the three days of our gathering, from 25th to 27th April, through listening, activity and discussion, we discovered just how much scope there really is for us to learn from each other.

That learning takes many different forms but what emerged over Yearly Meeting was a number of common threads. Listening to others' voices was seen as key. Michael Eccles, Executive Secretary of Friends World Committee for Consultation, Europe and Middle East Section, told us how over the course of a week's visit to the Friends' School in Ramallah it was by listening that trust was gradually built up and he was able to learn first hand of the devastating impact of the war in Gaza. There are fears over how children's education is being disrupted and Michael described the lengths that teachers go to in order to ensure that pupils have a safe learning environment.

The 2025 Swarthmore lecturer, Emily Provance, speaking from her 6 years' experience as a Travelling Friend demonstrated how the resolution of conflict surrounding a Kenyan woman accused of financial impropriety only took place after all involved had taken the time to listen to the woman's life story. Only by deep and long listening were understanding and a just resolution possible.

Shane Whelehan of Quaker Service illustrated the listening and collaboration the charity is involved in as it looks to develop service in North Belfast, using the voices in the local community to help discern where there is unmet need. In Geneva, the Quaker United Nations Office provides a space where Diplomats from many countries can engage in off the record over dinner conversations, listening and learning from each other in a quiet, non-judgemental space.

Over the course of the weekend, we were called upon to listen as well. We had asked representatives from the Quaker Schools in Ireland about what we could do to support their schools and in a practical session they identified a number of steps that we can take to support and promote the Quaker outreach that our schools provide. What we have learned through listening we now need to put into action.



IRELAND YEARLY MEETING

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Quaker House Dublin, Stocking Lane, Dublin, D16 V3F8

Phone/Answering – 01 4998003

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Our focus in our session with Alison Tarpey-Black from Britain Yearly Meeting was on how we can support our Meetings to thrive. We were uplifted listening to the positive story that Alison told, considering how we might make ourselves more visible and be more flexible in our practices to, for instance, attract young families who have so many calls on their time on a Sunday morning.

Alison reminded us that this period of global disruption really is the time to reach out to the many young people who are looking for answers and to show them that this is not the world that we wish them to inherit. The Society of Friends, she told us, is as unique today as it was 400 years ago; a group of both contemplation and action.

There was a large and vibrant gathering of Young Friends at Yearly Meeting and we were reminded of how much we can gain when we create space for their guidance and leadership. They prompted all of us to action with a Meeting for Worship for Movement and an interactive session in which we played games, got competitive, tried to collaborate, engaged in inspiring debate on topics from pacifism to the death penalty and simply had fun. Young Friends also led a candlelit Epilogue raingame on the first night. It was with delight that we partook in this shared exuberance!

As we listened and learned from each other, what was produced was a sense of encouragement and hope as we look forward. It was appropriate that James Nelson should have focused in his public lecture on how we think about the future. James suggested that the readiness to think differently as we look ahead opens each one of us to transformative learning, releasing us from our previous assumptions and freeing us all to think and act in new ways.

As a learning community we are guided by these words:

'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' John 8:31-32

Signed on behalf of Ireland Yearly Meeting,

William Haire, Clerk

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'William Haire'.

Elizabeth Dickson, Walsh, Assistant Clerk

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Elizabeth Dickson'.

Clodagh Davis, Assistant Clerk

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Clodagh Davis'.

Susie Harty, assistant in writing the Epistle

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Susie Harty'.

Website: www.quakers.ie

Facebook: QuakersIreland

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Instagram: quakersireland

Epistle 2024 from Quakers in Italy

Casa Cares, Reggello (Florence)

Dear Friends,

From Nov 8-10, 2024, Friends in Italy gathered in Reggello at Casa Cares, a manor house originally from the 15th century and, more recently after World War II, a former orphanage in the countryside near Florence. On Friday evening, five Friends shared their stories about their religious backgrounds before Quakerism. By phone, another Italian Friend shared his intention to apply for international membership, after having attended online Meetings for Worship and for Business for several months and having made contributions to the Quakers in Italy website. Lucia Biondelli shared the inclusive vision of the late Pier Cesare Bori for the Quaker community in Italy. Cecilia Clementel commemorated the memory of other departed Friends, whose lives testified to the Light through important reconciliation work between Israeli and Palestinian women and during the war in the former Yugoslavia.

On Saturday morning, Ethel Livermore from EMES led us to consider our theme of “answering that of God in every one.” A key reflection concerned the importance of recognising that of God in ourselves, in order to answer that of God in others, with the exchange of mutual blessings. Four friends of Friends from Florence joined in person for the day. By virtual connection, Joyce Steijn updated the group about the work of the Peace and Service Network with conscientious objectors from Russia and Ukraine, including the larger principles behind current events. Cecilia Clementel outlined the evolution of the Quaker Peace testimony in Britain as responses to two World Wars. The group reflected together in Worship Sharing on how to live out our Quaker Peace testimony, despite deep frustration and concern during such tragic times today. Saturday afternoon, a pacifist and friend of Friends from Pisa, Umberto Mugnaini, shared his research about historical connections between Italian pacifists and friends of Friends in Italy, one of whom had translated George Fox’s journal into Italian in the 1960s. After a short road trip through the hills on a sunny afternoon, a group of 8 women (Friends & friends) visited the Vallombrosa monastery, including a chapel and the monastic quarters from the 13th century. That evening, Andrea Guidotti led the group in some somber reflections about the thousands of deaths caused by the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

Early on Sunday, Clerk Jeannette Tien-Wei Law led Friends in some basic breathing exercises for mindfulness, as suggested by Thich Nhat Hanh, then in a time of prayer for personal and group concerns, including Lucia Biondelli’s upcoming work trip to Jerusalem. At the MFWFB attended by 3 more Friends online, the group reviewed the activities in community and in peace and service from the past year, since Annual Gathering 2023, with gratitude. For Annual Gathering 2025, the sense of the Meeting was to discuss and discern further details of dates and 3 possible venues at the next MFWFB on December 1st. This Epistle was read and approved after the Meeting for Worship for Business. Friends concluded the 2024 Annual Gathering of Quakers in Italy with silent worship, then final reflections under a circle of trees in the autumn sun, with renewed hope and vigor for the coming year.

In peace e Friendship,

Jeannette Tien-Wei Law

Clerk for M4W4Bs

Quakers in Italy

November 10, 2024

Dear Friends Worldwide,

Japan Yearly Meeting held its annual gathering on November 16-17, 2024, under the autumn sky at Tokyo Monthly Meeting. The theme was "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Thanks to Divine Providence, 40 of the 75 members attended (14 in person, 7 via Zoom, and 19 by proxy). AWPS General Secretary Adrian Glamorgan also attended. We are grateful that online technology enables us to communicate with members from various monthly meetings, transcending geographical barriers. We enjoyed sharing the fruits of our endeavors for Young Friends, education, peace and social justice.

In our Meeting for Business, we approved the 2024 activity and financial reports. Providing the Tokyo Hub for online participation in the FWCC World Plenary was a major highlight. The 2025 activity plan and budget proposal were also approved. In order to strengthen our regional connections, we decided to send two members to the AWPS Section Meeting in 2025.

In the first of two panel discussions, there was a status report from each monthly meeting on the theme of outreach, where we shared the joy of welcoming new members. Adrian gave us valuable advice on the spiritual process of outreach.

After dinner and fellowship, in the second discussion, Naomi Kamimura Backes gave a report on the FWCC World Plenary. She organized the Japan presentation at the Plenary, where each Friend drew a Chinese character that represents their idea of Quaker faith, and participants shared the thoughts that went into their selection. In total, 51 people contributed to this project.

At the Inazo Nitobe Memorial Lecture held after the general meeting, Yumiko Yokozeki, a member of Tokyo Monthly Meeting, spoke on the theme of "Peacebuilding: Learning from the Wisdom of Africa."

Throughout the gathering, we held in our hearts all the people around the world who are suffering from conflict, and prayed about how we can act for peace on earth.

Hiroko Koibuchi, Clerk
Japan Yearly Meeting
November 17, 2024



To Friends everywhere, who have received a faith and a relationship with Spirit as precious as ours:

Greetings from Lake Erie Yearly Meeting (LEYM).

On 6th Mo. 13, 2024, one hundred sixteen Friends of Michigan, Ohio, and Western Pennsylvania, along with visitors from other states, gathered in Ashland, Ohio, for our annual meeting. First, we acknowledged our present: new and returning Friends broke bread together and, in conversation, caught each other up on our own monthly meetings, personal lives, and news of absent Friends. From the beginning, the intentional planning of the program committee encouraged us to go beyond our familiar social circles.

Second, we acknowledged our past: we once again found ourselves on the campus of Ashland University, whose facilities provided a comfortable setting for Friends to learn together, commune with one another, and listen for Spirit's will. We also appreciated that we were by no means the first to benefit from this place, recognizing the Kaskaskia people, this region's first inhabitants.

We learned from our plenary presenter, Friend and singer Paulette Meier, how to practice an outpouring of Spirit—this year's theme—through plainsong and chants. Her practice of setting Spirit-imbued quotes from early Friends to a cappella chants had practical origins: when set to melodies, she found the task of remembering these words much easier. But, her practice soon grew into a meditative process itself. We experienced that, gathered in song, Friends' minds are in touch with their bodies; our spirits are bound to one another; and we feel connected to the wisdom of earlier Friends.

One of the many chants we were invited to sing in her plenary and subsequent workshop was excerpted from George Fox's Epistle #19:

"Keep within. And then they say, 'Look here or look there is Christ,' go not forth, for Christ is within you. And those who try to draw your minds away from the teaching inside you, are opposed to Christ. For the measure's and the light of God is within, and the pearl is within, though hidden." (1652)

Friends, we began each session of our worship with attention to business with an Epistle from yearly meetings the world over. Your words of news and of well-wishes inspired us as we looked within ourselves, asking how we can be a host to an outpouring of spirit.

We established a tradition of setting aside time to ask Spirit for LEYM's purpose in the next year. Admittedly, that's a big ask. But, through some structured sharing, we could discern the weightiest issues on our collective hearts.

Our concerns were diverse: for example, growing meetings expressed difficulty integrating new seekers into our practices of worship. Other meetings haven't seen much growth but were heartened that their community felt truly gathered.

Our session was graced by an abundance of volunteers, whose work caring for children, moving furniture, assisting in the dining hall, and countless other functions made this experience available to all Friends, across the spectra of age, ability, and experience.

Eleven young Friends attended. The older group visited the Ohio Reformatory museum, and our youngest Friends asked how we yield an outpouring of spirit from nature (and played together at every available moment). The compassion of our youth programming and childcare volunteers was palpable.

Friends, Lake Erie is energized. Our format and sense of purpose has been transformed by the Friends who do the Yearly Meeting's work, especially our outgoing Clerk. After our final night, celebrating the 400th birthday of George Fox, we hunger for more. We are filled with Spirit. And, we want you to feel its outpouring from our hearts.

Written for the sake of that Spirit who has moved through
The Epistle Committee:
Flo Friender,
Wink Covintree, &
Alexa Lake

Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Susan Loucks". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Susan Loucks,
Presiding Clerk

Ciudad Victoria Tamaulipas, May 5, 2024.

Epistle of the 46th General Meeting of the Friends in Mexico.

To all Friends everywhere:

We, the Ciudad Victoria Monthly Meeting, and the Mexico City Meeting, met in the absence of the San Nicolas Monthly Meeting, with our guests from Guatemala City, the Matamoros City Meeting, and the Pacific Yearly Meeting.

To consider the theme: Living the Spirit of Ubuntu, responding with hope to God's call to cherish creation and one another.

We come to the conclusion that Jesus is perfect, that one is not, but imperfectly we must do the best we can, today more than ever we must look for that of God in us, we must find the strength and wisdom to be able to act and to be able to empathize in community

The term Ubuntu comes from Africa and encapsulates the meaning of this gathering, to be for others. Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me", I am because we are, we take the challenge of taking care of our biosphere and being the gardeners of our Earth, working on a new theological interpretation on the subject.

We say goodbye in the light of our differences, together within our diversity for a common good, to learn and enrich our world.

In the light of God

Drafting Committee:

Juan Manuel de Ávila Pérez

Daniel Ulloa Garza

Hilda Martinez Hernandez



Monteverde Monthly Meeting of Friends

Asociación de los Amigos de Monteverde
Monteverde 5655, Costa Rica

June 9, 2024

Greetings to Friends everywhere.

Rainy season has just begun in Monteverde. The tropical night cloaks a woman walking along a rocky, mountain road. The heavens sparkle with myriad stars while fireflies twinkle in pastures and at the forest edge. Below the mountain top, lightning flashes. It's easy to feel spirit here. Many of those who have come and gone over the years call this place their spiritual home. Whether we are singing before Meeting for Worship or working our way through a long, difficult monthly meeting for business, spirit brings us together.

This year we shared the loss of beloved friends, Jean Stuckey, Carlos Guindon, Margaret Adleman, Mike West, and Manuel Mata. Jean was our librarian for many years and a main force behind Wassail, one of our Christmas traditions. Carlos was born and raised in Monteverde and was the first graduate of Monteverde Friends School to earn a Ph.D. Margaret brought the arts to Monteverde starting the first Monteverde Music Festival, staging musical productions at school and reading Shakespeare at her home every Thursday evening. Mike volunteered at Monteverde Friends School; his real generosity became known after his death. Manuel Mata's gentle spirit was known to many who enjoyed his talent as a builder in the community.

We celebrated the wedding of David Newswanger and Anara Sharzhuan which was shared on a video link with friends and family in Kazakhstan. We continue to delight in diversity.

The Meeting's devotion to the Monteverde Friends School remains true and steadfast. Even as the Meeting and the school rise to the challenges of a rapidly changing paradigm, together the Meeting seeks ways to bring Light to the School's needs. This interconnectedness continues to be a radiant beacon of love in the community. We trust "way will open" .

Peace and Social Concerns Committee continues its focus on learning, fundraising, and volunteering related to issues facing migrants who are passing through Costa Rica. Two trips were made to the Nicaraguan border crossing at Los Chiles, where students and Monteverde community members volunteered at the newly formed community center, Casa Esperanza. They helped with painting, gardening, cooking and distributing donated clothes and toiletries. Trying to bring a sense of normalcy to a chaotic and dangerous journey, students painted the nails of some of the migrants. One student, so moved by witnessing the need of a migrant woman, took off the shoes she was wearing and gave them to her.

The woman arrives at her cliff edge home, surrounded by forest, the *luciernagas* continue to blink on and off. Gratitude fills her for living in a peaceful country within a loving community and for the founders who made it possible.

“What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare.” W.H. Davies

The epistle committee:

Lucky Guindon

Harriet Joslin

Ran Smith

Judy Witt



NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS QUAKERS

2024 General Epistle

To Friends Everywhere,

Grace and peace to you, in the love that flows from the Holy One who longs to help us know and live our unity with our human kindred and with all Creation!

New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends gathered for its 364th annual meeting at Castleton, Vermont, and by video conference, from August 2nd through 7th, 2024. We acknowledge with humility and gratitude that we met on Ndakinna (n-DAH-kee-NAH), homeland of the Abenaki peoples. It was a joy to hear from Jorge Luis Reyna, presiding clerk of Cuba Yearly Meeting and to have the presence of Cuban Friends by video conference.

As we came together, we were acutely aware that our world is in turmoil. Armed conflicts in Israel/Palestine, Ukraine, Sudan, and other places are inflicting fear and suffering on millions. Oppressive regimes burden millions more. As climate change accelerates, we live with grief because of the wounds to the natural world that we love. As our days together unfolded, the sometimes-stormy weather in Castleton reflected these impacts of climate change, which have resulted in recent disastrous flooding here, especially in the “Northeast Kingdom” of Vermont, where we have beloved Friends.

We acknowledge our participation in many of the world’s crises, such as climate change, political polarization, and the continued effects of white supremacy. There has been turmoil within our yearly meeting as well, as differences have arisen on many points, for example during our discernment about the creation of a new meeting. We have felt the need to strengthen our capacity for conflict response.

Yet we affirm the joy and consolation of our community in the Spirit, within New England and beyond. We are glad to see our Friends new and old, and as we have centered together in worship, we are glad also to welcome the evidence of God’s work within and among us. The One who speaks, Creator-Sets-Free, is our steadfast companion, whose guidance we listen for, and whose love we strive to embody, however incompletely. When we accept that we are loved, we are strengthened to address our conflicts and our complicity in the ills of our society.

Our Bible Half Hour speaker, Genna Ulrich, of Portland Friends Meeting, reminded us how important it is to accept one another fully, even one who at first does not seem to belong, like John the Baptizer, clothed in unshorn camel-hide and eating locusts and honey. In being able to do this, we reflect in our measure the radical way that God accepts and loves each of us. Our experience of this love allows us to better hear the Good News and change our purpose to better align with the divine ordering, the Gospel Order.

Our plenary speaker, Lloyd Lee Wilson, of Friendship Friends Meeting, North Carolina YM(C), reminded us of the many, sometimes wordless, ways that the Divine speaks to us. He described his experience of the “spirituality of subtraction,” a practice by which we find ourselves gradually freed from distracting habits and unexamined assumptions. This makes it easier to hear the messages we are given by the One who speaks, God-With-Us, even if we are led in ways we do not at first understand.

We also were reminded that faithfulness to the leadings we are given, even when we see no great effects, is humble participation in Christ’s ministry of reconciliation. In our time together, sharing reports of our experiences of the Spirit’s gifts has given us courage and led us to see the many ways in which we need to grow in the love and power of the divine life if we are to respond, in our measure, to the challenges before us, within our community as well as in the world.

We continue our efforts to understand ways in which we enact the patterns of oppression that express the values of the culture in which we are embedded, a culture which places differential values on humans, the children of God, according to race or gender expression, class, education, or age. We long to be perfect in love, as Jesus calls us to be, and to respond humbly to others, but we remain beginners, apprentices in the school of the spirit that is Quakerism, struggling to apply the lessons of love, even with those near to us, where trust and forgiveness ought to be in richest supply.

The work of repairing relationships with those we have harmed is even more challenging and requires greater humility. For example, this year we heard from Friends who presented a report on the complicity of New England Yearly Meeting in the great harms inflicted by the so-called Indian Boarding Schools. The report found that New England Friends were deeply, directly, and intimately involved in the creation and material sustenance of these assimilating boarding schools and the policies that drove and justified them. We encouraged the reporting Friends to continue their work and explore what next steps we may take as way opens.

We have come to recognize that many structures and practices in our meetings at every level must be renewed or transformed if they are to help us listen to the Spirit and act in faithfulness. We hope to listen more to young and old, newcomers and old-timers, to tend their seeds of Spirit and encourage the use of their gifts. Such changes in practice and habit are unsettling, and can bring conflict. Experimental living in community requires patience, forbearance, and the healing flashes of divine humor as we try and fail, improvise and revise.

We can know that we are walking with the Guide by the growing beauty and freedom of the way we are led, the fearlessness with which we love and act, the growing scope of our gratitude. Not all at once will we come to maturity in that Spirit; not all at once will we acknowledge where we have fallen short, or be able truly to forgive or accept our need for forgiveness. Genna Ulrich reminded us of Jesus’ teaching that only God is good, and challenged us to avoid the easy assumption that because we’re Quakers, we are “good people”—rather than examining our actual behaviors and effects in the world.

But we are reminded this week that the blessings we have—among them our children, our friends, the abundant Creation, and the resources of the Quaker way—are bread for the journey, deriving from the divine Seed whom we cherish so dearly. Knowing this, the call and the need for radical transformation are invitations to meaning, and to joy. We recall with hope God's prophetic assertion: *I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?* (Isaiah 43:19 NRSV). Alleluia!

Yours In Faith and Love,

New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "M. Rebecca Leuchak". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rebecca Leuchak, Presiding Clerk



Epistle from New York Yearly Meeting

approved by the NYYM Friends gathered at Summer Sessions 2024

To all Friends everywhere,

Friends gathered at Oakwood Friends School and over Zoom for the 2024 New York Yearly Meeting Summer Sessions to ask the question: "Where is the love?"

With great joy, we felt love in intergenerational play; in deep, worshipful spaces; and in fresh approaches to spiritual exploration. Love shone through tearful smiles as we remembered beloved Friends.

Interwoven with our joy was conflict and challenge. Old and ongoing wounds around othering were revealed. Pain rippled through the body. Love was present and tested.

We hope for commitment to listen faithfully and hold each other across differences. We have much to learn from looking into the depths of the shadow with humility. Conflict offers potential to move us forward in community. May Spirit show us the Way.

In Friendship, we close, continuing to travel a path towards action and insight, as yet unforeseen.

We include with this letter the epistle from Junior Yearly Meeting, lovingly received.

2024 Epistle from Junior Yearly Meeting

AKA JYM, the youth program at NYYM Summer Sessions

Our JYM Epistle this year is an advertisement for Summer Sessions. We are advertising to those who have not come about how awesome it is

to be here. We chose this format so other kids can hear from those of us who were here about why to come, instead of something written for them by adults. And we are excited for our Epistle to be an official report to the yearly meeting, included as part of the whole community here at Oakwood.

Our Epistle is a large pink poster with some of the many activities we did this week. Activities listed are; "What are you doing?", "Sparkling Yoda", blindfold game, reverse charades, kickball, Frisbee, volleyball, cornhole, soccer, art, and slip 'n' slide. Presentations including; learning about the faulty prison system with King from AFSC, talking about food and water security with Emma, and meditation with Abby. Other fun things were; Karl the dog, contra dance, swimming field trip, spontaneous singing, Fun(d) Fair, bonfire, the coolest lounge, movie nights, and Café Night. Our snacks were: goldfish, pretzels, popcorn, cheese puffs, yogurt covered animal crackers, fruit snacks, freeze pops, fresh out of the oven cookies, ice cream, lemonade, watermelon, honey covered pretzels, and classic fresh cool nice clean pure amazing smooth brisk straight from the fountain refreshingly delicious Karl-approved... WATER!

*Side effects may include: extensive laughter, loss of voice, fatigue from fun, and intense joy.

A Note About the Minutes

The minutes from Summer Sessions business meetings are almost final (waiting on a couple of missing items) and will be made available as soon as they are complete.

Friends Church of North Carolina Annual Sessions, 8/9-10/2024
Quaker Lake Camp and Conference Center, Guilford County, Climax, NC
Epistle to Friends Everywhere

To Friends Everywhere,

Friends Church of North Carolina met August 9-10, 2024, at Quaker Lake Camp, with 22 meetings represented. Our seventh annual sessions, this was the third where joyful pockets of reunion and fellowship could be heard in at least three languages.

Our superintendent, **Mike Wall**, presented some sobering statistics about dwindling membership, trends that indicate some monthly meetings will not exist as soon as 2035. We have the same Savior we've always had, but the church model is changing, whether it be through technology or building congregations in more populated areas. When George Fox saw a great people to be gathered, none of them were Quakers — Quakers hadn't been invented, yet. Mike challenged us to find God's vision for each local meeting, as well as for our greater group.

We were encouraged by the ministry and missions reports, given by enthusiastic servants of Christ. Missions that we support are growing and need more space, from East Africa to Belize. Members of FCNC-affiliated and preparatory meetings, **Odre Nuevo** in Yadkin County (Spanish-speaking) and **Baltimore Friends** (Kenyan immigrants), infuse fresh vitality into our group. Quaker Lake had more campers than last year. Two of our young people attended Kaleo Academy for young leaders at Barclay College. Several pastors are under care of the Recording Committee.

Our guest speaker, **Samuel Vasquez** of **Iglesia Evangelica Amigos de Mexico** (North Mexico Yearly Meeting), shared the story of his call to be a pastor in a small, rural town. Every place, job, and situation had its lessons to prepare him for his life's work. His children have grown and now serve the Lord in other cities far away, but God has sent new people to serve in the church. Samuel said, **"When you're doing what the Lord wants you to do, the Lord provides everything."**

At the memorial service, **Georgianne Hartline** shared that the stones that were on the tables remind us how past members have had a ripple effect like pebbles thrown into a pond, and how we need to make our ripple effects on others around us. Workshop speakers continued the challenge, from reaching young fathers with activities outside of "church" to examining our traditions through the lens of our mission.

Music lifted our spirits. One of the lyrics was, **"I can't ... but I know a Man who can."**

As some congregations are shrinking, it can be tempting to shrink our view, grasping for whatever is "ours." But we have an awesome Lord and we need to share Him with the world. It is in looking outward, beyond ourselves, that our vision grows and God replenishes us from His endless vision and uncountable blessings.

Prepared by Elizabeth Saunders, Southern Quarter.
Read and Approved 8/10/2024, at FCNC Annual Sessions, Climax, NC, **Roger Holt**, Clerk

Friends Church of North Carolina (FCNC) "*Friends Obedient to Christ and United to Serve*"

Mailing Address: **P. O. Box 4240, ARCHDALE, NC 27263**

Email: **clerk@friendschurchnc.org**

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Facebook Page: **<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsChurchNC>**

North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative)
PO Box 4591, Greensboro, NC 27404
ncymc.clerks@gmail.com

To Friends Everywhere,

Greetings! We joyfully gathered together from the 10th to the 14th of Seventh Month, 2024 for our 327th annual session during the hot days of midsummer on the campus of Guilford College, built on land previously cared for and claimed, at various times, by the Keyauwee, Saura, and Saponi Peoples. We were accompanied by several cherished Friends online as well.

It is good to share with you how the Spirit is working among us. We have considered the role of outreach, and heard from visitors that we have something to share. However, as a body we are not always clear on how to do that. Perhaps this was evidenced by an initial hesitance of Friends to step forward to write this epistle. But we continue this practice both because we very much want to share the life of our Meeting with you, and because we appreciate the historical importance of epistles in the life of Friends: this is an important way for later generations to know about our experiences and concerns.

Our theme this year was "Kinship with All Creation." In a variety of ways, we have explored how God is manifest in the natural world, and what is our proper relationship with that world. Marguerite Dingman led our Bible class. She traced the traditional Western attitude that nature exists merely for human exploitation and destruction back to the creation story in Genesis in which Adam and Eve were given dominion over the plants, animals and earth – even though other, more positive attitudes can also be seen in Genesis, Job, and other scriptures. She also pointed out the ways in which earthly powers and interests influenced even choices in Biblical translation (for example, translating *logos* as "the Word" rather than "the Conversation") in ways that shut us off from understanding God as manifest in our relationships with others and with the natural world. But early Friends felt they had discovered a way back to the Garden in which all is one.

In keeping with our theme, our plenary talk on Sixth Day evening was given by Dr. Randy Woodley, a Native American thinker and leader in the fields of Indigenous and Intercultural Studies, Ecology, Spirituality, Race, Theology and Mission. Dr. Woodley shared with us his experience as an Indigenous theologian who does not consider himself a Christian, even though he feels he is a follower of Jesus. He emphasized that belief as an abstract thing – as a notion separated from practice – is empty, and no basis for true religion. He has lived and researched Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices, and finds in them a tendency to – in different ways – seek harmony and balance both among humans, and between humans and the natural world. Through numerous stories and reflections, he shared with us how Indigenous practices helped him see the importance of listening to others, respecting their stories, valuing community and seeing oneself as part of Creation.

We had two other evening sessions. In further keeping with our theme of “Kinship with All Creation,” Darlene Stanley and Nan Bowles led “Encountering the Sacred in Nature,” a time focused on encountering the Divine in nature, and how being in nature has healed and taught us. Friends shared many stories of their experiences of these encounters. Michael Misenheimer & Susan Wilson led a worship sharing on “Do Quakers Still Quake?” We had a rich experience of listening to one another and giving voice to the inward motions of feeling and sensation we experience when the Spirit is prompting us. We also enjoyed afternoon sessions on “Early Quaker Spirituality,” led by David Johnson, and on a new program of the School of the Spirit, “God’s Promise Fulfilled: Embodying and Encountering Grace in the Shadow of Empire,” led by Joann Neuroth.

We were joined by visitors from many monthly and yearly meetings, some as far away as Australia. Their presence enriched our sessions greatly.

As is our practice, each business session grew out of, and closed with, waiting worship. During business sessions, Emma Condori from Holiness Friends Yearly Meeting in Bolivia spoke about her concern for the indigenous people in Bolivia and how they have been affected by climate change, especially lately through drought. Guilford College president Kyle Farmbry shared with us that, while they are facing the same problems faced by all small colleges recently, enrollments are up for the past couple of years. As always, monthly meeting State of the Meeting reports were read in the face of the

Meeting, as were the monthly meeting responses to the relatively new queries we adopted recently. In this way, we share the condition and concerns of each monthly meeting, so that we can each serve as a source of support and accountability for one another.

These days we have had together – learning, sharing, doing business and simply being in each other's presence – have been precious. We were further delighted by the presence of children and youth of all ages. Their program included a tour of a local history museum, swimming, bowling and simply hanging out and playing games. They joined the adults for some activities as well.

Our time at annual sessions has been not only useful, but centering and restorative. We welcome you to join us at our sessions in 2025 if way opens.

On behalf of North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Michelle Downey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michelle" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Downey".

Michelle Downey, Clerk

To Friends Everywhere

Norway Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) were gathered for their 206th annual gathering, 28th to 30th of 6th month, 2024 at Fana Folk High School in Bergen. We were 37 participants, and in addition there were 6 guests on the Saturday. And there was time in our schedule for Quaker Service Norway to hold their annual meeting in the same place.

Some early arrivals had the opportunity to participate in a “Forest Immersion” in the beautiful surroundings as a help to open their connection to all creation. According to tradition, our programme also included other opportunities for contact with nature, and many took walks in the surroundings and visited the local botanical garden and arboretum.

We wished to celebrate the 400th birthday of George Fox, and Arnstein Finset gave the lecture, **1624 – 1824 – 2024: On George Fox, Hans Nielsen Hauge, and on us, Friends who live in the present time.** He broadened our perspectives by sharing glimpses of the two historical persons, in their ages, and following some of the threads into the present time. He shared his image of Fox’ experience of the following terms: religious experience, elements of faith, use of silence, and Quaker values. Unlike many classical mystics who tended to withdraw from “the World”, Fox typically found inspiration for action from his mystical openings. Fox saw the scriptures as spirit led traditions which we need guidance from the Spirit to comprehend, whereas Hans Nielsen Hauge, whose death in 1824 is also commemorated this year, had a Lutheran understanding of the Bible as the final Word of God. Hauge was afraid to be seen as a “pious dreamer” and remained in his Lutheran Church. Those of us who live in the modern, liberal Quaker tradition as “rediscovered” by Rufus Jones, like to use the terms used by George Fox, though in modern usage they may not have exactly the same meaning as they had to Fox.

We treasure the terms ‘that of God in everyone’, ‘the Light’, and the hope that ‘the silence opens for leadings from God’ as we have come to understand them. In one interest group Friends explored similar words and expressions from the Fox-anthology *Truth of the Heart*. In another interest group on current work on Norwegian *Queries and Advices*, we worked in smaller groups to explore how we may find our own words to express life-changing religious experiences. We struggle with texts and terms which hardly convey what we want to say. In a process for revision of *Queries and Advices* we expect to continue the search for both the right language and scope.

Our religious experiences as Quakers hold a richness which is difficult to describe but which represents our reality. Arnstein Finset quoted Tomas Tranströmer’s paraphrase on some words by Jewish philosopher Simone Weil, which spoke to us: “In the silence we experience something which we cannot fully imagine nor understand, but which is not an illusion.”

The Clerk opened our first business session by reading from no. 2.3 in our Norwegian *Faith and Practice* about the Quaker business method, how we wait together, in the Light, to discern what may be the right way forward. We remain open, listening, while also sharing our own view. Then the process may give us a shared understanding of reality. Our fellowship has again replenished us with gratitude and joy.

Bergen, 30th day of 6th month, 2024

Lara Marie Wik
Clerk, Norway Yearly Meeting

To Friends Everywhere from Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends 2024

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. Jer 29:11-13

Who would have imagined, not so long ago, that there would be a screen on the wall behind the facing benches of this old meetinghouse, projecting the names and faces of Friends in many places, some older members unable to be with us in person, some new seekers drawn to worship with us from all over the world, blessings known until recently only in the mind of God. As we engage in the delightful struggle to come into unity across our seemingly vast distances and differences, we are discovering that Jesus' promise to be in the midst of us whenever two or three are gathered in His Name is not conditioned on any barrier other than the openness of our minds and hearts toward one another and our yearning for His Love and Truth.

We grapple with the technology, which slows us down and makes many of us uncomfortable at times. Zoom may be useful with outreach, there is a work going on, but there is also vulnerability. Inviting our Lord's 'Kingdom of Heaven' in and among us is our deepest need. All these things are given by the Holy Spirit. It takes courage for us to worship and believe the way we do, soaking in the direct experience with the Holy Spirit. Acknowledging that there is one God, above all, through all & in us all, we are not ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1:16) We have a responsibility to those who sit in silence but do not know how to wait or listen to the God of the universe. Some may feel a leading from the living Word, but not know what to do with a felt motion from the Lord. As we sit quietly together, we may reach beyond our human wisdom to hear the One True Voice of God speaking to us and we feel the cleansing heavenly water of Spiritual Life. We experience a more powerful inward quickening Life when gathering as one body in Christ Jesus. We even find our natural, earthly desires and individual opinions melted into a unity in Spirit in the Heavenly realm. An intelligence beyond imagining, Water and Bread that feeds the soul, Strength and Wisdom provided as our individual selves are woven into the Living Body of Christ.

In our worship we give ourselves to the inward work, feeling for the Presence among us while seeking to lay all our busy concerns in the restfulness of God's care for us. We wait until that blessing of melting love is given and we feel the oneness of the Creator drawing us into healed oneness with each other.

This treasure of unity is a gift we can forget in a moment, when issues are difficult, minds are unsettled, and we can become attached to our own perceptions. We have a humble part to play in preserving our body; as we wrestle daily with the temptation to feel distanced, offended or angry. In true fellowship with one another, we find Christ is at hand and able to restore the sensed love among us. Forgiveness, and daily return to unity seems to be our work, which the Weaver enables for the unseen creation of wholeness.

A constant spontaneous joy this year are the encounters we see "around the edges" of worship time and business, with close conversations, sharing and counsel engaging friends old and new, visitors from other meetings, and guests in person and online.

The worldly pleasures that are so fleeting, pale in comparison to the Heavenly Joys that are everlasting and grow stronger as we share them freely through our love for one another.

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths" Proverbs 3:6

For Ohio Yearly Meeting,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Charles Thomas, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Charles Thomas, Jr, Clerk

Epistle from the Oxford Young Adult Friends Gathering, 3/2025

Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

To Friends everywhere, greetings in the Love that draws us together.

Oxford (UK) young adult Friends gathered from 15-16th 3rd Month (March) 2025 at Wallingford Meeting House to listen together to our Guide. We thank Wallingford Friends for their generosity and warm welcome. In times of worship, conversation, rest, and discernment, we felt new willingness to be led, to name and exercise our gifts, and to support each other to live faithfully. Our hearts were softened, our ears were opened to our Teacher, and our eyes were made more able to see God's loving hand in our lives and community.

As we met in worship, with the early spring sunshine streaming in through the windows of the meeting house, the sweet power of the Spirit helped us come into the slower rhythms of grace, where we can hear and rely on the Guide's voice. We heard a call to the peace of abiding in the Vine, the source of our faithful work in the world. We must allow ourselves to be pruned so that we can bear the fruit we are called to bear. We are called, not to lives of busyness, but to give over our own willing and running; resting in the Presence, the tasks that are truly ours come into view, and as God has God's way with us, we find that our lives are given new depth and new meaning.

We reflected together on where we see the gifts and leadings of the Spirit in our lives and in each other's lives. We considered how we can encourage each other to sing, in our own ways, the song we hear God singing. We were reminded of the value of friendships in which we can ask each other how God is working in our lives. We felt the need to nurture each other into nurturing each other. There are many gifts in our community, and by appreciating the gifts God is giving us, we can become more willing to live adventurously.

In a living meeting, we need elders: spiritual midwives with a sensitivity to the conditions of Friends and meetings. We need gospel ministers willing to bravely and vulnerably speak the words they are given. We need the gift of care that enables us to see more in others than they see in themselves. These gifts are given for the good of our community, so it is our responsibility to help each other deepen in them. We feel a concern to invite Friends into this deepening work.

We are comforted to know there is a lasting Power that can join us to each other, whoever we are, however we find our way to Friends. We heard a call to offer fellowship to those in our midst who may not yet know our ways, whom we may not yet know, but who are reached by the love we feel for each other. Can we challenge ourselves to open our doors and hearts more widely, allowing ourselves to be helped and changed by this? Are we listening for the new life the Living Teacher is calling us into?

We have enjoyed time with each other, recognized each other's gifts, and strengthened our bonds of friendship. We will carry from this place the love we have for each other and our meeting. We

have felt close to many who were with us in spirit, aware that our Precious Friend rejoices in our unity.

As we have encountered the Presence in this meeting house, like many Friends before us, we have witnessed the thread of Living Fire that runs from the prophets to the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ at Pentecost to the early Friends who found Jesus living in their hearts. That Fire has not gone out. It will not go out. We young adult Friends seek to know this Fire for ourselves, in our time. We have found it roaring here. This gives us hope for the future of our Religious Society. We have gathered around this Fire in worship, and we plan to leave it burning.

Oxford (UK) Young Adult Friends
3rd Month 2025

Epistle of the 78th Annual Session. Theme: Transformation
Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Greetings to Friends everywhere from Pacific Yearly Meeting's annual session. We met at Whittier College, located in the ancestral homeland of the Gabrielino/Tongva people.

Several Friends appreciated the privilege of being shown the archives of John Greenleaf Whittier and Pacific Yearly Meeting by the archivist. We honored George Fox's 400th birthday on Sunday 21 July. We sang "the George Fox song" in English and in Spanish.

While some activities were held solely on-site or online, many were in hybrid format, including Meetings for Worship and Plenary sessions. Participants came from Mexico and Guatemala, Scotland, the states of California, Nevada, Hawaii, and several other parts of the United States.

Quaker Elders have been attentive to the movement of Spirit among us throughout the gathering. The presentation on the theme of Transformation by the keynote speaker who goes by the name of ,O illustrated the interconnections among us. Transformation is part of life. ,O showed the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly within the cocoon and a peanut plant growing from seed and producing new seed, both of them to illustrate the astonishing energy and potential within each of us. A Friend offering Ministry reflected on her paradoxical feelings: that each of us can feel both like a miracle and utterly insignificant. We heard part of the Epistle from Switzerland Yearly Meeting, that mentioned Ubuntu, a concept from South Africa, meaning approximately "I am what I am because we all are", which connected to one of the messages of the keynote.

Interest and affinity groups covered a wide range of themes including Friends of Color; White Anti-Racist Allies; LGBTQIA+; the 12-Step Program; Rewilding our Souls; the Guatemala Scholarship Program and the Mexico City Casa de los Amigos; the Roots For Peace Project; Reconsidering our Advices and Queries; End-of-life Issues; The Role of Grandparents; Restorative Somatic Practice; Support for Indigenous Concerns; Chaplaincy in the Police Department; Updates from the Friends Committee on National Legislation, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Friends World Committee for Consultation and the Quaker Institute for the Future. An evening film presented the frightening history of plastics.

After a plenary presentation by AFSC, we entered a heart-felt and difficult discernment over our response to the terrible situation in Gaza. Working in the evening with a draft on Gaza, Israel and the Palestinians, prepared by Peace and Social Concerns Committee, after many conversations, we were able to return the next morning to Spirit and approved a minute of concern.

Worship-sharing groups explored a sequence of queries moving from our experience of transformation, to our connection with spirit, to our experience of meeting for worship and the Quaker community, and back to transformation, both in our own lives and our influence on the world. Groups also met to study the Bible and early Quaker Writings, and to discuss theology and how each of us experiences the presence of God in our lives.

In worship, a Friend reminded us that redwood trees, even with shallow root systems and tall trunks, are protected from strong winds by growing in communities. Beyond physical support, they communicate their needs, and redistribute water or nutrients through intertwined underground

systems of roots and mycelial networks towards a tree that is suffering. Forest ecosystems are a symbol of what we aspire to as a Quaker community; We live and thrive with each other's support, connected in spirit and body.

We agreed on the formation of an ad-hoc working group on Transformation, considering what changes may be needed in our committee structure, and indeed all aspects of how we meet and carry out our work and witness. (We recognized, with humor, the irony of forming yet another committee to address the lack of people to serve on committees within our existing committee structure.) Some recent examples show how we struggle to fill the roster of positions, overloading some who serve. In our worship for business, the Treasurer stated a need for transformation in our budgetary process, saying: "We cannot continuously decrease our resources."

Pacific Yearly Meeting is grateful for the presence of young people this year, with their unique gifts and roles. We rightly invest in their participation with financial support (the Yearly Meeting covers all participation costs for people through 18 years of age, and offers reduced costs for Young Adult Friends, or YAFs), but also through our relationships and encouragement. Annual Session was blessed by the presence of babies and children, who were frequently seen playing with, or being held by, some of the 26 teens in Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) and 25 YAFs. As young people in our unprogrammed meeting follow Spirit and think for themselves, some may not choose to continue a traditional Quaker practice; others shape the ongoing growth and form of our community. It is notable how many young people have chosen to be here and spend time together. All Ages offer essential gifts of service, ministry and friendship. Older Friends, too, remind themselves of the perspective they bring, and the work they are still called to do.

One Friend commented, "Quakers are not where Quakers come from." That is, many Friends come to the Quaker Community, not by upbringing, but by conviction. How can our Quaker communities be open and findable by those from other walks of life who may be inspired by Quaker values, and become convinced Friends?

In the Meeting for Memorials, we celebrated the lives of Friends who passed away this last year. We all were deeply moved by the loss of a young friend who took their own life. We wrestle with how to communicate honestly, with transparency and sensitivity; to break the silence, to speak of and share the burden of this heartbreaking reality. As ,O reminded us in their keynote address, what happens to one of us impacts us all.

The next morning, we celebrated and welcomed four babies in Meeting for Worship. Throughout the gathering, we enjoyed the presence of the youngest members of our community, reminding us of the blessing of new life in the world.

Considering transformation within Pacific Yearly Meeting, what do we nurture, and what do we let go? How do we discern what, when, and how? In what ways do we resist or accept changes—those that are likely, or sudden, or unexpected? Some unexpected changes can be exciting. Are we ready to respond with joy and meet change with grace? Therein lies transformation.

Piedmont Friends—Yearly Meeting & Fellowship
Epistle
Second Annual Session, Sixth Month, 2024

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

Piedmont Friends-Yearly Meeting & Fellowship, commonly known as Piedmont Friends, held its 2024 retreat and annual sessions May 31 to June 2 with both virtual and in-person participation.

For the Friday evening gathering, we met over Zoom and introduced ourselves by responding to the question, “What gives you joy and hope?” Afterward, Friends responded to a series of queries that opened our hearts and prepared us to further engage in the theme of the annual retreat: How are Friends Called to Respond in These Tumultuous Times? We enjoyed getting to know each other at a deeper level.

Approximately 70 Friends gathered on Saturday, June 1, on the Guilford College campus for the second annual meeting of Piedmont Friends-Yearly Meeting & Fellowship. Upon arrival, we greeted Friends, old and new, and enjoyed a bountiful table of delicious breakfast foods brought by those led to share in this way. The day was warm and sunny, the campus green and inviting. We settled into a full day of worship, conversation, reflection and activity with a sense of joy in being together.

Our plenary speaker, Amelia Kegan from the Friends Committee on National Legislation spoke on the essential role of people of faith in a time marked by war, the rise of white nationalism and authoritarianism, and climate catastrophes. Amelia recounted a passage from Mark 4, in which Jesus and his disciples were in a ship. A great storm arose while Jesus was sleeping, and the disciples were frightened. They called out, “Carest thou not that we perish?” Amelia stated that the disciples were not so much doubtful of Jesus’ power to calm the storm, but fearful that he was unaware of their plight. She encouraged us to be faithful in reaching out to others, in our own and other communities, where people may feel forgotten, offering caring and companionship to those who are marginalized, disenfranchised, and in need. Comparing this moment to the 200-mile mark of a 250-mile race she ran, where conversation with another runner kept her awake and alert, she encouraged us to keep each other awake as we move forward.

Before lunch, Friends were encouraged to learn about Quaker Call to Action-NC, an initiative inviting Friends—both individuals and meetings—throughout North Carolina to discern how to be engaged in protecting the election and strengthening democracy. Kyle Farmbry, President of Guilford College, welcomed us to the lovely campus with strong Quaker roots.

After lunch, many Friends participated in one of the following activities: a walk through the Quaker Woods to enjoy nature’s beauty and learn more about how African Americans supported each other in the underground railroad, guided by James Shields; conversation and handwork in the friendly handcraft circle; and browsing tables of

books, Quaker organizations, and a George Fox literature display. Other Friends found chairs under a shade tree to rest and opportunities to be in fellowship.

The clerking committee assembled Friends in the afternoon for the second annual session. The names of Native American tribes who had lived on meeting house grounds were read as part of the roll call of the 16 Piedmont Friends member meetings and worship group. We experienced a tender silence as the names of those Friends who had passed during the past year were also read.

We welcomed reports from representatives of Quaker organizations and committees carrying out our vision in the wider world.

Clerks acknowledged with gratitude the individual Spiritual State of the Meeting reports provided by nine member meetings. Common themes became the core of the Spiritual State of the Meeting Report: joy in returning to in-person worship and other gatherings; appreciation for the technology that kept Friends together and currently widens our outreach; appreciation for the unifying power of worship; the welcome many meetings have extended to families and young children; service to address social injustice in local communities and the wider world; and challenges faced as meetings grow toward being anti-racist faith communities.

Friends engaged in thoughtful discernment regarding the recommendation that Piedmont Friends become a signatory to the Vision Statement for Peace in Palestine and Israel. Discernment included the concern that Friends consider how we as monthly meetings might further the work envisioned in the statement and “own” the statement. Clearness was reached to become a signatory, with an understanding that Piedmont Friends will continue to carry the concern for peace in the region of Palestine and Israel.

As the day drew to a close, we recognized the 400th anniversary of George Fox’s birth by listening to inspirational excerpts from his writings. In reflection upon our time together, Friends spoke of much we were grateful for, including the following: our childcare coordinator, who provided programming for young Friends; the care taken to conduct the annual gathering in a zero-waste manner; the wisdom and guidance of the clerking committee. Other Friends expressed appreciation for the challenging ideas brought by our plenary speaker, the opportunity to sing songs of freedom, and the abundance of good food and fellowship. We celebrated how Piedmont Friends has matured during our short time as a unified organization. Friends concluded the annual session with worship and left the beautiful Guilford College campus with full hearts.

Friends gathered by zoom for worship on the next day. Friends joined in worship from their homes as well as their meetinghouses. The worship ended with appreciation for all who made the annual retreat joyful, rich and centering.

Shared in peace,

Marian Beane, Nancy Riemer, John Shuford

Clerking Committee, Piedmont Friends-Yearly Meeting & Fellowship

Epistle of the All Poland Gathering, November 8th 2024

Dear Friends,

The 2024 All Poland Gathering was held in Nikiszowiec, a historic district of Katowice. The meeting was attended by 16 Friends, including guests from the Czech Republic, Germany and the UK. Also among us was Konstancja, who intends to describe the Quaker meeting from an ethnological perspective. We are curiously subjecting ourselves to this experiment. Thank you for the greetings from EMES, from Friends from Sweden and those from Poland who could not be with us.

We were prompted to pay more attention to the essence of Quakerism than to its form by Pavel Marušinec's lecture. It dealt with Quaker practice and the meaning of Silence, what is in, behind or underneath it, which Friends sometimes take years to arrive at. During the discussion after the lecture, we shared personal perspectives, difficulties and discoveries. We also addressed the topic of membership, considering what made us join the Religious Society of Friends or what keeps us from doing so. We heard stories of Friends in which the words identity, belonging, home were repeated. We also saw a photo report from a trip to remembered and forgotten Quaker places. A short presentation about FWCC EMES emphasized that we are part of a larger whole, and showed what activities we can still engage in.

We also heard a report on the activities of the "Podró nych ugo ci " Association, to which last year we donated funds from the Lyna Atterburra bequest to help migrants and support humanitarian activities on the Polish-Belarusian border. During the meeting, we listened to Saad and Abdelhalim's stories about how, using their own immigrant experiences, they support the Association's work. Their joint activities are helping to create a multicultural relief environment.

During the convention, we also shared knowledge and skills related to fiber crafts. We learned black embroidery and knitting. It was an opportunity to focus on the value of detail and movement awareness. We also visited old mining settlements that combine historical beauty and modern life: Nikiszowiec and Giszowiec. We may remember these places from the films of Kazimierz Kutz.

The time spent together among friends was an opportunity to exchange experiences, learn about different perspectives on spiritual matters. We shared the hardships and joys we experienced during this year. We look forward to the next meeting of Polish Friends in 2025 in Gdańsk.

EPISTLE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF QUAKER COUNCIL FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS NOVEMBER 2024

Dear Friends

Greetings from Quaker House in Brussels where QCEA's General Assembly (GA) has met over 15-16 November 2024.

Yearly meeting representatives and alternates, funding support group representatives, the Executive Committee and representatives from EMES and EMEYF, together with the Staff team, gathered together. We welcomed new members and QCEA staff. In opening worship, hearing words from Joanna Macy, we were encouraged 'to be absolutely present'.

Our third workshop with Sarah Diedro Jordão on anti-racism and anti-oppressive behaviour started with a summary of the two previous sessions and then in small groups we considered what we can do to improve diversity, both in QCEA and also in our own communities and meetings. The recognition of the dominance of English was clear and became a theme throughout the two days. We look forward to including an agenda item at future General Assemblies in another European language, and to learning from those in our community who already have more focus on translation and interpreting in their meetings. We ask Yearly Meetings to consider diversity when nominating Friends for GA.

In the Friday evening session, we also talked about the need for effective induction of new GA members with possibly the introduction of a buddy system. There could also be a pre-GA forum to pose questions and maybe help those of us who are nervous of talking in public. We appointed a working group to consider all the suggestions and to bring proposals back to future GAs. The Friday evening session ended with a reading from the Epistle of the 2024 Friends World Plenary during Epilogue.

On Saturday morning Tracey Martin, QCEA Director, gave us an update on the work done by QCEA staff at a time of flux and political hardening following the June 2024 European elections. She started by telling us of staff changes and welcoming Celina Bebenek our new Communications and Programmes officer, who brings to us her knowledge also on Conscientious Objection. On climate justice and peace, Alice Privey stressed the importance of emphasising a socially just transition for all within the EU priorities. We affirm the need to hear the voices of people from the global south as real agents and not just as tokens. To this end one of QCEA's actions has been to publish stories about communities most affected by militarism and the climate crisis. Maybritt Lyck-Bowen told us of her work in finishing the Migration and Peace Handbook started by Saskia Basa and we look forward to its publication and launch early in 2025. In all this work, an important focus for QCEA is using our Quaker experience in promoting dialogue especially in more polarised political and social contexts.

While we will not be going into full partnership with American Friends Service Committee, through Tracey's work, QCEA is planning to offer on the ground support when African peacebuilders come to the EU in 2025. There will also be a joint QCEA and QPSW conference in June 2025 on the theme Faith in Action in an Age of Permacrisis.

Looking forward, there will be a new Strategy Working Group to consider our vision from 2026 to 2031 and further ahead. In the current very unstable world and taking into account

our own limited finances we need also to extend this vision further into the future. GA members will be involved in small groups to feed into this work.

We ended our Assembly with dinner in Quaker House. A time of relaxation and building community.

In Friendship

Quaker Council for European Affairs
16 November 2024

Epistle from the South Central Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends
2024 Annual Sessions
3rd month, 24th through 31st days, 2024

Warmest greetings of peace and goodwill to our beloved Friends everywhere,

“It is a good year for bluebonnets.” With wildflowers blooming and nestled in breezy, lush rolling hills, Friends from Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas met in Bruceville, Texas, for the 2024 Annual Sessions of South Central Yearly Meeting. We met on unceded Waco, Tonkawa, and Kickapoo lands, acknowledging and calling to mind the atrocities and injustices that Indigenous peoples faced as a result of the actions of white settlers. We realize that we have reaped benefits, directly or indirectly, from these historic abuses and systemic exploitation of those who cared for God’s creation long before us. Many in our Yearly Meeting are active in working to establish right relationships with Indigenous peoples, and we applaud these efforts.

We gathered for a week of worship, fellowship, learning, and growing around the theme “Being a Quaker Today: Nurturing Our Soul, Brightening Our Light, and Acting on Our Faith.” During the early part of the week when Friends gathered online, we reconnected with each other, shared in social time, worship sharing, and a workshop session. There seems to be greater sense of connectedness among Friends in this post-COVID era, fostered in part by our continued use of video conferencing. This is perhaps one of the few lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that we embrace and is likely to remain a vital part of our Meetings and our ministries. For the second part of the week, Friends gathered at Greene Family Camp with some Friends continuing to be with us online. We were joined by Friends from our wider Quaker community as well as representatives from Quaker organizations both in person and online. We cherished our time together with shared meals, worship sharing in home groups, and conducting the business of the Yearly Meeting. We thank God for bringing us back to this sacred space for another Yearly Meeting.

A spirit of unity and togetherness was infused into our Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business by reading excerpts from State of the Meeting reports from our constitutive monthly meetings as well as hearing from you, our beloved Friends, in reading Epistles selected from Yearly Meetings the world over. Our Friends worshipping in Fayetteville, Arkansas, wrote in their State of the Meeting report, “The strong sense that we are led by the Spirit in our Meeting for Worship informs all we do. It is the bedrock in the silence and vocal ministry. Spirit is our guiding light, the core of the meeting.” We were delighted to hear the news that Friends in Central Europe had discerned the leading to form the Central European Yearly Meeting, and we send them much love and many blessings.

Our Adult Programming Committee invited Pamela Haines from Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, to join us in worship and fellowship as well as to deliver our keynote address. In her talk, Pamela explored spiritual practices with us that have grounded and guided her work as a Quaker activist, teacher, and author. Specifically, Pamela challenged us to “show up in service to the sacred,” recognizing that all moments, places, and people are sacred but can sometimes be soiled with desecration. During time with our home groups, we explored what makes a moment, a person, a place, and an institution sacred to us as individuals. Claiming our places within the sacred and addressing the desecration with an open heart can make us whole again. Being a Quaker today and being in service to the sacred requires us to embark on paths and journeys with destinations unknown. Being a Quaker today requires us to nurture our soul, brighten our Light, and act on our faith.

The Peace and Justice Committee held a forum early in the week to hear social and societal concerns from Friends in our Yearly Meeting. After hearing from the Committee, SCYM was led to minute a re-affirmation of our support of a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies. Friends acknowledged that Quakers operated some of these schools where Indigenous children were forcibly indoctrinated with Euro-American culture, language, and religion. This proposed Commission will be another positive step towards right relationships between our two communities, but we acknowledge that much work still remains. The Peace and

Justice Committee showed the film “Two Rivers” which documents a reconciliation group between an Indigenous and white community in Washington state. The Committee also brought forward a minute on the plight of our unhoused neighbors and asked Monthly Meetings to explore what can be done in our local communities to ensure affordable, safe, and reliable housing. One Friend asked about language used to describe this issue. Friends agreed to season the usage of the terms “homeless” versus “unhoused” through queries from the Committee.

Throughout our time together, Friends sat with the weight of the horrific war in Gaza. A deep discussion around a minute in response to the war was solemn, yet rich and Spirit-led, with many Friends sharing ministry. Just as the nation and the world have passionate feelings around this issue, so too do Friends of South Central Yearly Meeting. It was clear that Friends had strong convictions that were not in unity as we began to discern this minute, but a well-seasoned Friend reminded us that, “What we are seeking here is unity under the leadership of the Spirit.” Honoring that of God in everyone, the Body was led to affirm our unwavering commitment to the Peace Testimony which leads us to “utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense *whatsoever*.” Our Peace and Justice Committee will formulate queries to guide our monthly meetings in discussion of this concern. As it is written, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

Friends continue to hold the SCYM Faith and Practice Committee in prayer. This committee’s work has been greatly aided by video conferencing, and the committee meets monthly to discuss content and feedback from individual Friends and Meetings. After presenting a first draft of the document at the 2023 Annual Sessions, the committee presented a second draft this year. A forum and workshop were held to discuss the progress on this important document. The Clerk of this Committee expressed his appreciation for the hard work of the Friends who, guided by the Spirit, have contributed to this work. Now, as the draft document reads, “we are again seeking through this Faith and Practice to describe who we are within the Religious Society of Friends worldwide and give voice to both our distinctiveness and how we fit into the Society of Friends.” – Faith and Practice (Draft), South Central Yearly Meeting, section 1, p. 4.

121 Friends gathered for our Annual Sessions including 12 young Friends who participated in their own programming thanks to our Youth Program Support Committee. 22 Friends attended Annual Sessions for the first time, bringing new faces and ever widening our community. As is certain with the passage of time, Friends heard memorial minutes for 11 Friends, and we give thanks for their well-lived lives. May their memories and their legacies be blessings to us all. We joyously received news of 5 births within our Meetings and unite with Friends who celebrated 3 marriages. We are blessed by our ever-growing circle of Friends and the strengthening of our community. In an example of our shared ministry, care, and nurture of Friends, several were able to record readings of Bible passages for a wise Friend with declining vision. We continue to be in awe of the creative ways that we are called to serve, including by sharing talents in a variety fun hour.

We send you, our beloved Friends, much love and every peace, the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Epistle from Southern Africa Yearly Meeting – St Augustine's Heritage Guest Farm Conference Centre**4-8 January 2025**

We send warm Greetings to Friends all over the world.

Many spiritual journeys take us through difficult and winding ways to a place of beauty and joy. As 2025 dawned, Friends began travelling, by 'plane, by bus and by car meeting decayed roads, faded road signs, missed turnings, difficult border crossings and very hot temperatures, all deemed well worth the effort to reach the warm welcome and fellowship of Friends at St Augustine's at Modderpoort on the border of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Friends hailed from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Western and Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal, Lesotho, with visitors from Britain, Kenya, and Sweden. Lesotho Friends played an important role in helping with pre-meeting arrangements, in welcoming Friends, and arranging an excursion across the border into Lesotho.

Our theme for the meeting was "What binds us together, what pulls us apart." The "us" in the theme relates not only to our Quaker community but to the broader society in which Southern African Quakers live and breathe. Each morning began with a Meeting for Worship, followed after breakfast with Worship Sharing in small groups which provided an opportunity to explore mindfully how the 'still small voice within' guides us in our daily practice of Quakerism.

Yearly Meeting was a hybrid one to cater for those who could not join in person. Our theme was truly tested by the difficulties the technical team faced as they battled with intermittent electricity, stormy weather, poor and fluctuating connectivity. Intended to bind us together, technology seemed determined to pull us apart, but the technical team were equally determined to bind us together with those online.

Sipho Nsimbi from the Bulawayo Meeting gave the Richard Gush Memorial lecture this year. Born of Salvation Army parents she and her seven siblings were given names of personal traits that they were supposed to live up to as a collective group, making them an interdependent collective group. Sipho began training as a nurse but within nine months was offered a scholarship to study sociology in Britain where she worked as a social worker for two years after graduation. She married there and returned to Zimbabwe with her small son. She has served on the Board of Hlekweni and has been a SAYM Co-clerk. Currently she is an SAYM Elder and a Co-clerk and Treasurer of Bulawayo Meeting.

With her inspirational theme, "Love in Action – Bringing Hope for Healing a Wounded World," Sipho reminded us of who we are, the journey that Quakers have been on in Southern Africa and the powerful work that Friends have done and could do, not only in Southern Africa but in the world. Her words took us into the heart of division but brought hope. At the core of Quaker unity – what binds us together and connects us – is our willingness to "constantly seek," to seek the path to "righteousness and service to others" and ultimately to be the "ocean of light and love" to dispel the "ocean of darkness and death." We have a mandate not to separate ourselves but to connect with the world.

Reports from the ten local SAYM meetings were received. While the increased participation and energy of Young Friends in the SAYM community is stimulating a sense of optimism, it was evident from the local meeting reports that many meetings are experiencing a reduction in numbers. This raises the on-going need for making ourselves known. It was also clear from concerns raised that, as a Quaker family, we need to address and resolve on-going differences – the issues that divide us. However, as Sipho pointed out to us, "Our differences can be our strengths," and on difficult issues, we endeavoured to speak truth to each other with kindness.

Since 2021 the Finance Oversight Committee has carried out extensive work to clarify and restructure the finances of SAYM and was able to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date explanation of the SAYM financial architecture, together with the income and expenditure. Given that financial competence has become imperative in the modern world, SAYM, together with the local meetings, must focus on mainstreaming financial competence and building financial institutional memory throughout the organisation.

In 2024 SAYM was privileged to host the World Plenary Meeting of the Friends World Consultative Committee. Planning for this event began in 2019 and SAYM Friends, together with Friends from Africa and other International Friends, shouldered the challenge, persevered through the COVID pandemic, and delivered a successful WPM in August 2024 which was attended by Friends from 59 countries and 95 yearly meetings. This meeting piloted a hybrid format which was so successful that the decision has been taken to hold the 2027 WPM fully online. Friends present who had also attended the WPCC meeting enjoyed sharing their reminiscences. Young Friends also presented a vibrant and enthusiastic account of their intervisitations with Young Friends in African countries outside of Southern Africa and of their participation in the World Plenary Meeting.

Each evening, we were treated for five- and ten-minute talks on a variety of topics reflecting the varied personal interests of Friends. Special Interest groups were also offered, giving Friends the opportunity to share some of their concerns and community involvements.

Friends offered a variety of early morning wellness sessions which included breath work, aquaponics, hiking – all opportunities to offset the long hours of sitting in Meeting for Worship for Business. The Children's programme provided powerful ministries in nurturing and caring. Among other activities, the children practised meditation and – using the Quaker testimonies as a guide – learned about peace, equality, truth and integrity, and homelessness.

The Young Friends carried out their own programme in parallel with the general meeting, and provided the following account:

Beloved Friends – we, the Young Quaker Friends gathered with joy, gratitude, and open hearts. Our time together was a testament to the power of community, love, and spiritual growth.

We were grateful for the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and welcome new ones. Our shared experiences, from worship sharing to the Death Café, fostered a sense of belonging and support. We appreciated the warmth and wisdom of our elder Friends, who shared their insights and guidance with us.

Our gathering was a celebration of life, love, and spirituality. We grew together, learned from each other, and deepened our understanding of Quaker values and practices. The World Plenary Meeting reflections, special interest groups, and the main programme offered us a rich tapestry of experiences, inspiring us to continue on our spiritual journeys.

As we part ways, we will carry with us a renewed sense of hope, connection, and purpose. We recognized that our roots in the Quaker tradition run deep, and we are committed to nurturing and growing our faith community.

To our fellow Young Friends, we offer these words of encouragement: may you continue to seek, learn, and grow in the Light. May you find joy, comfort, and guidance in our Quaker community. And may you remain open to the transformative power of love and spirituality.

We have been bound together in love, friendship, and fellowship. Now we pull apart as we return to follow our mandate to connect with the world.

Gregory Mthembu-Salter and Benonia Nyakuwanikwa

Co-clerks, Southern Africa Yearly Meeting

Epistle from the Swedish Yearly Meeting 2024

To Friends everywhere!

To the sound of singing birds and the glory of blooming flowers and budding leaves, we met together for our 90th Annual Meeting at Quaker House in Stockholm, from May 9 to May 12. It was the first time in decades that the meeting was held at Quaker House. It was also the first time the entire meeting was conducted in hybrid form: both physically and digitally. There were about forty of us present, Friends and attenders along with six foreign representatives and guests.

In spite of the fact that digital forms of meeting grew out of a global health emergency and given the challenges we were faced with, it was encouraging to experience how well the meeting turned out. It proves how quickly we learn and how rapidly we can adjust if we work together. Crises require us to see things in new ways, to choose new paths forward, and, with courage and joy, to actively walk those paths, be the crisis a pandemic, different kinds of conflicts between people, natural catastrophes, or the climate crisis now threatening our very existence. When obstacles cross our paths we can choose to focus on the path, not the obstacle.

The theme of our Annual Meeting was "Quaker Spirituality and Nature - Sustainability: our sixth testimony". Our Friend Nicklas Adamsson introduced the theme in a very informative and thought provoking way.

During a meditative walk we were encouraged to open our minds and reflect upon how society basically functions, and whether or not economic growth can bear in the long run. What, for example, about the fact that the economy of our own society is kept afloat by stock dividends?

The following day we devoted a few hours to worship sharing with questions like: How do we give meaning to our testimonies? Where do we go from here? We found spiritual strength and intensity in this sharing. Is this what the early Quakers experienced and what the world needs today?

Some truths and insights about our vulnerability, the vulnerability of our social relationships, and of the environment we live in, can cause grief and despair. Yet we can choose to act with living hope - together with other Quakers and with all organisations and individuals who want to be positive forces and voices. How can we do this in a way that inspires others? If we realize that all people and all creatures are linked together, can we ourselves be links where links are needed? This is a discussion that will continue in August when we meet for the World Plenary Meeting in South Africa under the theme: "Living the Spirit of Ubuntu".

Quaker Service celebrated its 60th anniversary on Saturday evening. Annika Hollsing, the clerk of Quaker Service, opened with a short presentation of Quaker Service. The feeling of community was enhanced further by the digital presence of guests from Burundi and

Georgia, and by friends from Bangladesh who were present in Stockholm. We heard about our Georgian Friend's English lessons for Ukrainian refugee children and about how sustainable farming contributes to reconciliation in Burundi. The dire situation in Gaza moved us deeply. We intend in the very near future to discuss how we best can contribute economically to Quaker Service's work there.

We found great pleasure in the fellowship of sharing meals and evening social events where we got to hear from our foreign guests and share poems, texts, music and stories, like the ones about Voltaire's and Jon Fosse's experiences of Quakers.

Quaker House, May 12, 2024

The epistle committee: Ingmar Hollsing, Berit Bylund, Sjoerd Uitslag och Julia Ryber

Greetings to Friends everywhere in inner peace and loving action.

On Pentecost weekend, May 17-20, 2024, Switzerland Yearly Meeting gathered at the beautiful Herzberg near Aarau, Switzerland. Mornings opened with movement and several Friends enjoyed silent walks in the surrounding countryside. About 35 adult Friends and two children joined us to worship, do business and share fellowship together.

Our gathering began on Friday afternoon with the sad news that South African Friend Rommel Roberts, who had a strong connection with Swiss Friends and particularly Zurich meeting that he visited on his 70th birthday, had passed away in an accident. He was an activist and lived out the power of ubuntu in his hospitality, creativity and actions for peace.

The theme for our weekend was “ubuntu” and after introductions we began to consider what ubuntu means and how it relates to our personal lives in conversation and worship sharing led by Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge. While some Friends struggled with Biblical references to help translate the concept of ubuntu, the fact we met over Pentecost as we came together with different languages, cultural backgrounds and life experiences was a metaphor for deep exploration of “I am because you are” within the meaning of ubuntu. We even considered the original meaning of George Fox’s invitation to “walk cheerfully (courageously) over the world (society at large), answering to that of God (or the Spirit or the Divine) in everyone.”

We continued to explore ubuntu on Saturday as we listened to a reflection by a Friend from New Zealand, Janie Banfield, who invited us to consider Nonviolent Communication as a tool appropriate for Friends’ peace testimony. We then heard reports from Swiss meetings, worship groups and “unofficial gatherings” along with greetings and reports from other yearly meetings and organisational representatives in our Section.

On Saturday evening we enjoyed a presentation by co-clerk Nadja Schnetzler sharing about her child, Nemo, who just won the Eurovision song contest on behalf of Switzerland. As the first nonbinary winner, Nemo exemplifies a strong commitment to inclusion and human rights expressed through their art in song. We were impressed by their witness to ubuntu by hitchhiking from Switzerland to Sweden for their performance, trusting in strangers along the way.

On Sunday morning, we began with worship and song before hearing from FWCC EMES representative Evan Welkin about collaboration and positive and negative experiences we have had in group process, followed by a presentation by Gordon Matthews on his recent trip to Israel and Palestine and a discussion of what we could do to respond to the crisis there. We then moved into considering ubuntu in the context of our yearly meeting and considered actions for the future focused on our working groups, particularly our Peace not War group which is focused on the Middle East. Patrick Taran offered a methodology for clarifying common purpose in organizing, which we explored together.

On Sunday evening, we shared a dramatic reading of the play “And the Beat Goes On: 300 years of Quaker Nonviolent Action”, exploring real and imagined scenarios related to Friends’ witness against slavery, arms trade, and “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland.

On Monday Friends decided to sign the letter called «A different future is possible» that was drafted by several Quaker organisations in response to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Some concerns and suggested additions for the letter were expressed; Friends decided to work on an addendum to the letter in the next weeks.

Friends also adopted the Sustainability Policy by EMES for future travels.

Swiss Friends were touched by the quote from Rumi, which we would like to share with Friends everywhere:

“Out beyond ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”

In peace and light,
Switzerland Yearly Meeting

FRIEND CHURCH TANZANIA

REG:NO:SA:4740



Epistle to Friends Everywhere

From Friends Church Tanzania Annual Conference, Msongwa, Tunduma, October 23rd-27th, 2024

Dear Friends across the globe,

We write to you with joy & gratitude as we share the blessings of our annual gathering at Msongwa in Tunduma, Tanzania. This year's conference, held from October 23rd to 27th, was a time of fellowship, learning, & reflection. Over 300 delegates joined us from regions across Tanzania—Serengeti, Mwanza, Kahama, Manyara, Dar es Salaam, Sumbawanga, Kyela, & the Tunduma churches—as well as Pastors from Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, and the United States.

The Land and Life of Tunduma

Tunduma, a town at the Tanzanian-Zambian border, offered a fitting environment for our gathering. With its rolling mountains, lush greenery, & vibrant cross-border culture, Tunduma exemplifies resilience & unity. The town's economy thrives on agriculture, trade, & small businesses that span the border, & it serves as a hub for Tanzanians and Zambians alike. This bustling economic activity reflects the strength & cooperation we sought to embody in our conference theme. Tunduma has been described the 'most famous border city' within SADCC [Southern African Development Coordination Conference, a regional bloc] & is informally known as the 'gateway to East Africa' with the neighbouring countries of Zambia and Malawi. So Tunduma is also our 'gateway' to Central & Southern Africa in our growing Missionary work in Africa.

Theme: "Rebuilding the Broken Walls"

Inspired by Isaiah 58:12, the theme, "Rebuilding the Broken Walls," was a powerful call to action. Pastor Simon Bulimo from the Lugari Yearly Meeting in Kenya addressed us with a message that reached to the heart of both our spiritual & communal responsibilities. We were challenged to actively rebuild the spiritual walls of our lives, churches, & communities & to carry the light of restoration to areas in need.

Teachings & Topics

The conference offered a variety of teachings & workshops that nurtured our growth & encouraged us to strengthen our ministries. Some of the impactful sessions included:

1. SWOT Analysis of Friends Church Tanzania (FCT): We engaged in a strategic assessment to understand FCT's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, & threats. This process allowed us to plan for growth & resilience, building on our strong foundations.
2. Pastoral Economic Empowerment: Recognizing the need for sustainable ministry, we discussed ways to empower our pastors economically. By equipping our leaders to support themselves, we can help ensure the long-term stability of our communities.

3. Financial Management & Integrity in Leadership: Sessions on financial stewardship emphasized the importance of transparency, integrity, and trust in handling church finances, reinforcing our shared commitment to responsible leadership.

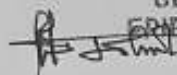
4. Facing Our Adversaries in "Rebuilding the Broken Walls": In this session, we addressed the challenges & spiritual adversaries we face in the journey to restoration, exploring strategies to overcome them and remain resilient in faith.

Guests & Fellowship

We were blessed by the presence of leaders from the wider Quaker world, including the FUM/Africa Ministries Office Director of Friends United Meeting & the General Superintendent of the Indiana Yearly Meeting. Their words of encouragement reminded us of the global bond we share with Friends everywhere and inspired us to work collaboratively.

Throughout the conference, the fellowship was rich & joyful. The unity we felt as we shared meals, worshipped, and discussed the teachings reminded us of the strength we have in Christ & in one another. Enriched singing by choirs were the highlights. As we return to our respective communities, we carry with us a renewed sense of purpose and a commitment to "rebuild the broken walls" in our spiritual lives & communities.

In Peace and Fellowship,
Friends Church Tanzania

 **GENERAL SECRETARY**
FRIENDS CHURCH TANZANIA
SERENGETI

July 14, 2024

Western Yearly Meeting of Friends Church
203 S. East Street, PO Box 70
Plainfield, IN 46168

Greetings to Friends Everywhere:

Western Yearly Meeting met in Plainfield, Indiana from July 11-14, 2024 for its 167th annual sessions to explore the theme "Embracing God's Abundance" based on John 10:10b (NRSV). Abundance often requires change, and the structure of this Yearly Meeting modeled how local meetings can embrace the changes that are needed to best steward abundance while moving forward to meet the future in an enthusiastic way. The changes in the format of this annual meeting moved us out of our "comfort zone" in a way that reduced some of the fears associated with change, allowing a realization that change, while sometimes uncomfortable, can lead to greater things.

Thursday's theme centered around "Roots: a legacy" as it relates to Western Yearly Meeting. This was followed by a workshop led by Emily Provance (traveling minister and a member of Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting, New York Yearly Meeting) which helped Western Yearly Meeting attendees explore the typical life cycle of meetings. Meetings were encouraged to recognize, celebrate, and embrace the entire birth to death cycle, along with the changes each stage brings.

Tom Hamm (professor emeritus and former archivist at Earlham College) presented a lecture regarding the gifts Western Yearly Meeting has brought to Quakers in Indiana and around the world. By examining the roots and legacy of the beginnings of Western Yearly Meeting continuing to the present day, all were able to see how our predecessors embraced the needs for changes they encountered and thus left a legacy for us to imitate as we move into the future. This theme was continued in the afternoon during the address by our superintendent, Shawn McConaughy. He and our assistant superintendent, Tom Rockwell, led group discussions which helped identify our legacy, the historical changes and events of individual meetings, including the negative events and occurrences that may be affecting present day attitudes and decisions.

A late afternoon memorial service was led by Jamie Lyon (pastor at Russiaville Friends Meeting) to recognize the importance of legacy by rejoicing in the memories of those who have found their heavenly rewards in the past year. This was followed by an evening meal which included introduction of representatives from affiliated agencies. A post-dinner program provided opportunities for more in-depth, small-group interactions with each individual agency representative and replaced the former "Quaker Lecture" and fellowship time.

Friday's theme centered around "Branches: our current work" of Western Yearly Meeting. It began with Gretchen Castle, Dean of Earlham School of Religion and member of First Friends Richmond, Indiana, conducting our morning worship time. She shared her personal experiences with abundance and the need to readjust to accommodate growth. Routine business followed. All business was done on Friday (a change from the two day format used previously). Written reports (included in attendance packets or on-line) enabled brief verbal summaries, questions, and approval of action items to be addressed during active sessions. While Western Yearly Meeting continues to be financially stable, individual meetings continue to wrestle with aging and declining membership. There was discussion on ways we could encourage more young adult and family involvement and how those changes might impact the Yearly Meeting. One way Western Yearly Meeting addressed these needs

this year was through re-invigorated and more robust Junior Yearly Meeting and Teen programs running concurrently with the adult sessions. An interesting update on Friends United Meeting (FUM) activities was given by the general secretary of FUM, Kelly Kellum.

Meeting for Business was followed by opportunities for workshops and interest groups to meet. These workshops included a wide range of options: legislative priorities with guest, Senator Fady Qaddoura, sponsored by Indiana Friends Committee on Legislation (IFCL); modern media and the state of the church led by Dave Hanson; equitable use of world resources led by Megan Fair of Right Sharing of World Resources (RSWR); Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) Quaker Connect initiative led by Jade Rockwell; Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) advocacy work led by Hassan El-Tayyab; financial legacy through Everence led by Chad Campbell; Belize Friends Church, led by Oscar and Miriam Mmbali of FUM; and a young adult research discussion led by Rachel Doll O'Mahoney (pastor at Valley Mills Friends Meeting) and Tom Rockwell.

After the evening meal on Friday, time was provided for dedicated information on Missions in Belize, sponsored by USFW and Quaker Men and led by FUM representatives Oscar and Miriam Mmbali along with Michael Sherman.

Saturday's activities centered around "Fruit: What we are working toward" as a Yearly Meeting. Starting with worship led by Tom Rockwell and a workshop exploring spiritual legacy led by Emily Provance, small groups explored the legacy we as a meeting will leave for future generations. The afternoon was spent in a discussion of a unified mission opportunity as a Yearly Meeting and how individual meetings can support this effort centering around Mental Health. The evening meal and following time was spent celebrating the gifts and calls of individuals in their various ministries.

The program on Sunday was enhanced by a brief presentation by Emily Provance on prevention of election violence. While this last-minute presentation was precipitated by an assassination attempt on the former US president, Donald Trump, it is a topic of world wide concern. Emily shared ideas that can be used now to reduce the risk of violence before, during, and after elections. She specifically mentioned resources available through the "Braver Angels" group and her own website: <https://quakeremily.wordpress.com/election-violence-prevention/>.

Rachel Doll O'Mahoney brought the Sunday message encouraging each of us to use our wounds and imperfections to develop wisdom that can promote growth and healing. This was accompanied by a choir made up of Western Yearly Meeting attendees. Following lunch the Meeting relaxed and rested in God's Abundance while listening to a special concert by singer and songwriter Carrie Newcomer which was open to the public.

Please pray for Western Yearly Meeting as we continue "Embracing God's Abundance" in the year ahead including all of the changes that abundance will bring.

In Christian Love,



Sarabeth Marcinko, Presiding Clerk



Brenda Rodeheffer, Recording Clerk



John Heshelman, Assistant to the Clerk