

2022 Epistle of Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends

[note: A few revisions have been made in response to comments to the first reading. Please send feedback and suggestions to: epistleclerk@pacificyearlymeeting.org]

Loving greetings to Friends everywhere from Pacific Yearly Meeting's blended annual session, held from July 22-27 in the coastal redwoods at Mount Madonna Center in California, the original land of the Amah Mutun, Ohlone peoples. Pacific Yearly Meeting includes Friends from California, Nevada, Hawaii, and Mexico. 178 people attended in person including 11 children, and 18 Junior Yearly Meeting teens. Over 98 people attended virtually via zoom, aided by two large projection screens and two remote controlled cameras. Wild turkeys, deer, and scrub jays were also frequent visitors.

Our theme of Beloved Community spoke to our yearning to be together again after pandemic isolation. Despite the fact that annual session coincided with record high Covid-19 numbers, a covid safety team worked diligently to make tough decisions juggling safety and inclusion and participants cooperated to a remarkable degree with safety measures. This being Pacific Yearly Meeting's 75th anniversary, jubilee themes of healing and renewal infused our expectant, waiting worship, plenary sessions, affinity groups, and interest groups. In an act of jubilee debt forgiveness, a financial surplus accumulated during the pandemic years allowed organizers to offer annual session free-of-charge for all children and pay-as-led for adults. Bible Study continued this theme by reading Isaiah chapter 40:13, which includes the passage, "Oh Lord, revive us again."

Inclusion and diversity were at the forefront of many folks' minds as we grappled as a community to heal from hurt feelings, ouches and insensitivities of the past, ultimately recognizing ways that we might practice simple loving kindness with one another as we seek to build a beloved, just, and inclusive community. Keynote panel speakers Marlene Coach Eisenstein, Peni Hall, and Keith Runyan challenged participants to be attentive to their areas where we lack awareness, especially ableism, racism, and disharmony with the natural world. Able-bodied friends can exclude others without noticing. We all have disabilities. Some are visible. Open, curious conversations draw out friends who feel excluded. Spirit equips us to see each others' gifts and limitations. The Light prompts us to offer a tender hand in acts of kindness.

A document outlining proposed guidelines for pausing before speaking to reflect on where ones' words are coming from was presented by the Racial Justice Subcommittee which has developed a series of workshops throughout the past years examining subconscious exclusionary practices among Friends. In the middle of our own gathering, the Racial Justice Subcommittee presented the keynote address virtually to New York Yearly Meeting, something that would not have been possible in the past. We found comfort that our work in making Friends a more inclusive and aware community, willing to acknowledge the ongoing impacts of history, is shared by so many Yearly Meetings around the globe. Honolulu Friend Aaron Terry guided a group of participants in the traditional Hawaiian practice of Ho'oponopono, the

healing and righting of past wrongs, and we looked at how Friends might bring more mindfulness in resolving conflicts amongst ourselves.

Quaker discernment process offers a model for seeking truth beyond divisions in this time of wars and scars, climate devastation, social, economic, gender, and racial inequities. Friends are developing ways to mend past harms and move society toward a healthier future. Deep listening is an act of surrender. Worship deepens when Friends are able to release regrets and worries with each exhalation and receive renewal with each inhalation in what Thomas Kelly named as “continually renewed immediacy” with the Source of Love. How might Pacific Yearly Meeting Friends become living epistles, couriers of the regeneration? We are called to be bold with one another and a beacon of light for the rest of the world.

Parents found solace in each others’ stories of struggle to fully participate in gathering while caring for young children and resonated with a report by the Children’s Program Committee raising concerns about children being ignored or even “othered” by adults not specifically tasked with childcare. A parent affinity group was formed, which led to parents feeling empowered to bring their children to an interest group focusing on the future of Pacific Yearly Meeting which was inadvertently scheduled at a time when it was challenging for parents to attend. The kids drew their vision of the future on a giant piece of paper and brought joy to parents non-parents alike. Despite anxieties about dwindling numbers, 1/3 of in-person attendees at this annual session were under the age of 35. We began the gathering looking at the past and ended feeling present and optimistic about the future.