From the Friends General Conference Pre-Gathering Retreat for Friends of Color and Their Families, 6th Month 2020 (full epistle here)

To Friends Everywhere:

We begin by remembering our ancestors who were strong enough to make a way for us. Friends of Color and their families met for Pre-Gathering Retreat on 26 Day through 28 Day Sixth Month 2020. This is the eighth year Friends of Color have met for our Pre-Gathering Retreat. First-timers felt welcomed and validated. This year, we met virtually with our largest attendance yet. There were 47 attendees, ranging in age from 11 months through 77 years from Canada, Mexico, Switzerland and the United States of America.

The importance of this Gathering for Friends of Color worshipping in community together cannot be overstated. To our Friends in the wider Quaker world: we, the Friends of Color, can’t breathe. During this weekend, we enjoyed the rare opportunity of not being othered in Quaker space. We experienced the joy of being seen as we are and the affirmation of a supportive spirit among ourselves in the “Amen corner”.... We were able to exhale, relax, and breathe together.... The gifts of the spirit were abundant.... We experienced spiritual renewal that was awakened by moving through pain to hope for the future for ourselves and our children. ....

From New England Yearly Meeting, 8th Month 2020 (full epistle here, español aquí)

.... We are adrift in a leaky boat; the forms of Quakerism we inhabit are not up to the task ahead. We have a religious organization and ways of being together that still embody empire.

On our first day of virtual Sessions we were given the gift of a three part framework for change from our Quaker tradition: revealing, surrender, and turning, or in more traditional language, conviction, convincement, and conversion. We are suspended in a moment of revealing, being convicted by the Light as we wake up to our sin. We are allowing our hearts to break, recognizing that the process of surrender and turning must be repeated over and over again.

We are naming the forms of white supremacy in Quaker culture, including participation in slavery and ongoing anti-Black racism, the history of Quaker leadership in the Native American boarding school system, and the settler colonialism practiced by early Friends. We continue naming the patterns of domination at every level, in our person, our household and community, through the industrial economy and our extractive relationship to the ecosphere. These patterns are active in Quaker forms and practices today. We stand convicted.

We are stuck in the whirlwind, and need to choose surrender. We can cling tight in fear to the forms we know or release the forms to trust the Divine Spirit will show us our way. ....

Our plenary speaker, Friend Amanda Kemp, implored us to move from our heads to our hearts, from our analytic mind to our imagination.... Asking us to create from a place of possibility that can invite what we don’t yet know, she said, “your imagination is essential for our liberation.”....
We know, and are beginning to internalize, the Truth; that more abundant life comes only after surrender, and our conversion is complete only when we turn, when we imagine, when we embody, and when we do.

From Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends, 8th Month 2020 (full epistle here)

To all Friends everywhere:

Greetings from a gathering of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends, together from many different homes for Annual Sessions, July 29–August 2, 2020.... We humbly acknowledge that many or all of us are settlers here, and live on stolen lands. ....

We are all called to be responsive to this moment, and that spirit demands that we evolve and grow. Part of our evolution should be critically considering what we call “Quaker practice.” All our practices have been shaped by the culture by which they were surrounded. In America, white supremacist culture has always been part of those surroundings. What parts of the practices we have inherited are perpetuating oppression? What parts of the practices bring Truth to the surface of our Meeting? These must be separated and it is our choice, as a yearly meeting, to maintain them and pull them apart. How can we carefully tease apart that which will nourish the future of our faith, from that which closes it off and diminishes it?

One Friend gave a message that they worry about the source of the Quaker tendency to avoid anger and conflict. Do we fear that our shared beliefs are not strong enough to hold us together through it? Do we doubt the existence of the power that binds us? .... Young Adult Friends, as both the present and the future of this community, want to participate in and inherit a yearly meeting that can hear grief and anger, because without these, our prayers are shallow.

P.S. To all Friends everywhere, abolish the police. Love, Young Adult Friends

From the Friends General Conference Pre-Gathering Retreat for Friends of Color and Their Families, 6th Month 2020 (full epistle here)

The Pre-Gathering Friends of Color Retreat provides a reprieve. Friends of Color need respite from the systemic racism too often found in our American Quaker community that often goes unseen by many white Friends. Friends of Color need respite from the insidious lie of white supremacy manifested in daily oppressive traumatic stressors (microaggressions) which have the effect of blaming the oppressed for our own oppression. Friends of Color need respite and support which our home meetings have not provided. Friends of Color are fatigued from being asked to teach white folks.
We ask all Quakers to heed a Call to Action. Please sit with these queries:

1. What is the Spirit leading me to do about the historic and ongoing racial pandemic across my meeting, my community, my work environment and my country?
2. How can we honor the memory of people who have lost their lives to the struggle for a better world?
3. How can we construct ways for people to engage and remain engaged beyond good intentions in the struggle for true equality in health, education, wealth and against state sanctioned violence?
4. How can we encourage the support of Friends of Color in Quaker worship and meetings around the world?
5. How can Friends de-center themselves in order to listen to and hear Friends of Color?
6. How can I support respite for Friends of Color?

.... For People of Color, the human-made pandemic of racism is deadlier than COVID19, and we need you to do work so that we can BREATHE.

From the Fellowship of Friends of African Descent, 8th Month 2020 (full epistle here)

The Fellowship of Friends of African Descent gathered from August 27-30, 2020.... with the theme of the Freedom Rides of the 1960s. ....

On Thursday, Friends gathered to learn about John Lewis and reflect on “good trouble” to which we are called. ....

On Friday, our Gathering began with programmed worship and a self-care exploration.... Participants considered how our spiritual journeys are deepened when we care for ourselves emotionally and physically.

During Friday’s second session, we.... learned that several Quakers of African descent, including Paul Cuffee, started schools for “colored children” and integrated schools in the 17 and 1800’s.... Those of us at the Gathering wrestled with the question of how Quaker schools had changed to focusing on providing education to the wealthy and the socially “elite.”

In the following session on Friday, we learned about the horrors of Bloody Sunday.... In small groups we explored the continued relevance of the peace testimony and recognized that it involved developing the inward capacity for forgiveness as well as facing the consequences of “overturning tables” like Jesus did. ....
During our last stop on this virtual Freedom Ride, we revisited the Minute on State Sanctioned Violence adopted by the Fellowship in 2016. We acknowledged how the Spirit moved among us in a prophetic way in that year and we were under the weight of how many lives might have been saved from senseless violence had we, and Friends generally, been more proactive in our commitments.

Throughout the four-day gathering, speakers and participants alike could hear the Spirit call us to go beyond the secular, social, and political perspectives on the challenges of our day and seek the deeper spiritual healing and understanding that we all need to advance the freedom work of our ancestors on whose shoulders we stand.

*From Baltimore Yearly Meeting, 8th Month 2020 (full epistle [here](#))*

.... What was normal is gone and the new normal has not yet emerged. We hold [Margaret Benefiel’s] advice to us: that we stay grounded through daily personal spiritual practice; that the hard work of being in community is itself a spiritual practice; and that community is fundamental to discernment as we ask, “What is mine to do? What is ours to do?” ....

What is ours to do is grounded in our relationship with each other. Our work is not just making decisions, but the act of “being” a yearly meeting. Being in conflict in community takes on an aspect of holiness because we labor together, as if “together” is the only option. Community builds hope and, like courage, hope is contagious. Our hope that Baltimore Yearly Meeting will in time be a truly just religious community sustains us in this work.

*From Illinois Yearly Meeting, 6th Month 2021 (full epistle [here](#))*

This year’s sessions focused on the Testimony of Equality: How are the choices we make considering all of our Beloved Community, and not the few who speak loudest or the group that is most dominant? How are we finding that of God in those around us, not only to acknowledge our shared humanity but to celebrate it fully? ....

We can see this time as an opportunity to rebuild our practices and processes in ways that both keep the beauty and strength at the core of what it means to be a Friend and move away from that which “gatekeeps” our community. Rather than seeing shifts away from traditions and long-held “norms” as a burden, we can instead see them as a gift. ....

As we find a new rhythm to our lives, it will be tempting to return to patterns that are so deeply engrained in our daily routines, from both dominant cultures and Quaker traditions. Seeking inclusive alternatives, we are called to hold each other in the Light, as we co-create a better future by working for a world where equality is not more equal for some, constantly asking ourselves what love requires...
2020 Epistle of Alaska Friends Conference to Friends Everywhere:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Quakers of Alaska Friends Conference held our annual meeting through Zoom. It was both a comforting ritual and a brand-new experience; we were together in Spirit and physically separated. We missed seeing each other in-person but were pleased to have people attending who would not have been able to if yearly meeting had been an in-person event. There were Quakers from around Alaska, Hawaii, the Lower 48 states, Mexico and Canada!

We wove together our spirits through shared meals, sharing our creative endeavors, music performances, workshops, general socializing, and children’s story & sharing time (adults were welcome, too!). All woven together through Zoom.

We had a variety of presentations and workshops around leaning-in to the powerful social, environmental and political movements occurring across our state and nation and intertwined: Black Lives Matter, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic inequality and the accelerating effects of climate change.

- Ayyu Qassataq from First Alaskans Institute spoke about its Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation initiative, and how Alaska Quakers can help heal the wounds from Friends’ missionary activity amongst Alaska Natives beginning in the late 1800s.
- Lucy Duncan of American Friends Service Committee led us in group exercises exploring the spiritual practices of accompaniment as an anti-racist practice for social change.
- Matt Leber of AFSC led an interactive session around the query, “What is your Meeting up to in the realm of social justice?”
- Ursala Knudsen-Latta of FCNL presented “Progress toward Peace - You Can Help Advance Peacebuilding with Friends Committee on National Legislation”
- Jaya Karsemeyer Bone and Regina Renee Ward, Friends General Conference’s Institutional Assessment Implementation Committee, led two related interactive workshops, “Moving Past White Fragility” and “Interrupting Racism.” Both were scenario-based workshops designed to elicit physical and emotional responses from participants. Ways in which our responses might affect our actions in the scenarios were then discussed.

These events give us tools and inspiration to guide us as we intentionally and spiritually engage in the wide-spread social and environmental movements of our time. We are thankful for the many people engaged in making positive changes in the world and for the workshop presenters sharing with us their knowledge and experience.

Also weaving us together was the purchase this year of Mahala Ashley Dickerson’s home and property from her son, John Dickerson’s estate. Adjacent to the Alaska Friends Conference property Ms. Dickerson donated to AFC many years ago, we felt Way opening in this process of developing both properties, potentially into the Quaker retreat center she envisioned. Friends continue to hold this project in Light and joy, and look forward to how we will be led to honor her and put her generous legacy to good service.

Quakers of Alaska Friends Conference ask all people of good will to join with us in countering racist and divisive words and actions. We have asked ourselves how our own Quaker history has contributed to divisions, intolerance, and white supremacy. We discern a need for healing work that confronts past actions including those of Friends that devalued and damaged Black lives and indigenous cultures.
Greetings to Friends everywhere

Some 90 Friends gathered at Waikanae, 14-17 May 2021 under the care of Palmerston North and Kāpiti Monthly Meetings. In welcoming us to Waikanae they began by acknowledging the tāngata whenua, the local first peoples.

We rejoiced in the opportunity to be fully present ‘with each other’ after 2020’s online-only meeting for worship. While giving thanks for the privileged position of Aotearoa/New Zealand, we were reminded of the perilous state of other nations, especially as we heard of the serious impact of Covid-19 in India.

The value of connection was strongly felt among Friends and we heard how the new use of technology had enabled the Quaker community, as never before, to extend its reach to remote and unwell Friends.

The importance of connection was explored further in the Quaker Lecture, "Stories of Belonging", delivered during Yearly meeting by Anjum Rahman, a founding member of the NZ Islamic Women’s Council. She made reference to the whakataukī (Māori proverb) of the tōroa (albatross) that journeys out onto the ocean and then returns to the land, its nesting place, where it regenerates.

She challenged us to go forth like the tōroa, to listen and change, and to endure the discomfort of confronting our privilege. Those in dominant positions need to be willing to give away some power to allow others to resource their own communities. Her words lent weight to a call by Young Friends, for Yearly Meeting to be active in the move towards decolonisation, which requires more equitable sharing of power with the first peoples of Aotearoa.

The same sense of community and spiritual strength that Quakers at Yearly Meeting valued, was enhanced by the input from Young Friends on a number of subjects. Their creative and thoughtful contributions were heard and showed us a clear way forward.

Wiki Walker, a recipient of the Loxley award, spoke of self-healing to help ourselves and others, seeing the feminine in our culture and politics, understanding the impact of colonisation on us as a people, and connecting ourselves and others with the natural world. Her project, Te Reo o ngā te Whāea (The Voices of Mothers, Grandmothers and Aunties), sought to preserve the wisdom and the place of Māori women in nurturing community.

We were captivated by the story of how the board game called “Kaupapa” came into being supported by our Quaker Testimonies fund. The game, developed by Kuruho
Wereta and Rosie Remmerswaal, a Young Friend, aims to make learning Te Reo Maori fun. We also experienced our own brief moment of fun in a lively impromptu session on pronunciation.

As the meeting drew to a close we remind ourselves that we should let the Spirit guide us and that we must have faith that we will be given the means to follow such promptings. Like the tūroa, we now go back to our Quaker communities enriched by the aroha that has embraced this Yearly Meeting, and its attendees, both present and remote.

In Peace and Friendship

Lesley Young
Yearly Meeting Clerk
Yearly Meeting 2020
of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia
Greetings to Friends Everywhere

Here in Australia we think of you all as our Meetings worldwide face this time of multiple hardships.

Australian Friends gathered in Spirit this July mid-Winter, called to walk unfamiliar paths with an open heart, courage and curiosity, in our first experiment with an online Yearly Meeting. Presenting novel opportunities in this time of novel coronavirus, we gathered across the country and around the world, in kitchens, loungerooms, studies, dining rooms, meeting houses and outside.

After a ‘discomforting’ year defined by disastrous droughts, fires and floods, the struggle to contain Covid-19, and a deep recognition of the injustice of systemic and individual privilege, we offered each other comfort as electronic reflections embraced our Yearly Meeting. Whilst much work for this Yearly Meeting has been discerned ahead of our gathering, we ask: do our virtual meetings allow a place for Spirit to rise? Friendly School heard from Murray Short (The Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri), who questioned whether we have moved too far towards individual infallibility, away from community discernment.

An ‘oceanic’ invitation to right past wrongs was extended by Mingku (Shane Mortimer), a Ngambri Elder and traditional owner who reminded us that removal of children from First Nation families continues at a greater rate today than before. He shared a recent discovery of significant First Peoples’ artefacts at Mount Ainslie in Canberra, a joy shared by First Nation archaeologist David Johnston, who recounted the open-hearted journey of the Watson family, on the discovery of a stone axe quarry on their farm near the Silver Wattle Quaker Centre.

Care of the Earth and creation have been at the heart of Quaker witness since our earliest Friends. We must do everything possible to address the causes of the climate emergency we face. If we cannot participate energetically in person, we can nurture and support younger Friends financially, emotionally and spiritually. Our FWCC Asia-West Pacific Section session reinforced our concern to support young people in Australia and overseas. How are young Friends feeling about the future of the world? What do young Friends ask of the older generations? Ryan from Canberra Meeting is responding by making a movie about what we can do to save our planet Now!

In keeping with our Yearly Meeting tradition, we met online for ‘Share-and-Tell’ sessions, for coffee-time and shared music. There was also dedicated on-line time for children and parents. Our Meeting has been lovingly ‘held’ by the invisible, tireless work of hosting and technical teams networked throughout Australia, with Elders and pastoral carers adapting to new forms of ‘promptings’.

The Backhouse Lecture, delivered by Fiona Gardner, encouraged us to make time to nurture our spiritual practices in all aspects of our daily lives. We were urged to heed the promptings of Love and Truth in our hearts - regardless of how ‘strange’ they may seem to others, knowing that “I am a Quaker. My spiritual commitment means that my work is never done. I will live courageously.”
Our Presiding Clerk's companion during the Meeting for Remembrance at YM20, who gently came to sit when Meeting began and then quietly left at the rise of Meeting.
Australia Yearly Meeting - July 2020
Children’s Epistle

Over this past week 12 children and various adults met for an hour each afternoon on Zoom. There were different combinations of children everyday aging between 18 months and 11 years old.

Our theme this week was **Yearly Meeting in My House**.

These were a few of our favourite activities and things:
- the mustard seed story told to us in all-age worship
- joining the music hour where we sang songs and learnt about instruments
- writing letters to Penn Friends
- sharing about our homes and favourite places
- hearing stories about being kind to each other
- and where we all laughed with the kookaburra

Connections were made - fun was had - games were played.

In our own way we children were part of Yearly Meeting 2020 online.

*Dana and Elyse writing letters to their Penn Friends.*
Yearly Meeting 2020
Junior Young Friends Epistle

For this Yearly Meeting Junior Young Friends had a few challenges, including having to meet on Zoom from different time zones because of the pandemic. The older Quakers understand just how challenging Zoom can be. The pandemic has also given us time to reflect on the climate crisis. Being online meant it was also sometimes awkward, even with Friends we already knew. Unfortunately, we ended up not having as many JYFs as usual at Yearly Meeting. The positives were that it allowed JYFs to go to other sessions in the main Yearly Meeting program. Some of those sessions were Indigenous concerns, climate change share and tell, two business sessions, epilogues, climate justice share and tell, the Earthcare plenary session, and the Backhouse lecture. We also had lots of fun over two evenings playing online games!!

This year we, as JYFs, had a big focus on climate justice and regeneration as one of our fellow JYFs, Ryan, is making a documentary about climate change and its disastrous impacts. We found that a lot of the older Friends used this time to reflect on themselves and how they can use their privilege to support the younger generations confronting the many issues of today’s society. From this, we also looked at ways in which we could help the earth. As a result, we came to realise that there isn’t just one way to manage the issues we face, whether it is something as simple as donating to organisations that are helping to deal with these issues or something more complex like, lowering or cutting out of certain materials, objects, foods etc. from your life.

To begin the week, we had two introductory sessions. For the first session, we were able to have two small groups meeting in-person in Wahroonga Meeting House and at Goulburn. These groups were then able to join a zoom call with JYFs in other parts of the country. With lower numbers than usual it was a bit awkward at first, but we soon got into the swing of YM with a clever online adaption of the game The Big Wind Blows.

We had a session in which Ryan talked to us about his documentary and showed us how to make videos. This was quite fascinating, especially for those of us who struggled a bit with technology.

On Wednesday, we discussed the proposal for a JYF summer camp for 2021. We had to take into consideration how we would be able to hold a JYF camp with the world’s current climate, as well as considering where we were likely to find accommodation. The idea of an all ages summer camp was brought to our attention by the Children and JYFs Coordinators, Tania and Gina, which would be a change from what we normally have.

On Tuesday and Thursday nights, the JYFs held online games night over zoom. Although it was over Zoom, everyone was able to enjoy it and have fun, as if we were meeting in person.

On Thursday morning, the JYFs ran an all ages Meeting for Worship in which we included a video that Ryan had created during the week about what we as JYFs were doing to solve this climate issue. We were happy to receive some reflective responses from our older Friends.

This unusual JYF get-together was oddly successful. While we didn’t connect with as many of our Friends as usual, perhaps the smaller numbers were better suited to online gatherings. We’re very excited to think about when we can meet face to face again.
L-R: Clare, James, Lisa and Zac, Wahroonga JYFs and Friends, cooking damper

L-R: Ryan, Dan, Lucy, Rob, Laura, John, Joel, Miles gather at the Emerson’s for in-person fun.
To Friends Everywhere,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the Light,
Friends of Baltimore Yearly Meeting

EPISTLE OF YOUNG ADULT FRIENDS
ACCEPTED 9TH MONTH 26TH DAY, 2020

Theme: Self and Community Care

Please note: This year, Baltimore Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends (BYM YAF) would like to recognize that there are Young Adult Friends (YAF) groups at a number of BYM meetings that organize activities and conduct business independent from BYM YAF; much as the individual meetings of BYM operate independent of the Yearly Meeting. Just as the Yearly Meeting accepts epistles from each of its Monthly Meetings, BYM YAF would like to recognize the work and worship of these vibrant young adult communities. This year, Friends Meeting of Washington YAFs (FMW YAF) are the only contributing group, but we know of (and hope to include) other YAF groups within the BYM area.

This year, the BYM YAFs started talking with BYM about becoming a more stable and sustainable worshipping community, introduced a wildly-successful platform for communicating with each other in

Friends in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia
www.byrsf.org
between our in-person conferences (and seven months of pandemic-enforced Zoom calls), conducted more business and watched each other eat more dinners than we have in the last several years combined, and continued in our labor towards becoming an intersectional and anti-racist faith community.

Winter Conference
BYM YAFs only managed to hold one conference over 2019-2020, instead of our normal two. It took place the weekend of January 3rd-5th, 2020 in College Park, MD. Over the weekend, YAFs took a break from three years of anti-racism centered workshops and discussions by spending some time discerning where we, as a worshipping community of BYM, are heading; and attempted to play a rather tongue-in-cheek tabletop role-playing game (which quickly devolved into a humorous dramatic reading of the game manual). Several YAFs from Friends Meeting of Washington joined us for the weekend, and their contributions to our meetings for business and our workshops re-kindled our desire to work more closely with each other.

The main workshop for the conference was a discussion with Rep Pickard and Melanie Giord from BYM's Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee about our desire for BYM YAF to function more like a monthly meeting. For many of the YAFs in attendance, BYM YAF is their primary spiritual home within the Yearly Meeting; and we want to be sure that those Friends are not deprived of (or unfamiliar with) the sustainable structure of a regular meeting. Rep and Melanie helped us begin to feel out which parts of the monthly meeting recipe are things we want to adopt, and which parts won't work for us or aren't relevant. Spirited conversation sprung up around topics such as marriage, writing a spiritual state of the meeting, and drafting a handbook or faith and practice document for the use of future YAFs. Those present were keenly aware that unlike most meetings, BYM YAF is intrinsically a transient community, and that we will need to tailor any monthly meeting practices we adopt to reflect that.

Discussions throughout the weekend helped Friends from FMW become acquainted with YAFs connected to BYM from other Programs, and share their feelings of the need to “bridge the gap” between Monthly Meeting YAFs and the Yearly Meeting Program for YAFs. Over the years Baltimore Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends has drifted to become separate from the Young Adult Friends group of Friends Meeting of Washington. This drifting is the result of geographic and cultural differences between Friends. Efforts are being made to bridge this gap. Though time has widened the gap, we remain committed to the process of reintegration. We hope to strengthen the Friendship that exists between the Friends of FMW YAFs and BYM YAFs and we will continue our work to unite the young adults throughout the Yearly Meeting. This also involved the idea of aging out of YAF, as FMW YAF and BYM YAF have different customs in place. BYM YAFs have a strict cutoff at 35, matching the common definition of a Young Adult Friend, while the FMW handbook describes Young Adult Friends as old as “approximately 40”. This will be a discussion that we will continue to have.

More effective social media and email connection was successfully established between BYM's 2019 Annual Session and the Winter Conference, through some trial and error and a lot of input and cooperative planning. This caused connection to be easier to maintain throughout 2019 and 2020, even as our Summer 2020 conference was not able to proceed as planned.

Pandemic Pandemonium
Many Young Adult Friends are comfortable online. Our reality is often a stew of in-person and virtual interactions, with smiles and love sent over the internet just as much as face to face, if not more, even
before the pandemic. One would think that a transition to an entirely virtual life would be easy, or at least easier. COVID-19 made us very aware how important every ingredient was to our specific recipe.

BYM YAFs were fortunate to already have existing communications platforms set up that worked well for the new form our community needed to take. We have long relied on social media to remain connected with each other due to our geographic diversity, which made the transition to online Meetings for Worship and Business much smoother. Our Discord (a community focused communications platform) group grew from a few channels of communication to now nearly 20. We grew from a single person managing our server to having several moderators and a committee to support them. We learned in real time how to transition a platform from a secondary resource to a primary one.

We also started meeting frequently over Zoom to conduct business, provide company and support, and share the creative ways we endured the quarantine life. Our YAF ’n Craft sessions (held every Friday or Saturday evening) turned into a place to let out frustration and turn it into something positive. We learned a lot from each other during these sessions; things ranging from crochet stitches to giant-weaving-machine programming.

We also tackled difficult community issues, such as the age at which YAFs age-out, how to balance our desire to effectively advertise our online spaces to other (as yet unconnected) YAFs with the need to maintain the safety of those spaces, and whether or not YAF should be able to declare participating Friends to be Members of our community. Although we were not able to reach unity on all of these, the conversations themselves were focused. Our more frequent meetings helped keep our collective attention from wandering which allowed for substantial progress on difficult topics. We also discovered that assigning committees and working groups to season issues worked far better using our Discord server, which lets committee members share thoughts and ideas as they arise.

**Journey Towards Being an Anti-Racist Community**

This year YAF continued to struggle with increasing awareness of white privilege, harm, and the suffocating atmosphere that minorities continue to live with. Current events have made the need for this work all the more obvious. BYM YAF sees the declaration of BYM's intent to become an anti-racist community as a promise made to Friends of Color; one that it has become clear we have not been pursuing with the dedication and seriousness these Friends deserve. Instead, we have come to feel that Friends within BYM are more concerned about preserving the positive self-images of our white Friends than they are about confronting behaviors and practices that harm and exclude Friends of Color. While we have seen a great expansion of important dialogue on anti-racism within BYM, we have also sat in committee meetings where not making someone feel bad was of equal concern with re-shaping our community into a place where people of color actually have a seat at the table. We grow tired of having to explain that the floor being scratched or paint chipped doesn't matter if we truly make more spots. And if the table no longer serves the community, how do we make one anew, stronger and larger than ever before, where no one will find spaces lacking?

All the while we must continually remind each other that our own work is not done. Declaring that we wish to become anti-racist is only the first step. Our experiences with the wider BYM community in the past year have made it clear to BYM YAF that not all Friends are willing to see that we all have more to do. Friends of Color still have to contend with a legacy of subtle and overt racism. The forums for sharing their pain are full of unspoken rules, where messages only matter if they are shared in the `right' way. At the same time, decades of clear lessons white Friends have been given about how to pursue anti-racism
are ignored. All too often, the recitation of a white Friend's anti-racist resume is used to excuse and deny behavior that victimizes our Friends of Color, twisting opportunities for spirit-led self-improvement into wasted hours of self-serving autobiographies that deny us any true progress towards our goal of anti-racism.

While there have been the timid forward steps of an organization unwilling to be bathed in the white-centered Light of our guilt, BYM YAF is concerned that if white Friends continue to resist having their past and present failings laid bare, we will forever be stuck taking baby-steps toward anti-racism. The spirit has driven us to re-examine our actions today and, in doing so, provide a safe seat at our table for Friends of Color to join us.

In the Light,
Baltimore Yearly Meeting
Young Adult Friends

Addendum to the Epistle
Friends Meeting of Washington Young Adult Friends

The COVID-19 Pandemic and ensuing lockdown deeply affected the FMW YAF community as well. Though we are not unique in having our lives disrupted by COVID-19, the disruptions have affected our lives in unique ways. Though many FMW YAFs live with roommates or in group homes, there are some who live alone and are experiencing greater isolation than other members of the community who live with their families. Many FMW YAFs are also in the group that splits time between the Washington, DC area and a family home somewhere else. The inability to travel easily to see parents and siblings has been a unique challenge for FMW YAFs. The economic uncertainty that has resulted from COVID-19 has also hit FMW YAFs differently than other members of the community. The economic hardship has hit our Meeting particularly hard. FMW YAF has done its best to be good stewards of our community and has donated as a group and individually to help support our Meeting community. The many disruptions that COVID has brought to our lives has led to a deeper commitment to our Meeting life and a greater reliance on the spiritual and social activities provided by our FMW YAF community.

Before the COVID-19 lockdown, FMW YAF had weekly bible studies, monthly potlucks, game nights, and this year had a very successful Friendsgiving and Quakemas Murder Mystery Party and gift exchange. Since the COVID-19 lockdown, FMW YAF has transitioned many of our normal activities to Zoom. We have transitioned from doing monthly potlucks to weekly Zinners (Zoom dinners). Many FMW YAFs have found these Zinners to be a valuable part of coping with the social isolation that comes from the lockdown. We have also transitioned the FMW YAF sponsored bible study to Zoom. Attendance at the bible study has increased since the beginning of the lockdown as many are seeking increased spiritual guidance during this time. We have also been able to easily accommodate FMW YAFs who have moved out of the area to come to these events due to their virtual nature. It has been great to see the old F/friends can still lean on the FMW YAF community for support. These weekly events have helped to break up the monotony of the week and keep us grounded during this time.

We are getting through this because we are doing it together. We have been able to support each other through the shared joys and sorrows of this time. Though as individuals this outbreak may have been overwhelming, because we have been there for each other we have been able to withstand it.
In the Light,
Young Adult Friends
Friends Meeting of Washington

EPISODE OF YOUNG FRIENDS
ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 1ST DAY, 2020

The Young Friends held our first conference of the year at Stony Run Friends Meeting. September Con is always a wonderful combination of reuniting with old friends and making new ones. To introduce the incoming class of Freshman into our community, we held Con 101, a place to learn our guidelines and expectations, as well as how our self-governing community functions. Friends attended a lovely workshop, where we learned to find and better express our voices. Our Business meetings at this con were productive and further served to teach our self-governing process to new members of our community. Saturday night we played a game of sardines in the dark before heading inside for a dance party. Sunday morning, we woke up early to clean before joining Stony Run Friends in worship. We thank the Stony Run community for granting us the use of their Meeting.

In November we met for our next conference at Friends Meeting of Washington. Our workshop at this conference was an insightful look on the history and current societies of Native Americans. Our community also enjoyed a field trip to a local playground where we played community bonding games. To celebrate the winter season, we made gingerbread houses in our Color Groups before gathering for Business. After our Business Meeting we had another dance party till the early morning, before waking to clean the meeting house and gather in worship with Friends Meeting of Washington. We thank Friends for allowing us to gather in your space.

For our third Conference of the year we gathered at Adelphi, for our February conference. We enjoyed several Valentine’s day games. Young Friends then attended a workshop on sexual health and education, an important topic for our age group. After our Business Meeting, we held our annual Prom and once again danced into the early morning. Sunday morning it was time to clean up and say goodbye, but not before joining Adelphi Friends for Worship. We are deeply grateful to Adelphi Friends for opening their doors to our community.

Our Service con was sadly canceled due to Covid-19, and our Grad con was moved to an online format to maintain the safety of our community and the wider Friends Community. We were still able to organize a community online bonding session, before holding our Senior Circles for the graduating class. We hold them in the light for the disruption to their senior years but hope that our online substitutes for Senior circles and books helped to bring some semblance of normalcy to these trying times. The class of 2020 will be missed in our community, but we look forward to seeing them all prosper as the light leads the way forward in their lives.

We would also like to take the time to thank Gunpowder Friends Meeting and Sandy Spring Friends Meeting for planning to allow us into their meetings for our Service and Grad cons respectively. While we were not able to hold in person conferences and connect with your communities this year, we hope to carry over our plans and hold conferences with these Friends in the 20-21 year. That being said, our community is placing the safety of all Friends at the forefront of our considerations this year, and will evaluate the risk level before each con. We plan to make all arrangements for cons in the hope that the Light will shine on positive circumstances, but we will pay close attention to the situations and cancel conferences if it keeps Friends safe.

Friends in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia
www.bym-rsf.org
Lastly, our community is saying goodbye to another loved member this year. Jocelyn Dowling has served as the Youth Programs Manager for 6 years now, and she has changed the lives of many Young Friends. Our community is self-governed, but it is Jossie’s presence that helps maintain and advance that state. She worked tirelessly to assist Young Friends in our work, while also being an incredibly fun and welcoming presence that brought love and light to every con. We cannot say thank you enough for all of the work she put in to help us, for how many of us she helped and for all the fond memories we will hold onto. While it is sad to see her leave, we know that the light will lead her way forward to bigger and better things, and we will be cheering her on the whole way.

This has been a difficult year for all Friends, but those of us in high school have gone through an incredibly difficult level of change. We had to cancel two conferences this year, and for Young Friends our conferences are an important place to be ourselves and feel accepted. It has always been the support of the meetings that open their doors to us and the wider BYM community that allows the Young Friends community to grow and prosper. We thank you all for this support, and hope that we are able to work together to maintain the Young Friends Community in these times. We hope you all stay safe and healthy.

Love and Light,
Young Friends

EPISTLE OF 2020 WOMEN'S RETREAT

February 8, 2020

Greetings to Friends Everywhere,

More than 170 women from as far away as Australia gathered at Pearlstone Retreat Center in Reisterstown, Maryland from February 7-9 for the annual Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women’s Retreat to explore the theme of “Diligence in love, Overcoming isolation.”

Old and young came ready to learn from each other, and hold each other up during different seasons of their lives. Women shared their gifts in varying ministries, facilitating workshops, participating in the planning, in ways that enriches ours and the larger community. Our time together refreshed our souls: combining listening, speaking, reflecting, crying and laughing.

With exuberance, we sang rounds and chants, traditional and playful tunes, knowing that no one judged our voices—that God heard us and that every voice contributed to the harmonies that will see us through the remaining winter and nourish us throughout the year. Where God is, is holy Ground, and as Quakers we know that this can be anywhere we gather together, or anyplace that we can live deeply attuned to that of the divine in others.

We were nurtured in so many ways. Women shared their wisdom and talents in workshops and the coffee house. In order to deeply explore our theme, we focused on queries during various forms of worship sharing groups: traditional, walking, yoga, and singing, Experiment with the Light. We were renewed by health practitioners at the Healing Center. We enjoyed delicious kosher meals that included vegetables grown on this sustainable working farm/retreat center. We visited baby goats born on the grounds of the Center, a harbinger of spring and symbol of renewal.
In her multi-sensory keynote address, Dr. Tonya Thames Taylor of Fallowfield Friends Meeting, from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, shared her experience of growing up in Mississippi and rich stories of ancestors who struggled to survive. She discussed iconography and language, and how constructs differ from person to person and culture to culture. She connected the ancient scriptural words stenciled around the border of the room in this Jewish Retreat Center with a gospel song using those same words: “we are blessed in the city, we are blessed in the field, we’re blessed when we come and when we go…” The ancestral paths of African-Americans, of the Jewish people, and of Quakers seemed to converge in this holy space as we sang the verse of this song.

Tonya’s joy and Light shone through her, as she reminded us to bring our own unique Light into the world around us. There is a strength in loving with diligence, of showing up, and loving ourselves, our God, and our world.

In a world that is quick to judge, which is overrun with fear mongers, with those who would squash the simple beauty of loving kindness to our neighbors, we were reminded that sharing joy and sadness with strangers and fellow travelers alike is perhaps the most powerful and important thing we can do in these times.

If we let the Spirit work through us in our daily lives, and refuse the mantle of negativity that others would ask us to wear, then our collective Light can energize movements that will “try to see what Love can do.” We know in our hearts that if we follow that path, amazing things will transpire.

As the Women of BYM, we hope that you find those who empower you to let your Light shine in this world, on this earth that needs the deep love that Quakers have to give.

In the Light,
The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women’s Retreat
Epistle 2020

Letting Our Lives Speak: Linking Quaker Theology, Spirituality and Social Action

To Friends everywhere,

We, Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting, held our ‘residential’ yearly meeting over the weekend of 10-11 October 2020, online via Zoom, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Our theme was ‘Letting Our Lives Speak: Linking Quaker Theology, Spirituality and Social Action’.

Although Friends regretted that the current situation prevented us from meeting face to face and enjoying informal social interactions in person, gathering online enabled geographically distant Friends to join us, including representatives from yearly meetings in Britain, Switzerland, Ireland and the Netherlands. Some 45 members and attenders were present, from Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as Germany, France, the UK and the USA.

No children attended this year’s online yearly meeting. Their joyful presence and participation were missed.

Our keynote speaker was Craig Barnett, member of Britain Yearly Meeting and author of The Guided Life. Craig reminded us to ‘Take heed…to the promptings of love and truth in [our] hearts’ (Advices and Queries 1). He used his own spiritual journey as an example of lived action from those promptings, reminding us that the teacher is within.

Testimonies are not externally imposed aspirations but rather are descriptions of where generations of Quakers have been led by the Spirit. There is no perfect Quaker. We each have our own unique purpose in the world and the Quaker Way leads us to discovering it. We bring our promptings to the Quaker community in our Meetings (Business, Threshing, Clearness, Experiment with Light, etc.) to help us discern what are true leadings.

A guided life is not necessarily a successful life. The life journey itself is more important than the goal, and along the way, weakness, failure and suffering can be powerful teachers. When faced with adversity, remain open and surrender. Vulnerability may open us to new leadings. For example, George Fox needed to feel despair himself so he could speak to the condition of others. Reflect on what you yourself have learned when led into areas of weakness.

Our second speaker was Anya Nanning Ramamurthy. Anya is a British Friend and climate justice activist who is engaged in the UK Student Climate Network. She has been inspired by historical Friends who acted on their beliefs. One in particular is the Quaker American civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, who encouraged ‘angelic troublemakers’ to use their bodies to ‘disrupt business as usual’. Quakers have upheld children and young people as leaders from our earliest days when children kept meetings going while adults were imprisoned.

Anya encourages Friends to recognise that we cannot work against climate breakdown without addressing inequalities and social injustices.

Friends from Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting shared testimonies on how they have been led by the Spirit to serve their communities in unexpected ways. In reaction to the mistreatment of Muslim students, Isfried Rodeyns was led to develop creative forms of inter-religious dialogue. Karen Lang’s life ‘master plan’ was disrupted by a series of chance encounters which led to unexpected opportunities for service in multiple areas including human rights education.
We have considered how the Spirit can lead us either to social action close to home, to ‘bloom where [we] are planted’ and ‘find [our] own Calcutta’, as St Francis de Sales and Mother Teresa were quoted in testimony — or how we may be led to venture wider into the world.

Margaret Fell wrote that the Light ‘will rip you up, and lay you open’. We need to remain open, to seek discernment of our promptings and follow our leadings. The journeys on which we are led are their own rewards.

Acceptance of our limits and being gentle with ourselves can help us to find authenticity in our lives and avoid ‘Quaker guilt’ at not doing enough. We can see ourselves as ‘well-oiled cogs’ in a bigger machine. We do not move, spiritually or physically, in isolation, but rather in concert with others. Our own movements affect and propel and perhaps inspire the movements of others. As a community of faith and searching we are all connected.

Corona times have provided us with challenges and unexpected opportunities. The crisis woke us up to our collective vulnerability and connected us with people of other times and places. Like George Fox at the precipice of darkness, accepting our own feelings of confusion, disorientation, fear, anxiety and the heartbreak of separation from loved ones allows us to persevere and serve others. The Quaker Way is an active, adaptable path, guided by the still, small voice, through fear to gratitude. Together with our neighbours we are slowly building the beloved community.
To all Friends everywhere

“‘The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.’ (Proverbs 19:21, NRSV)

This letter of greeting comes to you in a year when so many plans have been disrupted, along with our ways of working and of meeting. We had planned a week-long gathering for up to 2000 Friends of all ages to worship and build community, and to discern leadings for our yearly meeting on “Listening, prophecy and reconciliation: allyship in a climate emergency”. We had hoped to welcome among us many Friends from other yearly meetings. Instead, due to the coronavirus pandemic and continued uncertainty over what would be possible, our Yearly Meeting is short, held by electronic means, and for only necessary business and to worship together.

Nevertheless, our greetings to you all are as warm and loving as always. We have been learning again the importance of faithfulness in keeping our meetings and building our Quaker communities, whilst discovering new and unexpected ways to connect and worship together. One hundred years since the first world gathering of Friends came together to affirm a worldwide opposition to war and to building the social conditions for peace, we are thankful to belong to our world family.

The issues of privilege and climate injustice, which have been exercising our yearly meeting, are still urgent. Inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic and the response to it. Tackling systemic racism is a spiritual imperative. The impact of changes in the climate grows. Work and learning on these issues continues around our yearly meeting.

In these extraordinary and challenging times, we have seen that it is possible to make changes in our way of life. We have hope. We trust that the leadings of love and truth will come right.
To Friends Everywhere,

Loving greetings from the 186th annual gathering of Quakers in Canada, our 64th as a united Yearly Meeting. Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends met over 5 days between the 8th and 13th of August, 2020.

In this extended season of diverse isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian Yearly Meeting, like other Meetings across Mother Earth, has had to find new ways of being, new ways of meeting together while separate, and new ways to perceive and acknowledge the Light that grounds us, and the Spirit as it moves among, through, and all around us in our separate solitudes.

Canadian Yearly Meeting’s plan for 2020 was to meet in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but like the rest of everyone’s plans for this year, this was disrupted. Our Program Committee, while accustomed to the many labours involved in gathering Friends together across a vast country – the traditional home of over 600 Indigenous Peoples, stretching over 5000 kilometres from west to east, and across 5½ time zones – had to conceive an entirely new format for Yearly Meeting 2020. An Interim Program and Support Committee was formed to research technologies which could meet our needs and to choose strategies by which to go about our virtual gathering. We honour the Interim Program and Support Committee’s dedication, and that of our Clerks and the many others who have brought the gathering of Canadian Yearly Meeting into a new virtual dimension.

This Gathering of Yearly Meeting in Session, in addition to being different in most physical ways, has had the unique characteristic of not holding Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business. The business of Yearly Meeting has been conducted throughout 2020 by Representative Meeting, which has met in an online forum in frequent but shorter meetings, and will continue to do so. Since our Monthly Meetings also have been unable to meet in person, the communication among individual Meetings, their Representatives, and Representative Meeting has been imperfect, but like everything else this year, it is a work in progress. We are committed to learning, to being patient with one another and ourselves, and to mastering the new technologies which aid us in carrying out our mission.

We have discovered that there are blessings to be celebrated. Many Friends who would not have been able to attend otherwise - those who physically could not have endured the travel, those who wouldn’t be able to spend the time or the funds to travel, and those who choose not to travel because of the environmental impacts - were welcomed into our Yearly Meeting Gathering. The challenge of new technology has been partially overcome, but for many Friends more time and learning are required to allow for comfortable use. Some isolated Friends and attenders have expressed particular gratitude for the possibilities that online gatherings open for them. In addition, we are aware that our carbon footprint is greatly reduced, which is congruent with our concern for the environment.

235 individuals registered for our Yearly Meeting sessions: 203 were registered from within Canadian Yearly Meeting, with 32 visitors who came from Canada, the USA, Britain Yearly Meeting, Kenya, and Kuwait. 22 identified themselves as Young Adult Friends; 13 were new to Quakers, and 70 were attending Canadian Yearly Meeting for the first time. Since we do not have the usual expenses of a physical gathering, but acknowledge the continuing needs of Canadian Yearly Meeting for basic funding,
our registration has implemented a “pay-as-led” experiment and an “attend-as-able” expectation. We also acknowledge that some Friends do not have access to the technology by which we come together and we hope to find ways to better include them.

Yearly Meeting began with intergenerational welcoming activities, as usual, and was followed by small breakout groups reflecting on the movement of the Spirit during the pandemic year. As Friends gathered via Zoom for silent worship, they were warmed by seeing one another's faces. There was vocal ministry reminding us of love and tenderness, as well as tenacity and mutual support.

A Friend who has travelled in the ministry invited us to listen deeply during our time together — and always — for the Spirit as expressed through its many voices, and reminded us that we need to discern when our own egos are at play, clouding our listening and understanding. We were asked to look at the racism and white supremacy ideology that we all house (both individually and collectively within Canadian Yearly Meeting and the broader community of the Religious Society of Friends), because it is part of the very fabric of current society. We must grow our hearts wider and stronger in order to do the hard but crucial work to heal these harms and divides and come together in wholeness.

Following the opening Meeting for Worship, visitors from Britain, Kenya, and the United States introduced themselves. A Friend from the John Joseph Gurney tradition of Quakers expressed feeling warmly welcomed, and affirmed that we are all children of George Fox.

The lives of many Friends who have died since our last Yearly Meeting in session were celebrated in a Memorial Meeting for Worship. Friends found it profoundly moving and uplifting to learn more about beloved Friends, and to celebrate their gifts.

Our tradition for Canadian Yearly Meeting in session is to create a daily newsletter throughout the yearly meeting gathering called “The Daily Quacker.” This year, for the first time, it was published only online at quaker.ca as “The Daily e-Quacker”.

We heard the report from the Change and Sustainable Transformation working group. After giving the statement of purpose for Canadian Yearly Meeting, the clerk of the working group presented a suggested structure for holding Canadian Yearly Meetings in the future. The 2021 Gathering is currently planned to be held in Winnipeg in August, 2021, on Treaty 1 territory, traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota, and the heart of the Manitoba Metis Nation. Since this year's gathering of Canadian Yearly Meeting is not constituted as a decision-making body, this report was received in order for Friends to do further discernment individually and within their local Meetings, as we find our way forward as a Yearly Meeting.

The week progressed with Meetings for Worship and Worship-sharing, 14 small Worship Sharing groups, our traditional “Experience of the Spirit in my Life,” and an event with LGBTQ+ Friends. The physical, social, and spiritual challenges of life during a pandemic, especially for Friends who are aging or living alone, or both, were voiced and supported. As ever, Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel cared for the worshipful nature of the week, both in and out of Meetings for Worship, for which we are grateful.

There were special presentations: “Two Row on the Grand: A Learning Journey,” regarding the relationship of settlers with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and “Quaker Leadings and our Calling in these Times,” with Alastair McIntosh of Glasgow Meeting. Alastair urged us to think in depth about our concern for the environment and global warming, and the climate of racism and how we respond. He asked us to consider what we can uniquely offer that is not being done already in the secular world, and called for our actions to be based on spirituality, reminding us that we have practices and experiences of deep discernment. “Defunding Criminal Justice – Transforming, Abolishing, and What Comes Next,” offered the opportunity to explore this vitally urgent issue. These inspiring presentations nurtured our faith and inspired us to action.
Part way through the week, the need for a Meeting for Healing was made known and was quickly put in place. It was a tender time of sharing, where the Spirit's healing presence was palpable. Zoom was no barrier to the love shared, and the time was just as rich as in past years.

A chat platform incongruously called “Discord” was used by many Friends to discuss issues, meet and enjoy casual conversation (by text and video), and 'hang out' as we might if we were together. Young Friends, Young Adult Friends, spontaneous discussion groups around specific concerns, and other events not on the pre-meeting schedule occurred here. And, of course, there was singing.

We miss the camaraderie, the intimacy, the hugs, the spontaneity of meeting in person, but we are grateful that the world of technology has advanced so far as to make possible this level of gathering. The future is, as it always is, unknown, so we cannot tell whether or when to anticipate how we might meet again physically, but we rest in the Spirit, bear witness as the future unfolds, and wait expectantly for way to open.

We reach out to Friends across the world to greet Friends in these times of uncertainty, separation, disruption, and the challenge of new ways. It is a time of both death and rebirth, and offers many positive things as well as hardship.

This is a richly fertile time of change and transformation, looking at what is essential and what we are ready to do away with (both in our daily lives and within society). We need to prime ourselves and build our resilience to do the hard but necessary work ahead of us, addressing the many injustices of racism, poverty, sexism, LGBTQ+ issues, the environmental crisis, and other concerns which, as we re-form a new world, may we approach with new energy and commitment. May we step into true activism by letting our lives speak. As we move through the dark times of a pandemic, may we find the Light ever present in our lives, drawing us together.

[Signature]

Presiding Clerk
A todos nuestros Amigos Cuáqueros:

Llegue a ustedes, en la unidad del Espíritu Divino, nuestro deseo de compartir las experiencias vividas en la 93 Asamblea de la Junta Anual de los “Amigos Cuáqueros” en Cuba.

Durante este tiempo de aprender y crecimiento en construir una comunidad de amor y gracia, donde el mensaje de Dios nos convoca a través del libro II de Corintios 13: 11-14, a ser de un mismo sentir y vivir en paz; esa paz que rompe las barreras del miedo, la incertidumbre y el desamor.

Hermanos, así como los vientos soplan en diferentes direcciones, así el Amor de Dios, como silbo apacible llega a sus buscadores y nos ayude a ser un solo cuerpo, consolándonos, siempre unidos en el Alfarero de la vida.

Nuestra Iglesia en Cuba se proyecta a explorar nuevos campos para llevar el evangelio, así nuevos obreros surgen dispuestos a trabajar para el Señor, una nueva Iglesia se reconoce como Junta Mensual: Floro Pérez en Holguín.

Entre alabanzas, mensajes y oraciones recibimos los informes del año de trabajo, así como proyectos de nuestra comunidad de fe para enfrentar nuevos desafíos en el contexto histórico que vivimos. La realización de talleres y grupos de interés sirven de motivación para instruir nuestras vidas en la obra de la Iglesia.

Nos sentimos gozosos al compartir con los hermanos de Nueva Inglaterra: Em Mc Manamy, Bruce Newman, Marion Athearn, Jacqueline Stillwell, y también Jade Souza de la Junta Anual de Sierra Cascades, quienes compartieron sus experiencias espirituales en la hermandad que vivimos, aún con diferencias geográficas y culturales.

El hermano Bruce Newman, predicó el mensaje de Dios sobre la verdad. Las personas tenemos una parte de la verdad, ésta viene de Jesucristo. Lo que indica que es imprescindible escuchar de forma más continua la voz de Dios.

Disfrutamos temas sugerentes que nos instruyen para lograr una mejor comunicación, construir la paz desde la humildad, la sencillez, la integridad que necesitamos para perfeccionar nuestras comunidades y así nuestro testimonio en la sociedad en que vivimos.

Amigos, somos buscadores de la luz, gracia divina, unamos nuestro sentir y juntos construiremos un mundo mejor. Seamos luz para el mundo.

Junta Anual de los “Amigos Cuáqueros” en Cuba.

*Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one*
another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

—2 Corinthians 13:11-14 NIV

Gibara, February 23, 2020

To all our Quaker Friends:

In the unity of the Divine Spirit we want to share with you the experiences we lived in the 93rd session of the Yearly Meeting of “Quaker Friends” in Cuba.

During this time of learning and growth in building a community of love and grace, the message of God through 2 Corinthians 13:11-14 calls us together to be of one and the same mind and to live in peace: that peace which breaks the barriers of fear, uncertainty, and the absence of love.

Brothers and sisters, just as the winds blow in different directions, the Love of God comes to those who seek it like a still small voice; it consoles us and helps us to be one body, and always unites us in the hands of the Potter of life.

Our Church in Cuba is planning to explore new fields where we can bring the Gospel, as new workers emerge willing to work for the Lord. A new Church has been recognized as a Monthly Meeting: Floro Pérez near Holguín.

Along with praises, messages, and prayers, we received reports from a year of work, together with ideas for projects for our faith community to face the new challenges in the historical context we live in. Workshops and interest groups helped motivate and instruct our lives for the work of the Church.

We felt joyful being able to share with brothers and sisters of New England: Em McManamy, Bruce Newman, Marion Athearn and Jacqueline Stillwell; Jade Souza of Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting also joined us. They told us about their spiritual experiences in the fellowship we share despite geographical and cultural differences.

Brother Bruce Newman preached the message of God about the truth. As people, we all have a part of the truth, which comes from Jesus Christ. Bruce tells us it is indispensable to listen to the voice of God in a more ongoing way.

We were enriched by the discussion of themes which suggested that we learn how to achieve better communication and to build peace from humility, simplicity, and integrity — qualities we need to make our communities more perfect, and thus develop our testimony in the society in which we live.

Friends, we are seekers for the light and for divine grace. We join together in this feeling and together we will build a better world. May we be light for the world.

The Yearly Meeting of “Quaker Friends” in Cuba.
Dear Friends everywhere…

... this year, we were not able to hold our Summer Gathering in Finland as we planned and looked forward to, due to the Covid19 outbreak. We still wanted to connect and meet and were therefore contemplating about what we need and how we can answer these needs in a new way this year. Pretty quickly we realized that an online gathering was the best and the safest choice for us this time. Our impromptu planning committee was able to create a space with different rooms which made us connect how we needed it: creating togetherness, creating community and spending time together. While going online was a necessity, our priorities in the way we approached this were our choice.

We did not know how this event would turn out, as it had to be so different from our usual gatherings… and we were positively surprised! The special connection between us was there, even with this very different way of being together.

We started to feel like a community already after the opening session – not just like pixelated pictures on a screen. We came together after the experience of several months of reduced social contact, everyone wanting this to work, craving connection. The digital ‘venue’ with different rooms made it easy to be at a place and be present. We felt like the venue made the place ‘real’ even if at that point no other people were online in the room. We also realized how much care and attention is needed to enable community, especially when meeting online – it is amazing what technologies are available, but even more what community can do. The words “The spirit is in the detail” stayed with us over the week. And when one main session had to be postponed due to technical issues, we just stayed together and played the game someone suggested.

Meeting online was not without challenges, though. It was much harder to ‘see’ the people who were not present during the sessions than it would have been in an in-person community like Spring Gatherings, and at times it was hard to connect throughout the day, as we didn’t know who would be online at what time exactly. As the week progressed, we became more confident and started using the platform for conversation in between sessions as well. Implementing and planning these inspired moments was harder than planning the sessions themselves, so we were glad to see that over time and with trust, this happened.

The online gathering not only brought challenges but also came with advantages. For example, it enabled several people to attend who said they couldn’t have come to a gathering in Finland. Not only was the gathering easier to combine with the demands of daily life, but being able to attend it
from your own home also lowered the threshold for several newcomers. This made us consider different ways of making future gatherings more accessible by using digital or hybrid forms of worship. Reflections on this were also shared when Michael Eccles visited and led a discussion about the ways meetings in the Europe and Middle East Section (EMES) are staying in contact, worshipping and coming together. Some Friends appreciated the freedom of attending just a few sessions and nonetheless being a part of the community. Throughout the week, we experienced a steady attendance, with all sessions or meetings being attended by at least a small group of Young Friends. In total, more than 25 Young Friends were a part of the gathering.

During the week, we had sessions in the evening and early morning activities like Yoga and Meeting for Worship, while spending the day in our workplaces, with our families and (non-EMEYF)-friends. Because the gathering took place in the midst of Friends’ everyday lives, some everyday life impressions were blending into the gathering and vice versa. People from our everyday life did eventually notice that we were doing activities together and we were able to share interesting conversations about our gathering and our community with “outside people”, which we otherwise maybe would not have had. Carrying the gathering with us and incorporating it in our daily lives also allowed us to see each other differently, as part of other communities and in our daily spaces, outside of the exceptional time and space of an in person gathering: We got to see each other’s kitchens and living rooms, pets, partners, and housemates, which gave the gathering a very homey feel. 😊

The digital setup of the special gathering also allowed us to easily welcome external speakers, to share their stories and concerns with us. Edouard Dommen from Geneva challenged us to think non-anthropocentrically about the world, and we looked at this together, from different perspectives, growing in our understanding and awareness: How can we extend the community of neighbours that we think of when we intend to ‘love our neighbours’? How is our view of the world and how are our actions for the environment changed when we stop thinking in terms of stewardship, but understand ourselves interwoven in human-nonhuman connections and networks? Some of us were inspired to start conversations about how we and our meetings are sometimes anthropocentric (maybe without being aware of it).

Matthias Schwerendt from Berlin shared his memories and reflections on being a Young Friend in the GDR and when the wall came down, asking what it means to be a (Young) Quaker in a Europe that is changing all around us. We heard about the close community of East German Young Friends, about the joys of international contacts and intervisitation, but also about the difficulties in growing together, as their experience differed from those of Western Young Friends. We spoke about what keeps us going and how conflicts within Quaker communities can be attended to, and Matthias reminded us of
the importance of listening. This thought-provoking session created conversation and connection between the current and former generation of “Young” European Friends, then and now.

In other sessions and activities we enjoyed the opportunity to connect and catch up, such as when we were cooking a Mung Dal with Raita together, each in our own kitchen. While some of us were already eating, others were still cooking or in conversation. We appreciated the shared activities and the freedom that comes with a communal rhythm of the day, including variations, without the need to sync our activities too much.

These sessions, as well as our virtual Meeting for Worship, created a sense of “together togetherness”: on Veertly, in a meeting room, looking at each other. Other activities that were offered to use the week as a retreat created a sense of “separate togetherness”: We had daily challenges on the topic of “Nature and Spirituality”, which encouraged us to leave the house, searching for water and sitting with trees or harvesting fruits. Pictures of our adventures were shared in a messenger group. We sent each other postcards to create a ‘tangible’ memory of this online event. We looked after each other in homegroups. It felt special and important to take time out of our week for our community and our faith.

We hope that the connections between us will continue to strengthen and grow, virtually and in person.
The Fellowship of Friends of African Descent Gathered from August 27 -30, 2020. Due to the COVID 19 Pandemic affecting our world, we gathered virtually with the theme of the Freedom Rides of the 1960s. Our sessions focused on various aspects of the Freedom Rides and we used queries in each session to explore the current manifestations of our theme. Each evening closed with a community building time. On our first night we introduced ourselves to each other via an Adinkra Symbol or an object we shared. On our second night we shared Freedom Songs. On Saturday night, we shared a talent or treasure with one another.

On Thursday, Friends gathered to learn about John Lewis and reflect on “good trouble” to which we are called. We also held up C. T. Vivian and Joseph Lowery as ancestors who, with Lewis, led lives which can guide us as we seek our way forward. We discussed nonviolent social action as a political tool to promote social, political and economic change. Are we led to “good trouble?” How will we answer the spirit?

On Friday, our Gathering began with Programmed worship and a self-care exploration led by Sisters Karla Cruel and Regina Renee Ward. In small groups participants considered how our spiritual journeys are deepened when we care for ourselves emotionally and physically.

During Friday’s second session, we learned about Mississippi’s Freedom Summer of 1964. Our Friend and elder Carolyne Jordan shared her courageous work as a young student during the civil rights sit-ins. We also learned that several Quakers of African descent, including Paul Cuffee started, schools for “colored children” and integrated schools in the 17 and 1800’s. Other Friends also started such schools, including 16 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania alone. Those of us at the Gathering wrestled with the question of how Quaker schools had changed to focusing on providing education to the wealthy and the socially “elite.”

In the following session on Friday, we learned about the horrors of Bloody Sunday during which nonviolent protestors marching across the Edmund Pettus Bridge were brutalized by state police. We were reminded of the price that was paid for our current voting rights and explored ways we could promote and protect those rights in the upcoming elections. In small groups we explored the continued relevance of the peace testimony and recognized that it involved developing the inward capacity for forgiveness as well as facing the consequences of “overturning tables” like Jesus did.

On Saturday, we heard from the Black Quaker Project and its work of celebrating the lives and contributions of Quakers of Color worldwide, as well as its work on a Pendle Hill pamphlet addressing issues of racism and violence, grounded in Quaker principles of peace, truth, equality and justice. Paula Rhodes shared about the International Decade on the Human Rights of People of African Descent. We discussed ways that the Fellowship can participate in both of these activities.

During our last stop on this virtual Freedom Ride, we revisited the Minute on State Sanctioned Violence adopted by the Fellowship in 2016. We acknowledged how the Spirit moved among us in a prophetic way in that year and we were under the weight of how many lives might have been saved from senseless violence had we, and Friends generally, been more proactive in our commitments. We renewed our commitment to working together and sharing information to develop “Peace Forces” and peace centers, and promoting disarmament in our various communities.

We paid tribute to the lives of Ernest Cuff, Jeanette Page and Wilma Campbell, members of the Fellowship who died in the earlier part of this year. We celebrated 30 years of the Fellowship’s
existence with a wonderful documentation of those years through photographs provided by Vanessa Julye.

The Gathering concluded on Sunday at a meeting for worship with attention to business. We then adjourned to join in worship with the Ujima Friends Peace Center.

This was the first gathering of the Fellowship done by video conferencing. It was filled with laughter and tears, historical insights and inspirational examples of the courageous actions of those who preceded us. While we all longed for the opportunity to share and interact in person, we were touched by how the Spirit was able to speak and move among us in spite of our physical separation. Throughout the four day Gathering, speakers and participants alike, could hear the Spirit call us to go beyond the secular, social and political perspectives on the challenges of our day and seek the deeper spiritual healing and understanding that we all need to advance the freedom work of our ancestors on whose shoulders we stand.
Epistle of 2020 Annual Pre-Gathering Retreat

The Outgoing Epistle of the 2020 Virtual Pre-Gathering of Friends of Color and their Families

Friends General Conference

“We are a harvest of survivors. But then, that’s what we've always been.”

- Octavia E. Butler, Parable of the Sower

To Friends Everywhere:

We begin by remembering our ancestors who were strong enough to make a way for us. Friends of Color and their families met for Pre-Gathering Retreat on 26 Day through 28 Day Sixth Month 2020. This is the eighth year Friends of Color have met for our Pre-Gathering Retreat. First-timers felt welcomed and validated. This year, we met virtually with our largest attendance yet. There were 47 attendees, ranging in age from 11 months through 77 years from Canada, Mexico, Switzerland and the United States of America.
The importance of this Gathering for Friends of Color worshipping in community together cannot be overstated. To our Friends in the wider Quaker world, we the Friends of Color, can’t breathe. During this weekend, we enjoyed the rare opportunity of not being othered in Quaker space. We experienced the joy of being seen as we are and the affirmation of a supportive spirit among ourselves in the “Amen corner”. The term “Amen corner” comes from the Black church and is a communal space that validates, affirms and uplifts the spirit. In isolation, due to COVID19, we are being kept apart and away from those we love, trust and need. The pre-gathering retreat brought back the source of community and family that has been missing. We were able to exhale, relax, and breathe together. Many of us did not realize how exhausted we were until we were able to relax with one another. The gifts of the spirit were abundant. We shared in worship, gentle yoga and meditation, meaningful discussions, journaling and self-discovery. We also listened and shared in each other’s joys, triumphs, pains and sorrows. We experienced spiritual renewal that was awakened by moving through pain to hope for the future for ourselves and our children. Attention and space was given for people to play games, dance, talk, grieve, play music, watch videos, and write.

We have much gratitude to the Program Coordinator for the Ministry on Racism; the pioneer who laid the groundwork to make the Pre-Gathering Retreat available to us within FGC gathering and who faithfully makes it happen each year. We are grateful for being able to acknowledge all that makes us human, for finding home and connection. Our inner Light is magnified and our capacity to breathe deeply is nurtured when that of God is acknowledged in each of us. It is our hope that other Friends of Color will know
that such a space exists and know that they are desired, needed and will be warmly embraced.

The Pre-Gathering Friends of Color Retreat provides a reprieve. Friends of Color need respite from the systemic racism too often found in our American Quaker community that often goes unseen by many white Friends. Friends of Color need respite from the insidious lie of white supremacy manifested in daily oppressive traumatic stressors (microaggressions) which have the effect of blaming the oppressed for our own oppression. Friends of Color need respite and support which our home meetings have not provided. Friends of Color are fatigued from being asked to teach white folks.

We ask all Quakers to heed a Call to Action. Please sit with these queries:

1) What is the Spirit leading me to do about the historic and ongoing racial pandemic across my meeting, my community, my work environment and my country?

2) How can we honor the memory of people who have lost their lives to the struggle for a better world?

3) How can we construct ways for people to engage and remain engaged beyond good intentions in the struggle for true equality in health, education, wealth and against state sanctioned violence?

4) How can we encourage the support of Friends of Color in Quaker worship and meetings around the world?

5) How can Friends de-center themselves in order to listen to and hear Friends of Color?
6) How can I support respite for Friends of Color?

In this time of COVID19, People of Color discovered that a deadly pandemic is secondary to the long-time pandemic of racism in our lives. People of Color are more likely to die from COVID19 due to the effects of racism and oppression. Think about how this pandemic has turned your world upside down, economically, emotionally, psychologically. Now imagine there is no one working on a vaccine, and that if you get sick or die, no one notices or cares. For People of Color, the human-made pandemic of racism is deadlier than COVID19, and we need you to do work so that we can BREATHE.

In Peace, Love and ....

2020 FGC Virtual Pre-Gathering Retreat for Friends of Color and their Families
To Friends Everywhere:

Greetings from the FWCC Central Executive Committee. We have held our annual meeting by a series of videoconferencing sessions spanning five days, 11-15 June 2020. While we miss the fellowship of in-person meetings, the conversations over meals and cups of tea, the sharing of sunsets and walks, we have learned new skills in electronic meeting, and are grateful for the “tech elders” who have guided us.

We gather in the midst of dual challenges: a global pandemic and associated economic crisis that has upended all our normal ways of working and being together, plus widespread, largely peaceful, popular protests throughout the world challenging long-entrenched patterns of racial and social inequities and colonial domination. The dual crisis has starkly revealed injustices that are too often hidden from those who are more privileged. Throughout the world, we have been brought into a new reality, in which many people echo the plea, “I can’t breathe.” God is giving us the gift of another chance to right so many wrongs that have gotten us to this place. We long for healing, justice, and reconciliation. These challenges resonate with work FWCC has already undertaken, to expand our use of digital communication and to address and transform historical patterns of injustice.

During these sessions we have found it difficult to make firm plans for the future, given the profound sense of uncertainty about the global economy and the pandemic. Nevertheless, we have moved forward in faith with our normal work of budgets and audited accounts, reviewing the work of FWCC’s committees and Sections, and evaluating the General Secretary. We have been heartened by reports of the creative ways Friends in each Section have found to channel resources to help bridge the digital divide, connecting Friends in ways we would have thought impossible only a few months ago. Many Friends are taking advantage of opportunities to worship online with Friends at considerable geographical distance, creating new relationships. We are planning a number of online presentations in connection with World Quaker Day, 4 October 2020, on the theme “What does it mean to be a Quaker today? Living into a faithful life in a changing world.” We have reluctantly postponed the next World Plenary Meeting for one year until July 2024, in Durban, South Africa, with a sequence of online events during 2023 to help prepare for it and engage Friends around the world.
We hold in prayer those in economic distress, those who are sick with coronavirus, and the families of the many thousands who have died. We are reminded that God knows all and understands all. We can rest in peace, trusting that God’s care makes us lie down in safety. What marks us as Christ’s disciples, in this time as in any other, is our love for one another. We extend our greetings and our love to Friends in whatever circumstances you may find yourselves, and look forward to connecting with you in the coming months as way may open.

Job Bikokwa (Evangelical Friends Church Kenya) Sec Africa Section
Gretchen Castle (Philadelphia YM) General Sec FWCC
Elizabeth Cazden (New England YM) Assistant Clerk FWCC
Ronis Chapman (Australia YM) Sec AWP Section
Michael Eccles (Britain YM) Sec EMES
Myron Guachalla Montano (Bolivia Central YM) Member at large
Fenwick Kirton-Darling (Britain YM) Treasurer FWCC
Simon C. Lamb (Ireland YM) Clerk FWCC
Thule Mbete (Southern Africa YM) Member at large
Robin Mohr (Philadelphia YM) Sec Section of the Americas
Esther Mombo (Highlands YM) Assistant Clerk FWCC
David Shiner (Illinois YM) Clerk Section of the Americas
Lee Taylor (Britain YM) Alternate, Clerk EMES
Ronald Titus (Bhopal YM) Clerk, AWP Section
Bainito Wamalwa (East Africa YM-North) Clerk Africa Section
Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting held Online, 7 – 9 May 2021

And truth flourishes as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns… for the seed Christ is over all (George Fox, 1663):

Discerning how we rebuild and grow with hope

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised, is faithful. Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

Hebrews 10, 23 & 24

In Friendship, i vennskap, i vänskap, i venskab, ystävyydessä, bien amicalement, in Freundschaft, in Vriendschap, en amistad, in amicizia, v přátelství, u prijateljstvu, draudzībā, a barátságban, sõpruses, w przyjaźni, le cairdeas, fi alsadaqa.

Signed
Ethel Livermore
Clerk FWCC-EMES
Dear Friends everywhere,

we send loving greetings from our unusual meeting place for our 90th Yearly Meeting of German and Austrian Friends – for most of us, our own homes. Instead of meeting in Bonn, we logged in to web-meetings held between the 23rd and 25th October 2020. For the past few months we have been getting used to the fact that Meetings for Worship, Meetings for Worship for Business, and Creative Listening sessions are not possible “in person”. While we miss this personal contact, we find that technology can help us bridge this gap. We are sad to meet fewer people than in previous years, and we hold those in the light who cannot be with us. At the same time, we are grateful that this technical support enables some Friends to take part who could not otherwise be present.

Our children and young people were almost completely out of the picture for many of us; however they too were participating in lively online sessions, which included a real live chicken!

The theme of our Yearly Meeting this year was also the theme of the Jochen Dudeck’s Richard-Cary Lecture: “Connected in the Light”.

Based on his own experience and his personal influences, he sees us all from birth onwards as connected; with our own selves, with our families and with the material and spiritual world. We live in symbiosis with innumerable bacteria and viruses and in constantly changing relationship to all of the world’s living things.

Jochen understands the old Quakerly „inward Light“ as the light of life, that streams into us when we open ourselves to it. In this process lies the nature of the „gathered meeting."

During the past three years, our Yearly Meeting has begun to grow. This year we welcomed six new members into the Meeting, as well as Friends who have transferred their membership to us from other Yearly Meetings.

After years of debating the future of our Quaker House in Bad Pyrmont, we found the confidence this year to write a far-reaching minute. We want to keep the house, meanwhile using the coming year to develop ideas for shaping the building in a way that is sustainable, both financially and otherwise.

Many of us are actively involved in demonstrations and direct action, including civil disobedience, calling for equality, peace and the integrity of creation. May all of our personal and joint efforts be connected to and with the Light, our trust contributing towards transformation for the good.

We give grateful thanks for your messages from all over the Quaker world. Let us continue to hold one another in the Light, that Light which both connects and moves us.

In Friendship

German Yearly Meeting
2020 Illinois Yearly Meeting Epistle

To Friends Around the World,

In spite of ‘the weight of the sad time,’ I bring you a message of hope. For I believe our young people can yet save the world. The revolution that is needed now is already taking place in the minds and lives of some of them.

Elizabeth Watson, as quoted in Nine Contemporary Quaker Women Speak

For the first time, Illinois Yearly Meeting held annual sessions via online video-conference from June 17-21, 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic. In this and other ways, reflections on how Friends are called to change became a hallmark of the 146th Annual Session. Many Friends have spent months grappling with the losses and disruptions caused by this pandemic. In response, Northside Friends Meeting was joined by other monthly meetings in holding Memorial Day 2020 as a National Day of Mourning for Victims of COVID-19. In their statement, Northside Friends reminds us that as Quakers “our testimony of equality compels us to see the privilege enjoyed by those whom the pandemic has touched lightly and witness the pain of those whom the pandemic has wounded deeply.”

That same day, May 25, 2020, the horrific inequality that permeates our country was brought to the fore when a Minneapolis police officer killed George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. In witness to this injustice, sessions opened in silence for this same period of time. Heightened awareness of racist, state-sponsored violence, and the ongoing suffering from the worldwide pandemic were never far from mind as we contemplated our theme “How do we walk cheerfully over the earth answering that of God in others and ourselves?”

Earlham Quaker Studies professor Stephen Angell shared how we can draw strength from the words of Friends who have gone before us in times of crisis. In the 1660s in England, George Fox, knew fear of dying from endemic disease, which took the lives of hundreds of imprisoned Quakers. “The truth can live in jails,” Fox wrote to Friends. Stephen then shared how Black Friends from the past can help guide us as we face the ugly nature of racial disparities and police brutality in 2020. He read two poems by poet and Pendle Hill resident, Helen Morgan Brooks, written in the 1960s and shared an excerpt from theologian Howard Thurman’s 1971 book, The Search for Common Ground:

The heartrending years when hundreds of Negros were lynched, burned, and butchered by white men, whose women and children were often spectators of the inhuman ceremony are conveniently forgotten…. The bodies of Negroes remember and their psyches can never forget this vast desecration of personality.

Stephen asked us, how can we confront this horrific reality that has lasted for centuries and not turn away from it? How can we act?
One of the ways Friends answered was with a sense of urgency that our work for change in the world today involves providing material support, physical and vocal presence, and financial contributions to Black-led anti-racism organizations. Those present also adopted a minute to acknowledge that Quakers have been part of systems of racist oppression and to describe how we will begin the work of learning about and reflecting on the effects of personal and structural racism in our lives and our spiritual journeys.

During these times our local meetings are also experiencing dramatic changes in format in response to the pandemic. In the absence of in-person gatherings, many of our monthly meetings are connecting online for worship, business, and fellowship. Although this offers increased accessibility and opportunity for many Friends to connect, others are struggling and describe the online environment as a barrier to the quality of spiritual and social experiences they have when physically gathered.

These struggles are especially true among high school Friends who tend to have a smaller local peer group, and are particularly saddened at being unable to fellowship in-person. Simultaneously, a number of high school Friends found meaningful opportunities to volunteer in support of children’s events. Children from the ages of 3 to 15 held each other in the Light during the weight of these times as they participated in online Religious Education classes via Zoom. They were glad to have this way to connect to each other and the life of the Spirit, but it could not replace their freedom to play together for hours on the rural campus of the historic Illinois Yearly Meeting Meetinghouse.

While Friends were not physically present at the meetinghouse and grounds, these spaces will receive new care with the appointment of Judy Reese in the role of property caretaker. As we move into the coming days, Friends need discernment in considering how to better meet the needs of those among us and throughout the world who have been impacted by the intersecting forms of inequality.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963)

Illinois Yearly Meeting, via Zoom, Sixth Month, 21, 2020
For the second year in a row, Illinois Yearly Meeting met not on the grounds we hold deeply in our hearts, but through computers, forming a patchwork quilt of faces on a screen. This year’s sessions focused on the Testimony of Equality: How are the choices we make considering all of our Beloved Community, and not the few who speak loudest or the group that is most dominant? How are we finding that of God in those around us, not only to acknowledge our shared humanity but to celebrate it fully?

We so often think of differences as burdens, as things to be handled. But during a panel presentation on the Testimony of Equality, Adrian Nelson shared what a gift it is for something often considered a burden to instead be considered a gift. When we step away and see these differences as strengths, we gift each other with the love and knowledge and community that we are all so different, and yet at our core the same. And so, rather than seeing shifts away from traditions and long-held “norms” as a burden, we can instead see them as a gift. We can see this time as an opportunity to rebuild our practices and processes in ways that both keep the beauty and strength at the core of what it means to be a Friend and move away from that which “gatekeeps” our community.

In her presentation on environmental justice, Shelley Tanenbaum, of Quaker Earthcare Witness, shared a query from Potawatomi scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer. At its core this query asks: what can we change that may be difficult for us, but make positive changes in the lives of so many others. On this deep dive into the Testimony of Equality this week, many of us found that our idea of equality is rooted in our own experiences, rather than those of the people who have long been denied that equality. We recognized that to fully live into the Testimony of Equality is not to treat everyone exactly the same, but to treat people as they want to be treated, embracing the differences in culture, ability and norms that make us each special.

Dwight Wilson, Quaker author and minister, spoke Saturday night, fittingly on the first Juneteenth recognized as a federal holiday. Dwight shared from his heart, talking not about “white guilt”, but of a new way of love. Telling stories of his ancestors – not only their struggles, but their triumphs - he spoke of a promise he made himself years ago to be considered an ancestor one day; not just someone his family spoke of in passing, but someone who people would look to for guidance and strength. He left us with the wisdom that the work we do now is not about us in this moment, but about us in the future – we may not see the fruits of our labor with our own eyes, but our children, grandchildren and future generations will see them, and that will still be us. We must own our past, while moving forward in our present. Simply talking about things will not change anything; we must pair our internal work with external action.

We’ve spent the last year deeply searching for the ways to feel connected as we’ve needed to be physically apart. We’ve pivoted in ways we couldn’t have dreamed a year and a half ago, when the Covid Pandemic started raging. In that time, we have found intense joy, intense sorrow and everything in between. Some who have been kept away from their Meetings for decades were able to return, while others found Zoom overwhelming and needed to break away. As Meetings start to meet in person, or with a hybrid option, we will not – and we cannot – see it as a return to “normal”. This year has taught us that “normal” wasn’t working. Instead, we will walk away stronger, holding tight to that which makes us Friends, shedding what serves only portions of our community.

As we find a new rhythm to our lives, it will be tempting to return to patterns that are so deeply engrained in our daily routines, from both dominant cultures and Quaker traditions. Seeking inclusive alternatives, we are called to hold each other in the Light, as we co-create a better future by working for a world where equality is not more equal for some, constantly asking ourselves what love requires, remembering the call to enlightened action “What canst thou say?”. 
Indiana Yearly Meeting Outgoing Epistle

Friends gathered for the 200th Annual Session of Indiana Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held on the peaceful Quaker Haven Campgrounds at Dewart Lake, near Syracuse, IN. This was the 16th consecutive year to hold this event at Quaker Haven. The weather was beautiful, sunshine, and mid 80’s for the high and low 60’s at night. An average attendance included 83 for business sessions, 90 for worship services, reservations for the Mission Luncheon were 122 and reservations for the Feast of Faith were 135.

The Advancement Committee reported that $92,928.50 has been raised for the 2021 budget. God continues to bless IYM even in the midst of a pandemic. The Committee will begin working on the 2022 fund raising.

This year’s theme was “Knowing Jesus.” Michael Card shared his insight on getting to know Jesus through the four gospels. Jesus performed miracles then, and He still is doing them to this day. Sometimes we just don’t recognize them. He urged us to always be ready to see the miracles, the big and small ones, in our own lives.

Workshops held this year were:
- Spiritual Life at White’s, presented by White’s Residential & Family Services
- Barclay College-The 21st Century, presented by Barclay College
- What’s Happening in FUM? presented by Friends United Meeting
- Battling Addiction from a Christian Perspective, presented by Christian Service Committee
- Child Protection Standards, and how to implement them in your church, presented by IYM Christian Education Committee
- How Old were Jesus’ Disciples? presented by Kaleo Academy

Our speaker for the Missionary Luncheon was Dan Cammack, director of Evangelical Friends Mission. The purpose of EFM is to fuel a worldwide movement of people who seek first the Kingdom of God.

Indiana Yearly Meeting would like to welcome our new General Superintendent, Pat Byers, who will assume this role in January. IYM will not be seeking a new full-time Assistant General Superintendent but will be looking for two part-time positions for the year 2021 to address finance and youth and camping responsibilities.

Two ministers were recorded at the 2020 Session, Phil Abram of Van Wert First Friends and Rob Schwarze of Hemlock Friends.

Our statistical report shows a small decrease in total membership, worship attendance and Sunday School attendance. We also believe that God will increase these numbers in 2020 by reaching people through social media and other ways.

We welcomed our friends from our Worship Groups: African Friends Church of Louisville and Iglesia Amigos. Other visitors were from Western Yearly Meeting, Ohio Yearly Meeting, Barclay College, Friends United Meeting, Mesquakie Friends Center, and White’s Residential & Family Services.

Fellowship was enjoyed at the Thursday night “popcorn by the lake,” Friday night dinner by the lake, the ice cream social, and the Saturday night Feast of Faith banquet. As this yearly meeting session comes to a close, we praise God for His faithfulness even in the middle of a pandemic.

Without Him there would be no reason for our existence. We look forward to meeting again next year!
To Friends Everywhere:

Greetings from our virtual gathering! The indigenous people who have lived in our region for many centuries—among them the Ute, Comanche, Apache, Pueblo, and Diné people—teach us that being at home means being attentive to the places we inhabit. This year, we were getting ready to return to Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado after 20 years of meeting at Ghost Ranch near Abiquiu, New Mexico. We were preparing to renew our relationship with this place, but that was before CoVID-19.

The theme of this year’s gathering was “Be Here Now...Together;” but what if we couldn’t “be here” there? Without much time before our gathering date, numerous Friends pitched in and made the technical preparations necessary for us to meet in cyberspace. For some of us, the first day of our gathering was like the very first day of school. Where are we? Where is our homeroom? But in a short period of time, with the help of many patient guides, we became acclimated and we soon found ourselves in the welcoming space that is worship sharing.

What does it mean to come with hearts and minds prepared for this moment when there is so much pain and turmoil in the world? This query led us to engage our concerns and uncertainties about life in the era of CoVID-19. It gave us a chance to share our grief over the recent murders, terrors, and injustices visited upon men and women of color in this country. The occasion of Juneteenth on the second day of our gathering was an invitation to support those who have suffered because of systemic racism. Given the heaviness of our concerns related to current national and global situations, the sense of community available to us, even though we were unable to greet one another in a physical space, offered us great solace and empowered us to carry on.

Despite the unusual circumstances of our gathering, we were able to fully engage one another in many of the ways that we have become accustomed to over the years. Conversations and experiences drawing from the mystical traditions in Quaker practice helped us to be open and tender. We heard about the good work being done by various individuals, meetings, and Quaker organizations in response to issues like the climate crisis, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the transportation of nuclear waste through our region. We were informed and encouraged to continue working on challenges related to migration as well as racial equity in our meetings. We gathered virtually to write poetry, tell stories, and enjoy music together; activities that remind us, as did a lively discussion on Quakers and the arts, that a flourishing creative spirit continues to bring us together in celebration and community.
In a discussion about sharing resources, we had the opportunity to consider the responsibilities that come with the gifts we have been given and how best to share them. We were encouraged to remember, as Friend Elise Boulding once said, that “enough is as good as a feast,” and to express our gratitude. In this session as well as others, we were given prayers for doing so, one from the Iroquois tradition as well as the following prayer from Anna Mae Suttlerly:

    Lord help me to be grateful for what I have
    To remember that I don’t need most of what I want
    And that joy is found in simplicity and generosity.

Quaker theologian C. Wess Daniels, our Friend in virtual residence, who is the director of the Friends Center and Quaker Studies program at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina, offered a plenary address entitled “Liturgies of Empire and Liturgies of Resistance.” In his talk and in the discussion that followed, we considered the Book of Revelations as a text that helped empower first century Christians in their resistance against the Roman Empire. His message and the queries that came along with it challenge us to be mindful of the ways in which our Quaker practices can fortify us in these challenging times.

Wess gave us several queries that encouraged us to consider the presence of “empire” in our own time. What do we need in order to help us resist succumbing to the ways of empire and its obsession with death through violence, racism, poverty, and ecological devastation? In what ways can our worship help us resist and center our community in a God of abundance, healing, and reconciliation? How might we stand in solidarity with those who the empire ignores or rejects? To that end, we reminded our monthly meetings that they may request forgiveness of their monetary assessments as they provide support to those in need, particularly First Nations communities who have been hit especially hard by the CoVID-19 pandemic. We also leave our gathering inspired and eager to act in solidarity with the movement against systemic racism in this country.

While we missed the occasion of one another’s physical presence at this year’s gathering, we were reminded that this is only a temporary separation. As one Friend put it, “we shall hug in the Light again.” Until then, we are reassured by the Spirit which accompanied us here and which carries us forward.

In Faith, Hope, and Friendship,

Gale Toko-Ross and Valerie Ireland
Presiding Co-Clerks
Intermountain Yearly Meeting
"I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the gospel, period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned with the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, 'Now is that political or social?' He said, 'I feed you.' Because the good news to a hungry person is bread."  - Desmond Tutu

In recent years past, we have held our annual gathering on the campus of Scattergood School and Farm. This year, because of the pandemic Covid 19, we met for a much shorter session of only 2 1/2 days. For the very first time, we also met not in person, but completely online.

The theme of our gathering was **Finding Hope in Troubled Times**. Our program schedule recreated online many of our favorite activities and practices. The very first opening worship was deeply settled and rich in its vocal ministry. There was early morning Bible Study to feed our spiritual lives. The two evening presentations were designed to challenge and encourage us. In the first one we learned how to do worship sharing and discovered a joy that occurs when we listen to each other without the need to respond. There is community to be found inside the silences between us. The second evening was set aside to introduce us to our new Head of Scattergood School and Farm, John Zimmerman. We join with school faculty, staff and students to enter a new stage of many exciting changes including a newly added middle school, headed by Jamie Newton.

We had times to visit and catch up with old Friends and meet new ones, only now it was all scheduled and done online instead of sitting on the benches in front of the Main. We washed our own dishes at home instead of together after sharing a meal of food harvested from the Scattergood Farm.

Our committees met online and finished most of their reports before sessions began, instead of sitting together and sweltering in small hot rooms while they hashed out details. There was no late night singing in the meeting house, and also missed, perhaps most of all, were the voices of children playing outside our windows while we labored to find the words that spoke for all of us.

We found that in all our the monthly meetings across the large geographic area that is IYMC, Friends grapple with how best to join the work of healing the pain of violence, racism, greed and the economic exploitation so prevalent in our country.
These are uncertain times, and yet the discovery of many gifts this turbulence also offers came up over and over during our time together:
*the pleasure of welcoming so many new Friends to our monthly meetings and this gathering.
*the opportunity to stretch ourselves and adapt to new ways of doing that we never knew existed.
*the opportunity to reflect on what we miss, what is good, what we can let go and what we need to hold onto.

In this year 2020, Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) held its 143rd annual sessions, which means we have been gathering (at least) since the year 1877, or even earlier.

It doesn't take a historian to realize that some of those annual sessions were held in times of rejoicing and gratitude for prosperity, good harvests and good health. In other years, Friends met during times of war, drought, civil unrest, and pandemics. And many of those years, like this one, were times of uncertainty.

Our theme was *Finding Hope in Troubled Times*, and we spent these days together exploring how to do this. Being together reminded us that in both good times and bad, what we are called to never changes: to Love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds and all our strength; and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

This love gives us seeds to sow in the world... and so doing we join others in good work that started long before we were born, and will continue long after we are gone as we accompany each other along the way.

We will continue to work in our uncertain times, our troubled times, finding comfort in the words of poet Czeslaw Milosz,

"Early we receive a call, yet it remains incomprehensible.
and only late do we discover how obedient we were."

We hope you will be able to join us when we plan to meet again, God willing, at Scattergood Friends School and Farm, near West Branch, Iowa, from 7th month, 21 to 7th month 25, 2021.

Deborah Dakin, clerk,
Carol Gilbert, assistant clerk
11th April 2021

To Friends Everywhere,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Signed on behalf of Ireland Yearly Meeting,

Denise C. Gabuzda, Clerk, Ireland Yearly Meeting
Elizabeth Dickson
William D. A. Haire and Philip McDonagh, Assistant Clerks, Ireland Yearly Meeting
Online JYM 2020-21 Epistle

To Friends everywhere,

We send our warm greetings from JYM 2020: The Remix! Thirteen young friends and three organisers from Ireland, Northern Ireland and the UK gathered online from the 1st to the 3rd of January 2021 to attend. Postponed from Easter 2020, the gathering was held on Zoom, making it the first ever online Ireland JYM! The theme of this year’s JYM was Community, which we felt was especially important for us to contemplate this year.

With two sessions, led by Ciara and Oliver, we explored the theme through a variety of wonderful activities and games. In Ciara’s session we made use of the Zoom whiteboard to hold a ‘walking debate’. Some contentious issues emerged, such as whether pineapple belongs on pizza or not. There were also some deeper topics, such as whether a community can be as effective online as in-person. In Oliver’s session we split into groups of different sizes to find the things we had in common, and we pondered a selection of quotations on community by people such as Parker J. Palmer and Mahatma Gandhi. Then we made paper people chains in which we wrote a word, a place and a person or group we associated with community, and one thing we could do to strengthen community going forwards. Both sessions were really fun and thought-provoking, and opened our minds and hearts to a deeper understanding of community.

Throughout the three days we played games as a group, which included two exciting rounds of Geo-Guesser, the mysterious games of Mafia, and the hilarious Story Game. In base groups we did a variety of activities such as the weather report (an analogy for how everyone is feeling at a given time), discussing the sessions, Scribble games (where one person draws a scribble on Zoom whiteboard and another person makes it into something by drawing in details) and Two Truths and a Lie. Both games and base group sessions were full of laughter and discussion and brought us joy and merriment.

On Sunday morning we held a half-an-hour-long Meeting for Worship. In the evenings we held epilogue; a wonderful way to wind down after each day. The first epilogue started with a guided meditation by Susie, and the second epilogue started with a slideshow of Ciara’s photographs, and piano music by Laoise. These were beautiful and calming.

So, feeling replenished and connected, we face into the New Year, feeling grateful for this unusual opportunity we’ve had to meet and spend time together. Through our exploration of the theme of community, we have learned of the fulfilling benefits of spending time and sharing with each other. Our hearts and thoughts are full of our online-JYM experiences.

Signed on behalf of Junior Yearly Meeting,

Susie Harty (Clerk)

Laoise Corrigan (Assistant Clerk)
To Friends Worldwide,

On November 21-22, 2020, the annual gathering of Japan Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends was hosted by Tsuchiura Monthly Meeting. We took as our theme Philippians 1:9-10: "May your love grow ever richer in the power of knowing and discerning, and may you be able to discern what is truly important." Although the meeting was held in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were grateful that 30 people (including 12 who participated via Zoom) were able to attend the meeting with God's guidance and grace. This year, we were especially glad to be able to welcome and exchange opinions with members in Osaka and Mito, transcending the geographical distance.

In Panel Discussion I, we considered the use of the former Annex site and the future of the Tokyo Meetinghouse. Views were exchanged on the proposal to relocate the Tokyo Meetinghouse to the campus of Friends Girls School. In response to the proposal, the Executive Committee decided to establish a committee to study the future of the Tokyo Meetinghouse and the land owned by Japan Yearly Meeting.

We also approved the activity report and financial report for 2019, and the activity plan and budget for 2020.

Next, in Panel Discussion II, there were reports from four monthly meetings on the theme of deepening our faith during the pandemic. Tsuchiura Monthly Meeting made a donation to people suffering from the economic effects of the pandemic. We heard how the faces of the children attending Sunday School lit up as they realized that their donations were being used for good. Tokyo Monthly Meeting continues to hold Meeting for Worship face to face and via Zoom. They thought it would be meaningful to provide a place of quiet prayer for those who are anxious and worried, as well as to strengthen their faith by gathering for worship. Osaka Monthly Meeting also holds Meeting for Worship monthly via Zoom, and makes efforts to strengthen their connection with Meetings overseas. We renewed our awareness of the meaning of spending quiet time together in our homes at the same time, even if we do not have Internet access. Mito Monthly Meeting suspended Meeting for Worship temporarily, but when they resumed, they felt again the importance of gathering together to worship, and how it strengthens the connection and faith among the members. Each of the Monthly Meetings is making efforts to continue gathering for worship while trying to prevent the spread of infection.

In the Nitobe Inazo Memorial Lecture, Louisa Hatanaka spoke about her memories of coming to Japan as an English teacher at Friends Girls School, and then interacting with many Friends as the director of the Friends Center, principal of Friends Girls School, and chair of the Board of Trustees.

As the fury of the pandemic is still not over, we pray for the peace of mind and health of Friends and all people around the world.

Machiko Takeda, Clerk
Japan Yearly Meeting
November 22, 2020
Greetings to Friends Everywhere!

We, Lake Erie Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, gathered from July 30 through August 2, in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio, and other locations including Maine and Honduras, with a final business session on August 12, 2020. Although our physical gathering was limited mostly to groups of one or two, collectively 155 of us worshipped, carried out our business, and played together using the online platforms of Zoom and Minecraft. Our theme this weekend was, “Letting Go: Listening with Whole Hearts and Open Minds.

**Letting Go**

In the midst of a world health pandemic that separates us from each other and a new awakening to the depth and breadth of our longstanding racial pandemic, we found comfort in in seeing each other through Zoom, and in the LEYM routines we love. We began some days with bible study and worship sharing, we delighted in our beloved talent show, and envied our youngest children who were able to gather in person. While familiar and comforting, letting go of the physically gathered nature of these routines also created new opportunities. A number of Friends who cannot normally attend a physical gathering due to cost, mobility, time, or other reasons, were able to join us this year for the first (or first in a long) time. Our talent show this year included a number of favorite and familiar acts including several musical performances, but we were also treated to a video walk-through of one Friend’s garden, exploration of a Minecraft world and occupied by our Youth Program during annual sessions this year, to paintings, an HTML animation, and some scrollwork pieces of art created during the talent show.

We are excited about the possibility that the technology we used out of necessity this year will enhance our work going forward. We are grateful for the skilled and cheerful wizardry that made Zoom our Bluffton this year, and for inspiring musical interludes from Playing for Change. We are also grateful for the thoughtful planning of a Minecraft world which held our Youth Program, and for the gifts and flexibility of all of those serving our community during this time of unexpected challenges. While we are eager to meet together physically in the future, letting go of the need to meet exclusively in person opens up exciting opportunities for ongoing bible study, year-round Minecraft connections among our youth, and for breathing new life into our Earthcare and Peace and Justice Committees as they explore offering a series of free-standing interest groups during the coming year.

**Listening with Whole Hearts**

Our bible study group explored the biblical treatment of 5 words from our theme: listening, whole, minds, hearts, and being open. Participants shared their personal experiences, and also reflected on William Penn’s view that it is not our own salvation we are seeking, but that of the beloved community.

We heard, again, of brokenness in our beloved community. Racism is a pandemic that predates and exacerbates the COVID 19 pandemic, it is more deadly than COVID 19 to People of Color. Friends of Color, in an epistle written to Friends everywhere asked us for respite. “Friends of Color need respite from the insidious lie of white supremacy manifested in daily oppressive
traumatic stressors (microaggressions) which have the effect of blaming the oppressed for our own oppression. Friends of Color need respite and support which our home meetings have not provided. Friends of Color are fatigued from being asked to teach white folks.” These dear friends ask us to “do work so that” Friends of Color in our midst “can BREATHE.”

Friends in the antiracism workshop expressed frustration with our meetings’ lack of meaningful progress in becoming anti-racist faith communities. The barriers Friends identified are cultural and financial, some limiting our ability to attract attenders, some impacting our work in local communities. Those participating in the workshop expressed a commitment to this work and to continue to have brave conversations, set bold goals and listen to our Black neighbors and Friends in order to understand our blind spots.

As one step toward becoming more anti-racist, we were encouraged in our bystander intervention workshop to listen with whole hearts to situations involving racism we encounter, to explore what makes us hesitant to intervene, to make our presence as a witness known, and to follow the lead of the individual(s) being harassed.

But we must do more. When our Friends of Color are exhausted not only from interactions in the world at large, but from being othered in Quaker space, we are not doing enough. We encourage all friends, including those in our constituent monthly meetings, to read “the outgoing epistle of the 2020 Virtual Annual Pre-Gathering of Friends of Color and their Families,” to sit with the queries they pose to all Quakers, and to do more.

**Open Minds**

In the Listening through Relationship workshop, we were called to open our minds to explore what imprisons us – and to ponder where we might be led if we shifted our thinking about our relationship with the earth – to explore what would be different if we treated water and its interaction with land as sacred?

Our workshop on Connecting with Nature as a Spiritual Practice encouraged us to find more in nature than its beauty by exploring outdoor forms of meditation including simply walking or sitting in nature to attentive observation, active listening, restoration work, gardening, play, and activism. We were reminded that among nature’s spiritual gifts is its profound memento mori, its reminder that all living things must die, and that in these “good deaths” new life is made possible.

A staff member from FCNL encouraged us to open our minds to the power of storytelling as political advocacy, leading us through the steps of identifying and crafting stories we might share as a step to building personal relationships with our members of Congress as we work to heal the world.

We were enriched by our time together, challenged to do more to explore and mend our relationship with the earth, and to more actively address the historic and ongoing racial pandemic within our Quaker communities, and more broadly. We long for the physical connections that were absent this year, but leave excited by new possibilities for broadening and deepening our community using the tools that allowed us to meet this year.
In faith,
Josephine Posti, Presiding Clerk
Lake Erie Yearly Meeting
Dear Friends all over the world

Friends from the Netherlands Yearly Meeting were gathered online on Saturday 3rd October 2020. Instead of a full weekend in the beginning of May, this year we had a one day gathering via Zoom. Therefore, we focussed on the most essential topics. Herewith, we send you two of our minutes which may give you an impression of the spirit in which we were together.

Our vision on the future
In the greetings we received from Michael Eccles, Secretary of FWCC- EMES, we read the text of the theme of the gathering in May 2020: ‘Heeding the Prophecy of our sons and daughters, daring to dream dreams and see visions’ (Joel 2 28). This is also a promise: we need the Spirit, and we can be open for new ways. We are also able to experience a gathered meeting on Zoom.
We heard about inspiration from several films:
* A life on our planet (David Attenborough)
* The social dilemma (Jeff Orlowski)
* A Message From the Future II: The Years of Repair (Avi Lewis)"

We can be aware of the situation in the world and at the same time retreat into reflection on what we can achieve now with small hands. And: our hands can reach all over the world via the internet.
In these times when there is a lot of fear, we can connect in silence, hope can bubble up and dreams can arise.
Let the Spirit from the Silence inspirit our courage and strengthen our dreams. Our challenge is to create visions and make them come alive together. Quakers have a vision of a peaceful world without nuclear weapons and we want to spread that vision. When we each are going our own way, let's keep each other informed and let's continue to exchange with each other what we are doing to make our visions become reality.

Today we have been together via digital means (Zoom). The most recent Corona restrictions limiting non-essential travel led us to decide not to meet physically in the Johanneskerk in Amersfoort.
A shortened Annual Meeting of just one day, in which we experienced how important it is to meet each other, even in this way. We have taken the necessary decisions that could not wait.
Listening to the values and inspiration of Friends has started a process of further reflection on our values and inspiration, to be continued both in person and in our Monthly Meetings throughout the coming months. We hold each other close and keep connected during this time through online and live meetings, and in phone conversations with Friends who couldn't be here.

We wish that we enkindle the Light in each other, so that we all can use our talents and gifts for new inspiration in the coming months. Hoping that next year it will be possible to organize a live Annual Meeting!

In Friendship
Marlies Tjallingii, clerk of the Netherlands Yearly Meeting
Marielke Nieuwerth-van den Akker, assistent clerk
August 9, 2020

“Let me make the songs for the people, / Songs for the old and young; / Songs to stir like a battle-cry / Wherever they are sung. / Not for the clashing of sabres, / For carnage nor for strife; / But songs to thrill the hearts of men / With more abundant life.”

1 “Songs for the People,” Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

To Friends Everywhere,

The 360th Annual Sessions of New England Yearly Meeting met virtually over the course of ten days in Eighth Month 2020, in the midst of quadruple crises—a global pandemic, the ongoing epidemic of racism, a climate disaster in the form of Hurricane Isaias, and nationwide political unrest. The time for us to change is now.

684 Friends joined us, of whom 150 were under the age of 35 and 53 were visitors from outside our Yearly Meeting. We were grateful to be joined remotely by Friends from Kenya, Britain, Cuba, El Salvador, Canada, and Mexico, as well as a number of Friends from across the United States.

We were reminded at the opening celebration to treat our respective locations as holy spaces, and to view our devices as part of our pathway to the Divine. In the agenda for our business sessions we set aside the organizational work of the Yearly Meeting to focus more directly on the vital actions and living ministry among us. We were moved by Friends’ testimonies of the work they are called to in response to the ills of our world.

Last year when we wrote to you, we noted that there is a tide which, when taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. This year as we meet, we know we are swept up on such a tide. Yet we also see that we are adrift in a leaky boat; the forms of Quakerism we inhabit are not up to the task ahead. We have a religious organization and ways of being together that still embody empire.

On our first day of virtual Sessions we were given the gift of a three part framework for change from our Quaker tradition: revealing, surrender, and turning, or in more traditional language, conviction, convincement, and conversion. We are suspended in a moment of revealing, being convicted by the Light as we wake up to our sin. We are allowing our hearts to break, recognizing that the process of surrender and turning must be repeated over and over again.
We are naming the forms of white supremacy in Quaker culture, including participation in slavery and ongoing anti-Black racism, the history of Quaker leadership in the Native American boarding school system, and the settler colonialism practiced by early Friends. We continue naming the patterns of domination at every level, in our person, our household and community, through the industrial economy and our extractive relationship to the ecosphere. These patterns are active in Quaker forms and practices today. We stand convicted.

We are stuck in the whirlwind, and need to choose surrender. We can cling tight in fear to the forms we know or release the forms to trust the Divine Spirit will show us our way. We know we need to move from the head to the heart and the Word must be made flesh. “And the end of words is to bring [us] to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter.”

Our plenary speaker, Friend Amanda Kemp, implored us to move from our heads to our hearts, from our analytic mind to our imagination. Through a shared experience of living music we felt how music is not the notes on the page. She invited us to embrace the mess, and to not let ourselves be limited by the framing of the status quo. Asking us to create from a place of possibility that can invite what we don't yet know, she said, “your imagination is essential for our liberation.”

During the plenary, Friend Amanda also helped us lean into what it means to be a harmonizer—a peacemaker. She reminded us that walking the path of the harmonizer does not mean we will all be playing the same role. Too often we mistake unanimity and sameness for unity with the Spirit.

In our business this year we cautiously practiced surrender. When we found ourselves caught up in words, we tried to allow new patterns to rise among us. As a Yearly Meeting, we began the process of apologizing for harm to Native Americans in our region by Quakers. Recognizing that our apology must come from the head and the heart, indeed from the whole body, we sent a draft of an apology to monthly and quarterly meetings for them to consider and to allow the words to work more deeply in us.

We also heard calls to action from the Friends General Conference Pre-Gathering of Friends of Color, from the Native American Reparations Working Group, and a joint call from the Racial, Social and Economic Justice and Earthcare Ministry Committees. We know we need to surrender and turn to move from words into action. To help us do so we shared these calls with our monthly and quarterly meetings so we may unite in the Spirit that animates our work. We are shifting our understanding of what it means to

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2Isaac Penington [https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/27-27/]
unite with a minute. We know that our corporate statements must honestly name our present condition while also inviting us into spirit-led action.

Our Bible Half-Hour speaker, Friend Cherice Bock, painted the road ahead for us—the turning, our conversion—as an eco-reformation that shatters the hierarchies of the empire, replacing our ego-centrism with our rightful place in the household of life. We yearn to more fully enter into the kin-dom of God which is always present. We know, and are beginning to internalize, the Truth; that more abundant life comes only after surrender, and our conversion is complete only when we turn, when we imagine, when we embody, and when we do.

As our virtual time together comes to a close, we go forth, imperfect and humbled, with faith that our next steps will be planted exactly where they need to be. We feel the companionship of a Spirit that walks among us, and we feel the companionship of Friends and others around the world on this journey into the future the Divine Light invites us to imagine.

“Therefore, I urge you … in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—that is your true and proper worship.”

In Love,

Your Friends in New England Yearly Meeting

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3 Romans 12:1 New International Version
To Friends Everywhere,

We send our love to you from the ancestral lands of the Matinecock and Shinnecock, the Lenni Lenape, the Haudenosaunee, and the Abenaki peoples before the genocide that followed European settlement. New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) met online for two weeks this July with a full schedule of events: meetings for business, social meals, affinity groups, interest groups, worship sharing groups, young adult Friends groups, and activities for children. We began our Summer Sessions with a full day of extended worship we call Meetings for Discernment, which this year was made a permanent function of NYYM. Registration did not require a donation. Four hundred one people registered, of which 117 were first-timers, 18 were youth, and 61 were young adults.

We gathered this year during the pandemics of racism and the coronavirus from our homes, where COVID-19 keeps most of us sheltering in place. Many can’t go to school; many have lost jobs. We’re listening to the radio, watching the news, seeing protests and demonstrations in our streets against systemic racism. We do our daily chores, and we sit down at our electronic devices to meet together. We have found that God covers our meetings here online too and allows us to enter into a profound space of spiritual nourishment and transformation.

Each of our business meetings was preceded by a full hour of worship, which centered us in the Divine Light and allowed us to attend to our concerns with enough patience and quiet to stay in touch with each other in this new virtual space. We needed that time. Friends found ourselves deeply moved by the Epistle from the Friends General Conference Virtual Pre-Gathering of Friends of Color and Their Families, a community which allows People of Color “the rare opportunity of not being othered in Quaker space.” European American Friends have so much work to do, and this epistle gave Friends some queries to wrestle with: “How can we encourage the support of Friends of Color in Quaker worship and meetings around the world? How can Friends de-center themselves in order to listen to and hear Friends of Color? How can I support respite for Friends of Color?”

At our plenary Friend Angela Hopkins, founder of the Friends Center for Racial Justice (FCRJ) in Ithaca NY, asked NYYM to consider the query, “How can we contribute to building a faithful, more inclusive community?” She showed us that building an anti-racist structure requires inward work as well as outward. Our General Secretary Steve Mohlke asked us to consider the assumptions behind the question, “How can I help the Friends Center for Racial Justice?” He wanted us to consider how our understanding changes when we ask, “How can the FCRJ help within the Society of Friends?” We can build a multicultural community that does not
center whiteness and privilege, but it will take time. Some of the ways our practices “other” people among us were pointed out to us during these sessions, for which we are grateful as we look to ways we desire to change. In the minutes of our business meetings, we were asked to include substantive vocal ministry. This practice evokes a truer sense of our experience and our commitment to continuing revelation.

Marissa Badgley, NYYM’s Young Adult Field Secretary, reported on her work. In 2019, when we began Pay as Led for Summer Sessions and thanks to a year-long Young Adult program by Marissa, there was the largest ever YAF registration for summer sessions—70 young adults. Despite being online in 2020, 61 registered. The interest is there. One new initiative, a Mentoring Program, created intergenerational pairs to nurture each other’s spiritual lives. She told us that 26% of the 83 NYYM young adults who responded to her survey have lost their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic. We have been trying for three years to allocate enough money for a full-time position for children, youth, and young adults, so far only successfully funding a part-time Young Adult Field Secretary position. Young Adult Friends are not only our future; they are also our present. Can we trust the Light to lead us toward unity?

We began some of the work we have before us. We authorized our clerk to send a letter to Governor Cuomo, asking for early release and clemency for people in New York State who are incarcerated in crowded conditions in this time of COVID-19, and asking him to support the HALT Solitary Confinement Bill. There will be letters to follow to the Governors of New Jersey and Connecticut. Our Black Concerns Committee has formed three action study groups to address structural racism: Advocating for College behind Bars, Disrupt the School to Prison Pipeline, and Racial Justice and Anti-Racism Resources. Witness Coordinating Committee endorsed and forwarded a proposal that NYYM urge Congress to approve a new amendment to the United States Constitution, changing the 13th Amendment to read: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction,” omitting the exception for “punishment for crime,” thereby finally abolishing all slavery in the United States. We committed to this process, and NYYM will send such a letter to our members of Congress. We urge local meetings, individuals, yearly meetings, and community groups everywhere in the United States to do the same.

Friends, there is always more to do. As our Black Concerns Committee reminds us, “Our hearts are heavy but our Spirit is strong.” Our labors continue with trust in the Divine Presence that leads us to let our lives speak.

Jeffrey Aaron, clerk  
New York Yearly Meeting  
July 31, 2020
North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative)
PO Box 4591
Greensboro, NC 27404
ncymc.clerys@gmail.com

To Friends Everywhere,

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me I feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. Philippians 1: 3-7

We are gathered via Zoom for our 323rd annual sessions, Seventh Month 8-12, 2020. The above reading from our gathered Meeting of Ministry and Oversight on Fourth Day expresses our continued connection with you and our prayer for God's grace upon you. Our theme this year is "Living Faithfully in a Fractured World." The following opening reading by clerk, Gwen Gosney, reminds us of our gathered intention to worship as our ancestors and rekindle the gifts of the Spirit of gratitude, joy and the power of love and self-discipline.

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands: for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. II Timothy 1: 3-7

As always in the sharing of our State of the Society and other reports, we have a sense of the challenges and joys our meetings have experienced this year. Friends reported the various ways they found to continue to gather in community when it was not possible to continue in person during the pandemic. Friends have expressed desire to find ways to continue use of virtual gatherings in the future. The ability of Friends everywhere to join our meetings by Zoom has enriched our worship and sense of community experience. Each meeting has devised ways to keep in touch with members and attenders who are unable to access the technology to attend functions, in an attempt to keep our communities connected. Our meetings have kept the concern for the health of all, both physically and spiritually, as a priority.
Many meetings expressed how they are being changed by the national focus on addressing systemic racial inequity and violence against people of color. Meetings are looking at their own patterns of behaviour both individually and corporately. Friends are also engaged and active in protests, vigils, and efforts for social change throughout the region. It was felt that this is vital and critical work.

Please find the included Summary of Exercises to learn more about our time together. We welcome continued visitation among all yearly meetings and pray that Friends may feel open to join us next year when we intend to meet at Guilford College, Seventh Month 14-18, 2021.

On behalf of North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative,

[Signature]

Gwen Gosney Erickson, Clerk
North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative)
2020
Summary of Exercises

Friends met for the 323rd annual sessions of North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative from 7th month 8th-12th, 2020. The Planning Committee chose the theme of “Living Faithfully in a Fractured World” back in the fall of 2019. They had no idea how relevant this theme would become with the development of the Covid-19 pandemic and the world wide response to the continuing murders of people of color over the intervening months.

Early in the spring we began to realize that an in-person gathering would not be possible and at Interim Body in 4th month we decided to have yearly meeting sessions online. It has been an amazing thing to watch Friends adjust to reality and take on new challenges in order to continue despite the complications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Planning Committee, the Hospitality Committee, the Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Recording Clerk and others made the recommendation to simplify the schedule of sessions so as to avoid what has been termed “Zoom fatigue”. We scheduled no interest groups, reduced the number of hours of business sessions, made many reports available online rather than having them all read aloud, and also rescheduled one of our planned evening programs to next year when we hope to meet at Guilford College in person again.

We had good participation throughout our planned activities. We had Friends join us by Zoom from many places beyond North Carolina and Virginia, including England, Nigeria, Japan, Washington DC, Iowa, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Vermont.

After several years of mutual intervisitation and discernment with Five Rivers Monthly Meeting in South Carolina, they have submitted a request to be considered for membership in our yearly meeting. We are looking forward to beginning the process of formal discernment with Five Rivers.
Opening 5th, 6th and 7th Days, Mary Kay Glazer from Greenville meeting led an inspirational Bible Study, "Living Faithfully: Who, Me?", exploring the timely theme of faithfulness. As part of the intergenerational study each morning, Mary Kay read aloud Bible passages followed by a selected children's picture storybook for us to reflect upon. We were given a set of queries to consider in light of the story and would then break out into Zoom rooms of 4-5 to respond before returning to the main room. The queries often led us to reflect upon how life's challenges might deepen our faith. For example: What do these stories reveal to you about being faithful? What makes it difficult for you to be faithful? What makes it possible to be faithful? How is God inviting you to deeper faithfulness? How has community helped or hindered your efforts to be faithful? The children's storybooks were a creative way for us to reflect on our faith and often added a new dimension for how we considered the Bible text for the day.

Michael “Mizey” Mizenheimer from Durham meeting led a great intergenerational evening of fun and fellowship on 5th day. Michael led us seamlessly through a series of activities on Zoom that enabled us to talk in pairs and then later work in teams. Most of us were surprised that we could have such an opportunity for getting to know one another and being playful together using Zoom.

During the evening of 6th Day, John Calvi spoke with us on the theme of “Living Faithfully in a Fractured World - Remembering our Roots”. John is an experienced Quaker healer who has been engaged in his ministry for 38 years. The contemplative and loving manner in which he approaches his work was evident in the way he addressed us. Speaking out of the silence, John first gave us an overview of his healing work as well as the importance of balance and rest, both for him and for us in the work we all do in the world. We then entered back into silence several more times during which questions were submitted to John via Zoom chat messages and were read out by Mary Kay Glazer. A few of the concepts he shared with us during this time were: the importance of not joining ourselves into someone else’s pain, but bringing Light to their pain; the need to balance pain (both ours and others’) with things that bring us joy and that are beautiful in the world; and the importance of care for our meetings for worship because there is a great hunger in the world for the depth and quality of quiet that can
exist there. When discussing working with truly obscene tragedies that can envelop people, he compared the energy that is needed to that which is felt when arriving to Meeting for Worship early and feeling the gathering reverence. He taught us much more than these few thoughts, and we were blessed by his presence and willingness to share with us.

The Young Friends Planning Committee knew it would be a challenge to connect with children and youth in yearly meeting during the pandemic, so they sent packages ahead of time to the homes of all the children and youth who had attended yearly meeting in recent years.

The youngest children each received their own copy of a picture book entitled Good People Everywhere with a personal note written inside the front cover. Then during yearly meeting sessions, two opportunities were offered for story time over Zoom. Goldie Walton and Miriam Barnhill-Wright read stories with 2 children, Alayla Stewart-Nilsen and Isaac Walton. (Andrew Wright managed the technical side.) Parents also joined us and we had a nice time seeing each other.

For older children and youth, the Young Friends Planning Committee created a booklet of stories. In May, this committee asked adult Friends to share personal stories or verses or songs that spoke to how faith can support us through times of crisis. 12 adult Friends from yearly meeting shared written stories and they were put together in a booklet that was then sent to each child or youth at their home. Goldie and Andrew hosted two Zoom sessions where Friends checked-in, chatted and discussed a few of the stories. It wasn’t the same as getting together and swimming in the ocean, but it was good to see each other and remember what it feels like to be a community.
Epistle from North Pacific Yearly Meeting

Annual Session 2020

July 22-26, 2020

Online Meeting

Greetings to Friends everywhere from the Pacific Northwest, on the traditional and seized lands of dozens of indigenous peoples. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this 48th Annual Session was our first virtual gathering. The theme, “Deepening the Roots in Troubled Times,” guided us through plenary and business sessions; worship-sharing; a Quaker Fair; and breakout rooms for singing, socializing, and discussion. Friends also had access to a talk and conversation with Oregon State Senator Lew Frederick, a leader in the People of Color Caucus and an attender of Multnomah Meeting in Portland, OR.

The virtual format made a precise count of Annual Session attendees difficult; there were 279 full-time registrations and 63 part-time registrations. Attendance at plenary sessions ranged from 75-95. Unfortunately, attendance by children and Junior Friends was extremely low. However, organizers saw the pandemic as an opportunity for Annual Session to be more accessible. Freed from limitations of time and space would help include Friends whose distance, health, finances, or schedules would otherwise not allow them to attend. Thus, Friends from the Pacific Northwest and around the U.S and the world came together.

We gathered as a “Meeting Beyond Walls,” figuratively and literally. “A bridge is the opposite of a wall,” Friend-in Residence Kenya Casanova from Cuba reminded us. Kenya bridged the obstacle of her modem breaking down and recorded herself on her mobile phone. The result was a series of six, four-minute videos that suggested that love is the steel of our bridge-building.

We welcomed presentations from Western Friend magazine and Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). Mary Klein, Western Friend editor, outlined ways the magazine serves as a bridge during the pandemic (see https://westernfriend.org). “Thank you for hiring me,” Mary said. “Being editor keeps me sane during this difficult time.” Amelia Kagan, Legislative Director for FCNL, likened advocacy efforts to the “Golden Hour” in the 100-mile marathons she participates in. The final runners are cheered by more spectators than the first person who crossed the finish line. She suggested increased work for justice for people of color, the climate, and health care may be like that Golden Hour.

The Youth Committee presented a major revision of our Youth Safety Policy to incorporate current “best practices” for organizations involving children and youth. We began an important, challenging process toward keeping our children as safe as possible in a way
that allows them autonomy, community, and spiritual growth, without participating in policing systems.

Gathering with Friends for worship, singing, community, fun, and interest groups (including nine about systemic racism), was possible thanks to the brilliant use of technology and the exceptional efforts of those organizing the event. We feel deep gratitude for those who worked so hard to make it possible. At the same time, we intensely missed gathering in person and feeling the presence of the children; we also acknowledge the technology we used relies on unjust labor practices. Nonetheless, there is great satisfaction and many advantages being together virtually in this extraordinary time of change and continuing revelation.

Signed among and for Friends of North Pacific Yearly Meeting,

David Zeiss, presiding clerk
We are Quakers who love to be together in worship and work, who love to play and sing, old and young together. This is the 45th annual session of our Northern Yearly Meeting. Our gathering site is the Zoom virtual connection. Even as we long to physically be with each other, we rejoice to see all of the dear faces appearing on our screens. We slow down to hear our voices and our deepest yearnings. We acknowledged that we are meeting in the home lands of 16 nations south of Lake Superior, with reading of the names and music as well.

45 years ago, we were a brand new yearly meeting, who said, if there is work for us to do, we will go forward into it. This year, Friends, while moving into the new venue of online, maintained traditions of living experimentally and experientially. Our first Meeting for Worship was discernibly gathered. New life and leadings were supported in the context of Quaker discernment. Greatly expanded interest in the sister meeting relationship with El Salvador Yearly Meeting comes from both communities. We supported the leadings of 2 traveling ministers to visit El Salvador Yearly Meeting and their schools. The new experience of providing anchoring committees will support these friends and help them to prepare for this travel and ministry next year.

Clerking via Zoom became, of necessity, much more team work. We, the body, being clerked, learned to participate with the support of our amazing technical hosts, the personal use of colorful hand cards to assist unity and a glimpse into many windows of connections.

Workshops introduced experiences of Howard Thurman and earnest self-reflection on racism - self-examination leading to seeds of growth. Building bonds between our 30 monthly meetings in our yearly meeting was accomplished with focus on topics: First Day School in a pandemic, how welcoming our meeting places are, care of elders, inclusivity issues for virtual participation in Meetings’ activities, and outward work based upon inner reflection. During every hour of our online presence with each other, becoming an anti-racist organization was lifted up via the query from our Worshipful Spirit-Led Anti-Racism Working Group.

Our corporate body united with a request from 2 of our Monthly Meetings for our Clerks to write a letter of concern to the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, to request adequate and appropriate support within the prisons for our religious meetings of worship to meet regularly there. One piece of our anti-racism focus during this session was to agree to change the status of our Worshipful Spirit-Led Anti-Racism Working Group from an ad hoc group to a standing committee.

In worship sharing, Friends decided to listen around the subject of overcoming racism with attention to discovering who is missing from our family circle of Friends, what we are holding back from our community, and taking away, and when we look with our “spiritual eyes” what do we see as our differences, among other queries. Sharing was rich, self-exploring and sometimes difficult to speak.

Friends’ experience and experiment were furthered as our Plenary Speaker, Regina Renee Ward challenged the gathering to address, from the heart, several queries. Noting that Friends often have a hard time sitting with pain or uncomfortable feelings, but move too soon to joy and bless-
edness, Regina Renee challenged Friends to enter into non-intellectualizing self-examination. As Friends earnestly spoke from their own experience and understanding, fruitful insights were shared. The plenary continued with worship sharing around how Friends are living their Quaker values during Covid 19 and what might be done in the aftermath to form a more just and actively anti-racist community. Fittingly, the session ended with a showing of Zoe Mulford’s “The President Sang Amazing Grace” with the Jeff Scher animation and the singing of Amazing Grace in the style of our Nightingales, our spontaneous singing group that arose decades ago from our yearly meeting. A closing video of Daniel Nahmod’s “Planting Seeds” sent us homeward to nurture the seeds of this weekend.

The newness of gathering in worship and work via Zoom brought gifts of real focus for our work and helped us do some good things. Many people noted how easy it became to put names and faces together, when the various name tags we often used in the past were sometimes less than helpful or obscured. We understood that we were tightly scheduling the sessions, and this aspect was very helpful. We did keenly miss the many long-time attenders who are not using technology as a life-style choice, including the coordinator of our Simple Foods Program. Our annual session feels incomplete somehow when none of us have been able to play together in all of the ways the days at Lions Camp offered.

Living experimentally together via these online annual Yearly Meeting sessions showed us that the Spirit’s presence can be felt in this sort of gathering, though we dearly missed our physical presence with one another. As Sunday evening came to a close, we were invited to all unmute and greet each other. We did do that, and we were enthusiastic in our greetings. Greetings, alas, felt like only a good beginning. When all is said and done, Zoom can only begin to offer the opportunity for those deep on-going conversations and connection, as well as the joy of all ages being together for worship.
2021 Epistle: **Gonna Keep on Movin’ Forward**

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

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

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

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

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

Many had watched the film *Stories I Didn’t Know* prior to the workshop on the history and present situations of Indigenous Peoples of our area. Acknowledging the lack of awareness that many of us bring to encounters with Native Peoples, the Native presenters generously lifted up the value their Nations place on the Great Mystery and on the truth of not knowing. We heard examples of listening actively through differences in family, culture and community. Encouraged, we came away with queries about moving toward healing in right relationship with peoples of the First Nations.
Other remarkable workshops also led us to “live our lives as doers of the truth,” as individuals and as the Religious Society of Friends in our time. Zoe Mulford’s song-writing workshop presented the creative process as a spiral, circling around to pick up what might have seemed useless before, like the process of life, or of Quaker decision-making. Attenders learned creative strategies to “Keep on Movin’ Forward.”

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

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

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

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

In the summary State of Society plenary, we watched film segments from six meetings about losses, struggles, growth and triumphs of the past year, and then met in breakout rooms to share. Hoping to meet face to face soon, we are exploring hybrid meeting technologies to continue to include Friends who cannot join us in person. We trust in our testimonies to guide us in moving all our decisions forward.
“The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.” - Luke 10:2

Dear Friends Everywhere,

Greetings from Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends, one of the three conservative yearly meetings, which met on Zoom with members from NYC to California, Virginia to Michigan as well as Ohio and Pennsylvania with visitors from Canada, Kenya, Indonesia and Costa Rica; and California, North Carolina, Indiana, Maryland, and Tennesee participating from home. While we missed being together in person, we did appreciate being able to be together safely. For some being on Zoom made it easier to attend.

We learned together how to use the technology and asked ourselves how we might use it during the year and in the future for the advancement of our life in Christ as individuals and as a meeting. We have already found the needs of the pandemic have blessed us with opportunities to share in wider community, such as Seekers’ Haven and Crossroads worship. We met for the normal number of days, but understanding that business might take more time, we decided to address mostly business that needed decisions and have other reports available to be read separately with all being published in our minutes.

We had early morning study of what it means to be a Conservative Friend and Bible sharing and evening programs continuing our thinking about the future of our Yearly Meeting “Let us pray to discern His plans and promise to follow them” - Jeremiah 29:11 and outreach, as well as, many opportunities for expectant waiting worship.

We met as a Corporation of our Walton Retirement Home where we learned again of the fine, loving care they give their residents.

We took advantage of space made for fellowship to catch up with old friends and get to know new friends. We shared concern for loved friends unable to be with us with health challenges, such as two you may know, Fran Taber and David Eley.

During Business sessions, we prepared a memorial minute for recently departed Friend Arthur Berk who passed from COVID-19 just before his ninety-third birthday. Just before passing he sent us an epistle which we share with you now.

“Friends, God’s Ministry is far more vital than our own, that’s why Jesus urges us to welcome the Lord in silence.”

We invite you to join us and to invite others to join us. Information as to how to do that can be found on our website, www.ohioyearlymeeting.org.

We are holding all Friends in prayer during this time of pandemic and unrest.

In Christ,

Philip W. Helms, Clerk
Ohio Yearly Meeting
Home address: 2485 Bogie Lake Road
White Lake MI 48386
philipwhelms@yahoo.com
Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting joyfully greets Friends everywhere from our 200th Anniversary Sessions! Our planned great celebrations were unexpectedly altered by the COVID-19 pandemic. And yet, we persisted, and via the internet we gathered in great happiness together for a fruitful annual session. At least one Friend noted that the virtual meeting brought us closer together by viewing each other’s homes, pets, and family members. We are grateful to the Friends who creatively envisioned this new form for annual sessions and those who shepherded us in this new technology. Though we were not able to sit down to meals together as in our usual meetings at Earlham College campus, nevertheless we experienced great camaraderie online. There was an orderliness to meetings online that felt comfortable, as well as being able to clearly see all the adults present at once. A limitation was that most of the adults did not see our youth, as they attended different sessions.

Our gathering was strongly influenced by the racial and political tumult in the world around us. We gathered for two special meetings for worship with concern for racial justice and healing. A minute in recognition of the great social injustices that our nation has been built upon was proposed by Peace and Social Concerns Committee and accepted at our final Meeting for Business. Friends were encouraged to virtually attend the Mass Poor People’s Assembly and Moral March on Washington during our sessions. Following Yearly Meeting sessions, there will be a follow-up discussion of FGC’s request that monthly meetings collect age and race demographics.

Our theme was “Embracing our call to faith; Envisioning our shared future” in addition to our spirit of historical celebration. We began our first Meeting for Business by naming the Native American tribes that lived here in Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky, upon whose displacement we now live. We also named George Floyd and others whose deaths have brought our attention to the enormous work we have yet to do as a nation and as a religious society to live up to our ideals of equality for all.

Our greatest accomplishment in Meeting for Business was approval of the final text of our Faith and Practice after twenty-plus years of work. We are grateful to the many Friends who have taken the lead and helped us discern this document of our faith. Outside of business meeting, we began the work of collecting the histories of monthly meetings.

Two helpful plenaries enriched us. Dr. Catherine Roma shared videos and the history of her 30 years leading choirs in local prisons. We found this deeply touching and inspiring. She recounted the dismal history of the movement of the American prison system from rehabilitation to being increasingly punitive and restrictive—a prison-industrial complex which blinds us to the personhood of prisoners. She showed inspiring videos of the transformative power of music, including a performance of the musical “Hamilton” which was partly supported by the Braddock Fund of our Yearly Meeting.

In her plenary, Emily Provance shared her overview of the relationship between holding on faithfully to our traditions, listening with openness to people today, esp. young adults, and being open but careful towards newness in revelation for our future. She prompted us to think about the ways that we may be squandering our Quaker inheritance by living through the lens of individualism, the dangers of becoming too insular and comfortable. Embracing our faith and caring for the future may require work and sacrifice.

Morning worship and worship sharing refreshed our Friendly mornings. Worship sharing queries on our theme invited us to reflect on what we value in our faith; how we find strength in difficult times;
what our call to faith looks like in the contexts of environmental crisis, the pandemic, and racial injustice; and how we envision and bring about a new heavenly order on earth.

We were enriched by our children and youth. The numbers of children meeting online were low and yet it was amazing to see even the small children comfortable with interacting on Zoom. In the afternoons, teens discussed climate change and racial injustice and carried out their own Meeting for Business. Our teens had an especially intense experience with Bobby Trice of Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Our afternoon workshops were rich, including our Yearly Meeting history, support within meetings in uncertain times, poetry and playdough, joyful walking, Queer theology, FCNL work regarding Iran and Yemen, and “Courageous Conversations” on race.

We were grounded and felt integrated by healing presentations and experiences such as yoga, music, outdoor contemplative activities, self-massage, “havening” (a kind of healing touch), and compassionate listening.

Our own celebrations were complemented by Friends who simultaneously participated in Juneteenth activities and earth celebrations for the midsummer solstice. We sang together before our evening Plenaries, each (muted) in our homes as a pianist gave us accompaniment. Our traditional Saturday night Talent Show was different but still awesome fun. First Day morning of our 200th Sessions was completed peacefully and flowed by being united under Spirit, though physically separated.

The following minute was approved:

We stand with the families of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Ahmaud Arbery, and all those who have suffered the pain of racism and its deadly consequence. We affirm Black Lives Matter and join with those insisting on radical transformation of our society.

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) can call on a long history of effort to dismantle the most blatant forms of racism that dates back to the founding of this country. At the same time, we confess to limited understanding, inadequate attention, and racist beliefs and behaviors within our religious society, including, for example, at one time segregating Black Quakers on a separate bench and preventing interracial relationships. In this time of widening awareness concerning social inequities, Friends’ commitment to justice and equality is bringing more White Friends to a recognition of their personal responsibility and to a growing commitment to change. We acknowledge that once again, now is the time in which action is critically needed.

As a “Peace Church,” we understand at a very deep level, that when there is no Justice, there is no Peace. We affirm our basic belief that there is “that of God in every person,” and we are called by the gospel of Jesus to “Love our Neighbor! No Exceptions.” We see this love as an active love and encourage the support of Black leadership, and the amplification of Black voices. We urge all to actively protect Black people from attack and arrest, and to work to dismantle systemic racism in all its forms. We stand together in love, calling for equality for all.
To Friends Everywhere

Dear Friends,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our sessions took place at the time of the first formal national recognition and celebration of Juneteenth as a holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. In her welcoming, our Presiding Clerk prayed, “May the Divine Light that is in each of us illumine and transform this body as we undertake the work of decolonization and anti-racism.” In these sessions we looked deeply at our roles in racial injustice. European American Friends, accustomed to white privilege, found the capacity to begin to look honestly at our biases and at the structural injustices within the Religious Society of Friends here in OVYM. An African American Friend assured us, “Relationships are where it starts. Love and care of each other. We will get there.”

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

Martha Viehmann, Presiding Clerk

Rachel Ernst Stahlhut, Assistant Presiding Clerk
To Friends everywhere:

Greetings from the 340th Annual Sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. These Annual Sessions took place in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic that led Friends to meet via Zoom videoconferencing technology. This pandemic has exacerbated the very racial injustice and societal inequities that have hindered our spiritual growth within the PYM.

Friends met before the start of our 340th Annual Sessions with a series of plenaries focusing on climate change, membership, and racial justice. In a pre-retreat and the first plenary, Marcelle Martin brought us the fire of the early Friends as we reflected on how God is calling us and how we can let ourselves be known. Friends continued our practice of cross-generational worship, and families joined in all-ages spiritual community throughout the week. Many Friends seized this opportunity of Annual Sessions to be tethered together even in the isolation of these challenging times.

Our second plenary speaker, Zenaida Peterson, brought a grounding of self-awareness and care, with a contagious energy of love and Light. Zenaida shared their work, offered a collective poem to our community, and invited Friends to write their own poetry in the light of Love.

Naomi Madaras, our third plenary speaker, had a sober offering, tenderly but clearly given, of unrecognized early Quaker history regarding the practice of slavery, and our resistance to the challenges of conflict and anger that has kept that history hidden. Naomi invited recognition of
conflict and anger as gifts which may be understood as invitations to discern, an offering to experience and welcome the fire of Light and refining.

City Love brought their social justice band to Children, Middle School Friends, and Young Friends. Middle School Friends worked with City Love to create a song to accompany the MSFs’ slideshow. Their focus was on race in the United States today, including a timeline of the continuing story of protests against racial injustice over the past century.

There was great spiritual honesty and deep connection among Friends. This depth of Spirit was new, and welcomed. A Bible study focusing on the words of John Lewis affirmed the sense of the times and Lewis’s recent passing.

Friends noted the effect of time and platform on the unfolding of business as decisions required efficient approval separate from discussions informing those decisions. Zoom videoconferencing allowed participants to raise their hands and voices, but kept them also at a distance.

Our business meeting offered hope and change with a new slate of candidates to serve the PYM. We approved a budget for the upcoming fiscal year that exhibited structures and financial stewardship moving forward in our next year.

The rising appointees were welcomed by the community, which was united in approval of these people in their groundedness and calm. Friends expressed the ferment felt in small groups, in which they experienced a commitment and connection deeper than words. Through this process at Annual Sessions, which involved all ages, we are led to continue to strive to be where God needs us to be: on a long pathway leading to Home, Light, Justice, and Equality for all people. In this time of urgent need, we are challenged to take the fire that we have experienced into our work in our meetings and communities.

– Epistle Committee

Anthony Stover, Joan Broadfield, and Yelena Forrester
Am I a little Quaker child
like my ancestors?
Am I a different Quaker now?

“Give the Police Departments to
the Grandmothers”
give the meetings to the young people
I found empty spray cans on the side of the road
dancing in a pearly reflection of the sky.
And there beside it the brilliant color of yearning
etched graffiti
Black lives matter
will they listen
will we listen
will I listen
this time.

Some of us have always lived and found
Spirit in the shadows.
Some of us are just learning the shadows exist.

Much ugliness has been exposed
shadows protect fear, partly.
We want it carefully, guarded.
We invite worry and loneliness to reside with us
in darkness.
Our fear is us and our anger
is us and
we fight light.

We fight until community breaks in, entering to
dispel, bring light, in spite of our fear.

A different narrative is possible.
Imagination is the key to make us new.
Leaning out of the shadows I can see the light
light that blinds and warms.

In the shadows things are clearer and cooler
the outline of a shape you didn’t know
was there.
Grounding your feet to the earth.

In the shadow’s dark matter,
wait to be illuminated,

Distant spirit of newborn stars,
Voices struggle to speak,
truth.

Faith is the bird that sings for the dawn,
While it is still dark out.

It is dark out, is it not?
Wait... what’s that I see on the horizon...?

All of Creation, has its rightful place on
Mother Earth,
with a story - glory, acknowledgement, apology;
joyfully, lovingly, simply being, where
one belongs.

Being faithful means turning away from the
shadows to the Light.
resting in the shadow of a threshold full of pause.

Hands all around lifting holding guiding
suspending waiting pushing
saying: you will know

Listen in the doorway
feel the fullness of liminal space
welcome the uncertainty
faithful is in this place too.

Lighting a candle chases away darkness,
but you must tend its flame steadfastly
so the wind
doesn’t blow it out.

Zenaida Peterson
To all Friends everywhere:

Greetings from a gathering of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends, together from many different homes for Annual Sessions, July 29–August 2, 2020. Many of us gathered from the lands around Philadelphia, on the traditional homelands of the Lenni Lenape. We humbly acknowledge that many or all of us are settlers here, and live on stolen lands.

Young Adult Friends joined together Wednesday night, presenting ourselves with pictures, words, star signs, gifs and laughter. Many Friends experienced this welcoming activity as an expansive and joyful one, despite our separate locations, and we came back to the space opened in that spirit-filled way for the three succeeding nights.

Throughout the week we explored our emotions together. Grief has weighed heavily on Friends—as it has on others—for months. After the collective experience of Zenaida’s beautiful, resonant poetry, we came together around a short story about fear and grief. We practiced *lectio divina*, centering love in the text, in our lives, and in the world. We recognized in the passage we explored together, and again Friday night in Naomi’s talk “The Fire of the Light,” that grief, fear, and anger should not be dangerous to express. Anger is not antithetical to community. Decision making that excludes the possibility of expressing these emotions does a disservice to our members and to our community’s capacities. Anger, felt in response to injustice, can be a reminder to ground ourselves, so we can do the work.

We are grateful to see ourselves reflected in the Friday keynote speaker, Naomi Madaras and the poet in residence, Zenaida Peterson. Their powerful messages spoke to the spirit of the moment we live in, moments of abolition, uprising, and solitude. Indeed, we are all called to be responsive to this moment, and that spirit demands that we evolve and grow. Part of our evolution should be critically considering what we call “Quaker practice.” All our practices have been shaped by the culture by which they were surrounded. In America, white supremacist culture has always been part of those surroundings. What parts of the practices we have inherited are perpetuating oppression? What parts of the practices bring Truth to the surface of our Meeting? These must be separated and it is our choice, as a yearly meeting, to maintain them and pull them apart. How can we carefully tease apart that which will nourish the future of our faith, from that which closes it off and diminishes it?

One Friend gave a message that they worry about the source of the Quaker tendency to avoid anger and conflict. Do we fear that our shared beliefs are not strong enough to hold us together through it? Do we doubt the existence of the power that binds us? Unfortunately, we feel that the letter penned last April by the former clerks of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, fed this fear. In point 8, the clerks insinuate that expression of feeling is manipulation or “appeals to emotion.” By requiring Friends to leave emotions at the
meeting room door, we are asking them not to be their whole selves in our meetings. We are missing out on the important insights that feelings of anger can bring to the gathering. We should not be discouraged from bringing our fullest selves to worship.

When a message rises, it does not need to be palatable. Spontaneity has been, from the beginning, a necessary part of Friends meetings. In our own meetings for worship, Friends hold messages of babbling babies, song and dance, and much else that is unexpected. Young Adult Friends do not draw the line at anger or grief. We must let it rise as we do all messages. Our concept of the inner light is more than something tentative: it is bright and can be harsh.

Friday night, we came together to share a practice treasured across many branches of tradition since the fourteenth century, that of contemplative prayer. Just as we are called to meditate on God in order to “pierce the cloud,” we reflected, we are called too to meditate on suffering.

In this moment of solitude, we are being asked to confront a great deal of suffering. We try to manage our suffering and one other’s suffering; domesticate it, tame it, package it, and send it off to disappear. Prayer is a practice of being present, staying turned toward the thing we are afraid to look at, and moving through it with God. At the Uprisings for George Floyd, protestors knelt in silence for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, the same amount of time an officer knelt on Floyd’s neck, closing his pathway to air, and taking his life, violently and from a place of power. In this silence we are able to confront how long 8 minutes and 46 seconds is, staying turned toward George Floyd’s death, and the racism that led to his murder and the murder of so many Black and Brown people. Love and grief and anger go together. Looking away from suffering in our communities and relationships is neglect. We cry because we care. We are angry because we love.

Zenaida read on Thursday night, “My grief prays/ lights a candle for each new loss/ They melt without fire these days.” Their words are deeply personal testimony, offered to our Yearly Meeting in abundant care. The threads of Spirit reached out from their work to every one of our hearts. And they brought into clear relief the urgency of Naomi’s call the following night. Paying attention to the emotional responses too often silenced in Friends spaces is critical, if those threads are to reach beyond these Sessions. Young Adult Friends, as both the present and the future of this community, want to participate in and inherit a yearly meeting that can hear grief and anger, because without these, our prayers are shallow.

P.S. To all Friends everywhere, abolish the police. Love, Young Adult Friends
Greetings to Friends everywhere,

We are in extraordinary times. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting gathered virtually for the first time July 24-26, 2020 for our annual session and Meetings for Worship. Friends from member monthly meetings and worship groups in North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina reflected on the weekend’s query, “What opportunities do Quakers find in the pandemic and the current awakening to injustice for creating the world we seek?” We extend our deepest thanks to the team of volunteers from Chapel Hill Friends Meeting who provided technical support throughout the weekend during the ZOOM conference calls. The retreat registration totaled 114 adults.

After opening worship Friday evening, participants were sorted into small groups to reflect on queries about what impact the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement has had on their meetings, their communities, and themselves. Friends shared their pain and anguish as well as their hope and resolve.

Saturday morning Liz Nicholson and Hilary Burgin, Friends from Quaker Voluntary Service, led participants in a workshop tied to the weekend’s theme. Their listening exercise, which centered on the query “What is Spirit’s call to you in this moment?” was rich, deep and powerful. Sunday’s presentation on advocacy tools for connecting with legislators, provided by Bobby Trice (Friends Meeting of Washington and Friends Committee on National Legislation) and Christine Ashley (Eno Friends Meeting of Hillsborough and Friends Committee on North Carolina Legislation [FCNCL]), was informative and well attended. Friends gained useful knowledge and strengthened their skills to complete important work.

In preparation for Saturday’s annual session, committee and organization reports were sent as advance documents to lighten the agenda and to give more time for building community. Friends accepted these reports from our organizational representatives, and we received with thanks a summary of our member meeting spiritual condition reports. We celebrated FCNCL, approving a minute of appreciation that it is now operating full steam ahead. Marian Beane was approved to serve as our PFYM representative to FCNCL.

We value the fellowship we enjoyed this weekend and the opportunities to strengthen and deepen our connections with each other (albeit online), through conversation and worship. Friends expressed gratitude for Sally Freeman and Paul Klever’s spirit-led clerking, and for identifying hope, challenge and gratitude in our proceedings. Sally and Paul expressed their thanks to Christine Ashley and Marian Beane for their assistance in the weekend’s preparations.

As one attendee wrote: “The faults and fissures in our society that have been starkly exposed by the pandemic, police violence, and continuing polarization have made a deep impression on Friends, who expressed the need to put our love into action. In this time of uncertainty we hope to be led by the Spirit to take the next step, and to commit to the further steps as the path is revealed. I feel changed by the current moment, and by our worship together this weekend. May we be fertile soil for the Seed.”

In Peace,
Sally Freeman and Paul Klever, Co-clerks, Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting
Greetings to Friends everywhere,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shared in peace,

Sally Freeman and Paul Klever, Co-clerks, PFYM
On the 14th November 2020 an All-Poland Gathering of Friends took place, in which participated 21 people from the south, north, east, west and central Poland. It was the first meeting online in the history of our group, on the Zoom platform.

During the worship with spiritual sharing we expressed our joy with being able to see and hear each other, and our hope in the possibility that our community might thrive despite the limitations caused by the pandemic. We have also articulated our need to stay in touch with each other by any means possible, including email, phone, personal meeting and meeting online.

The Kaszuby group, the Warsaw group and the isolated Friends from the South and the North also participated in the news sharing part of the gathering.

We have listened to a presentation about the micro-practicing of peace, i.e. making peace every day in a micro scale. In the exchange that followed the presentation we shared our own experiences of peacefully solving everyday conflicts. We are hoping – and even planning – to organise further workshops in education for peace.

The need for regular, open-for-all meetings and worship was very visible and clearly expressed. In as much as we are challenged by the pandemic-related limitations, the situation also offers new opportunities. We are unable to meet in person but we can meet online instead, which for some of us means we can meet more often, and for others – especially the isolated – that we can meet at all. We have agreed that we will utilise the already tested Zoom platform for our future group meetings (once they are scheduled). The first of such all-Poland, hour-long meetings for worship, followed by tea/coffee, we have scheduled for 28th November 2020 at 10:30 am.

To ensure that the work of Friends in Poland continues the Gathering has expressed its conviction that the official roles, which were due to expire with this All-Poland Gathering, are ‘frozen’ until the next in-person meeting is possible.

The organisation of the next All-Poland Gathering remains an open question. We hope that more regular meetings and worship online will make it possible to address is again soon.
To Friends near and far:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mike Huber, co-clerk
Sarah Katee Hoggatt, co-clerk
Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends
Epistle Committee:
Gil George
James Hibbs
Julie Peyton

June 2021
To Friends here, there, and everywhere,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Peace and Justice Forum brought two minutes forward. We aligned with the “No Way to Treat a Child” campaign, which seeks an immediate end to the unlawful and unconscionable military detention of Palestinian children by Israeli Defense Forces. This minute recognizes that our own government also detains migrant refugee children. SCYM denounces such practices and calls upon our elected leaders to abolish them.
The other minute we endorsed asks for no-knock search warrants to be banned by all levels of government for all levels of law enforcement. We recognize more work remains for us to do, addressing policies and practices; we must recognize these moral imperatives and act when the Spirit leads us.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Retreat 2

In our two retreats, led by Emily Provance, we learned that we need to tell our stories of living through multiple crises—COVID, racism, climate change, the election and insurrection, economic inequality, misinformation—again and again to put them in perspective. In the first retreat, ‘Interruptions,’ we broke into small groups to share our
most vivid memories from the last year. In the second retreat, ‘Integrations’, in small
groups we considered who we were 13 months ago, compared to who we are now. Emily
cautioned us that ‘we are starting to make decisions about life after the pandemic, and
without reflection, we’ll go back to the way we were.’
We also shared stories of our spiritual journeys during the pandemic in worship sharing
and in ‘Awakening from Spiritual Lethargy.’ Friends have taken the social isolation as an
opportunity to adopt helpful spiritual practices and daily rituals, such as trying new
things, mindfulness, gratitude, intentional keeping in touch and bringing joy to others,
being in nature, prayer and meditation.
This last year we have witnessed an awakening to the profound effects that racism has
had on our country and ourselves. Some Friends and Meetings have joined groups such
as Black Lives Matter, the NAACP, and other organizations, and have also been engaged
in learning and reflection on racism. We feel strengthened in our commitment to equity,
justice, and becoming an anti-racist community. FCNL staff led an amazing workshop
– ‘Friends Reckoning with Racism, Justice Reform, and Election Integrity’ – a
comprehensive presentation covering the historical foundations of systemic racism, its
current forms, FCNL’s work, and what Friends can do about it. In ‘Mirrors of Identity:
Personal Reflections on Racial Experience,’ the Committee for Ministry on Racism created a
safe place for all Friends to reflect together on their early memories and life experiences
with race. In Affinity Groups, one for Black, Indigenous, & People Of Color (BIPOC), and
one for Friends of European descent, we shared our stories of racism and what actions
we are taking to build an anti-racist society.
During this year of social isolation, Friends have taken the opportunity to become more
connected with nature, deepening our sense of the need to protect her. We shared our
memories and experiences of nature in All Ages Worship Sharing. The songs of birds in
our backyards, shared over Zoom, brought the presence of nature into our morning
worship. In ‘What Now for Earthcare in SEYM,’ Friends heard about three critical issues in
our region, and considered what actions we can take. There is a lot of enthusiasm to do
more work together going forward.
In our plenaries and Executive Committee meetings, we learned that some committees have been able to meet online during the pandemic, while others have not. The Peace and Social Concerns committee, which meets monthly on Zoom, has seen an increase in participation. Our Field Secretary for Earthcare has been very active, with virtual visits to Meetings, giving presentations, and connecting with a myriad of Quaker organizations, environmental organizations, and interfaith groups. We were inspired by hearing the latest news from visiting representatives from AFSC, FCNL, FGC, and Quaker House. We adopted a minute, brought forward by the Committee for Ministry on Racism, to support the establishment of a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools. We also heard sad news that a member, who attended our YM many years ago, was arrested for sexual abuse of a minor. While we know of no incidents within our Yearly Meeting, we spent time carefully discerning how to respond to this news and care for any who may have been subject to abuse as children.

![Image of actors for Playback Theater](image)

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

Being together in person is such a vital need for young people. Over this last year, our youth have felt disconnected. The Youth Committee is searching for ways to help them re-connect with our community, and is starting to plan in-person events that can be done safely.
Friends were deeply moved by the Walton Lecture, ‘Interruption, Integration, Transfiguration,’ presented by Emily Provance. Emily spoke out of the silence on how people process and adapt to crises, change, and uncertainty; and she offered some ‘next steps’ in taking care of ourselves, our community, and society. Understanding the impact of what we’ve lived through this last year will take time to reflect and tell our stories. She talked about Maslow’s ‘hierarchy of needs,’ and how we first need to care for ourselves and members of our community with food and rest, security and identity, friendship and love. Simple acts of love and kindness have tremendous power to overcome extremism and divisions in our society; but we cannot meet those who distrust us (and who we distrust) with empathy – we cannot love our enemies – if our own basic needs are not met.

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

“We’re not called to be the people we were before; we’re called to be the people we are becoming.”
To Friends everywhere 2020-11-07

Like many Yearly Meetings all over the world, the Swedish Quakers were forced to hold their Yearly Meeting on Zoom, without the lifegiving personal meetings, without common lodging, without a theme.

We have carried out the most necessary tasks, welcoming new members, taking farewell of the members we lost, taking part of the economics reports for 2019, adopting the auditor’s reports and the budget, and approving the assignment of members to committees for 2021.

In the harsh times of the pandemic, we have still benefitted from the use of technical devices, which have made it possible to “see” each other and to worship together. In that way, those who lost their usual way to worship have been able to stay in touch with Friends and attenders, even those far away. We have been enriched by such new meeting places, and will most likely keep some of them, when today’s restrictions end.

One day, when we are no longer in the pandemic’s grip, we might become aware of what we learned during this social desert time. Then we might realize what the Swedish poet Karin Boye wrote in her beloved poem:

“Nog finns det mål och mening med vår färd
men det är vägen som är mödan värd.”

[Approximately: Sure, there are aims and meaning in life’s travels, but the road we travel, is what makes the effort worth it.]

Kerstin Backman, clerk
“Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing, compared to love in dreams.”

Ray Geers, of Cincinnati Friends Meeting, used that quote from The Brothers Karamazov in his Bible study on the scripture that grounded this year’s sessions: Micah 6:8. It is a familiar verse to many Friends: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?”

We are unaccustomed to thinking of love as harsh or dreadful, but to be truly merciful requires us to comprehend the depth of pain of the one who needs mercy. Ray illustrated this with the parable of the Good Samaritan, pointing out how the extravagance of the Samaritan’s mercy is fully seen against the backdrop of the injured character’s pain and the indifference of the passers-by. Ray encouraged us to think of love in experimental ways, as scientists exploring the field of love. He gave us these queries: “How can we stop tripping over the threshold between knowing what to live and actively living by what we know? How can we walk gracefully over this threshold between knowing what the Lord requires of us and actively living a life of love?”

While we chose Micah 6:8 well before the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the ensuing national and local conversation about dehumanizing and deadly police tactics, civil rights, and racial justice, we found that the prophet’s words spoke pointedly to our present faith concerns. Together we felt an urgent concern to respond to God’s call to action—if we could discern that call—at this moment when our corporate sins as Americans have been displayed so clearly before our eyes and hearts. With more energy and concord than your correspondents can ever remember, Friends freely discussed social issues like racism and public health and what we can do about them.
Throughout our sessions—in business, lectures, bible study, and small groups—we kept returning to this question of action. How do we act justly? How do we become people who love mercy? How do we come together to walk humbly before God?

But we must also acknowledge, before we go any further, that this year’s gathering wasn’t, remotely, anything like those in previous years. Our annual sessions in 2020 were held almost entirely on the Zoom video conferencing platform, although a small group of people gathered in the library at Wilmington Friends Meeting—socially distanced and wearing protective masks—to video conference from the same location. Many normal features of Yearly Meeting sessions were lacking: there was no sitting down to share a meal, no fundraising for mission projects, no hallway conversations, no singing together.

Gathering over Zoom presented new challenges. Rather than using our voices to express approval or disapproval of minutes, we held red and green items up to the screen. When we wanted to gather in small groups, we were shuttled into Zoom breakout rooms. We made errors—especially in unmuting ourselves—and we forgave one another for errors.

We rejoiced in seeing friendly faces, though, even if they were just little boxes on a screen. On Sunday morning we experienced particular joy in recording the gifts for ministry of two Friends—Hannah Lutz of Ada Chapel Friends Meeting and Miriam Speaight of Springfield Friends Meeting. Though these were the first virtual recordings in our history, they served as confirmation that however the world is changing, the Spirit is still working in us and with us.

In his workshop on clearness committees, Paul Buckley reminded us that answering the query Micah poses—what does the Lord require of thee?—is best done in the context of a worshipping community. We need spiritual community in order to rightly discern the voice of God.

Throughout the past year, an envisioning committee has been meeting to help us discern what God is calling Wilmington Yearly Meeting to become. They began that process by asking Friends for written responses to the unfinished statement, “Wilmington Yearly Meeting is ....” The envisioning committee heard that we are a Christ-guided community, a public Quaker presence in our various communities, a force for ministry coordination, a vehicle for affiliating with broader Quaker and Christian organizations, and a spiritual family. At our next Permanent Board meeting, the committee hopes to offer a plan for a new organizational structure that will free us to act together in love.

Wilmington College Interim President Erika Goodwin, reporting on the College’s plans for re-opening this Fall in light of the challenges of COVID-19, showed us how humility is necessary to ensure the safety of a community. This is a time at the College, she said, when we have to become learn-it-alls, not know-it-alls.

In her Saturday morning Bible study, Miriam Speaight spoke to us about the importance of compassion. She argued that compassion—loving mercy, as Micah would have it—must begin with a feeling of distress or discomfort. If we allow ourselves to pay attention to that anxiety, we can come to a place of calm from which we can
act. When we act relationally, we create connective bonds of love that address our discomfort—and the pain to which we are witness—rather than denying that pain.

We could see this move from distress to creative action in how our constituent congregations have been moving through the pandemic. Both Miami-Center and Friendsville Quarterly Meetings cancelled their spring meetings to avoid bringing people together, and most of our Monthly Meetings have been physically closed for some period of time; many are still not meeting in person. COVID-19 hasn’t stopped Wilmington Yearly Meeting, though. Friends are creating self-directed worship services, recording messages for broadcast over the radio, going on Facebook Live, gathering congregationally over Zoom, staying in touch via email, hosting drive-in services, starting YouTube channels, and sharing fellowship from the foot of one anothers’ driveways. And more, we’re sure!

Our financial discussions were also underlain by a concern for action. We wanted to know what the budget required of us. What does this budget translate into for my Monthly Meeting, or for me personally? What is required of us to make the ministries of Wilmington Yearly Meeting successful?

Micah’s call to act justly rang through both the USFW Lecture, delivered by Elizabeth Newby of Cincinnati Friends Meeting, and the Peace Lecture, delivered by Paul Moke of Wilmington Friends Meeting.

Ray Geers spoke of the threshold between knowing what the Lord requires of us and actively living a life of love. Elizabeth Newby offered one way over the threshold, as she shared some of her childhood memories of growing up as a vulnerable Mexican migrant laborer. As Elizabeth told her stories, she challenged us to see “immigration issues” as the stories of human beings trapped in a merciless system: people who are fully children of God and fully deserving of our emotional engagement, of love and mercy. God asks us to be willing to sit honestly with the discomfort of knowing that migrants are suffering—allowing ourselves to be horrified by the reality that families are separated at the border, children are placed in cages, refugees are sent back to be murdered in their home countries. We need to be open to grief and outrage so that we can move into grounded loving response.

Paul Moke, in his lecture on the work of the American Friends Service Committee during WWII, paid special attention to the AFSC’s unofficial responses—to the fieldworkers, largely women, who rescued hundreds of Jewish children from concentration camps while the AFSC’s official response concentrated on mediation and feeding programs. These fieldworkers provided fake identities for Jewish children, hid children and their families, and smuggled children out of camps and across national borders. Their choices were at odds with what the world expected of women—and also with AFSC policy. These women acted at considerable risk to themselves. Yet they saw what justice required of them, and they moved into action.

Quakers have not always been on the side of human freedom for all, and we as a Yearly Meeting have not done all we could do to root out racism within our own body and in our communities. As our offering in the current American conversation on racial justice and injustice, we approved a statement on racial justice. Our statement begins, “There is a gap between the ideals we profess and the realities we live.” Quakers have, in principle, rejected the idea that race should pose a social limitation. Those of us
who are white, however—and this is the vast majority of us—know that we benefit from our whiteness. We uphold anti-racist ideals, but have not done the work to destroy racism, either as it is hidden within us or as it is expressed through our institutions.

And yet, we pledge to work with renewed vigor toward compassion and equal justice for all. “True godliness,” William Penn wrote in the quote that we chose for this year’s theme, “does not turn men [and women] out of the world but excites their endeavors to mend it.” We are gathered and ready for the work of mending the world.

Friends everywhere, we pray that you are also feeling this excitement about mending the world by putting love in action. True godliness isn’t about escaping the world. It’s about doing what the Lord requires: acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with Friends and with God. We extend our hands to all Friends with an invitation to walk humbly along with us.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Goff, Dan Kasztelan, Julie Rudd

7/26/2020