

Dear Friends Everywhere,

We gathered at Guilford College on Seventh Month 12-15, 2018, for our 321st Annual Sessions, remembering with love and gratitude our distant Friends. We were blessed with many newcomers and visiting Friends. Our theme this year was "Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire" - a line from John Greenleaf Whittier's poem "The Brewing of Soma" that also references the passage in 1 Kings 19 about the "still, small voice".

Our clerk opened the business sessions with Romans 12:9-13 that starts with "Let love be genuine," and we experienced this love throughout our time together.

Our theme was also evident during the bible study led by David Hobson of Rocky River Meeting (FCNC). The bible study explored scripture through hymns, including "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind", which incorporates the words of the Whittier poem. We found that singing helped engage us in different ways, and our young Friends chose a number of favorite hymns for us.

During our annual sessions, each monthly meeting reads their responses to each of our 12 queries. This year, we started with query 11 - "Do we reverence that of God in every human being with concern for the needs of each individual? Are we seeking to rectify existing social injustice and racial discrimination in our local communities and in the world at large?" We set aside extra time for reflection after the reading of these query responses as we feel the times call for particular attention to these issues. We find a deep sense of closeness in sharing how the Spirit is moving in our meetings, and our struggles to remain faithful.

After a presentation about the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, we found that while we strongly supported the mission and goals of the campaign, we struggled with whether and how to convey that to the monthly meetings and their members and attenders.

On Fifth Day evening we enjoyed a dramatic reading of letters and journal entries written by North Carolina Friends during challenging times. It was helpful to look back at our history through first-hand accounts, and to see how the yearly meeting handled difficult issues in the past. It also helped us see that we sometimes made mistakes, such as supporting efforts to send freed slaves to Africa, which resulted in unanticipated suffering. The program also reminded us of the deep ties between North Carolina Friends and those in Ohio and Indiana.

We have been engaged for several years in revising our discipline. This year we turned our attention to the queries. We find that examining our practices in light of both the past and the present gives us new openings. Because the process has been deliberate and Spirit-filled, it is bearing good fruit.

During our time together we held numerous interest groups and heard from representatives from several Quaker organizations. Kendra Bradley, who has

been the director of Quaker House for the past year, spoke passionately about the work being done there. Andrei Israel shared about the work of William Penn House in Washington. Lauri Langham reported for Quaker Earthcare Witness on the work of caring for and restoring our planet. Bill Geary expressed gratitude from the Southern State Prison Worship Group for the yearly meeting's continued support and encouraged us to write to the prisoners, as the ministry of letter writing is so important to prisoners.

On Sixth Day evening we headed across the street to New Garden Friends Meeting to hear Diane Randall, the executive secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation. She titled her talk "Gracious Calling, Ordered Lives: the faith and practice of Friends in the political maelstrom", borrowing some phrasing from the Whittier poem. She described the difficulties of working in Washington, that are far from the calm Whittier speaks of, and more like the earthquake, wind, and fire. In describing FCNL's work, she quoted Edward Burrough's letter "To the Present Distracted and Broken Nation of England", saying "And we are not for Names, nor Men, nor Titles of Government, nor are we for this Party, nor against the other, because of its Name and Pretence; but we are for Justice and Mercy, and Truth and Peace, and true Freedom, that these may be exalted in our Nation; and that Goodness, Righteousness, Meekness, Temperance, Peace and Unity with God, and one with another, that these things may abound". Diane touched on various aspects of FCNL's work in the areas of peace, Native Americans, mass incarceration, migrants and refugees, and an Earth restored. She noted that the world is hungry for a spiritual life lived both externally and internally. She demonstrated how FCNL's work proceeds from a spiritual basis and is grounded in a practice of being present with, and listening to, everyone. Her talk left us with a sense of hope for repairing what is broken in our nation.

Diane Randall asked us, "Can we see the Spirit moving among us?" In our patient processes of working together, in our times of study together, and in our socializing together, we have seen and felt the Spirit at work, and are deeply grateful. We meet for our 322nd session in Wilmington, NC, on Seventh Month 11, 2019, if consistent with Divine Will.

On behalf of North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative,

Gwen Gosney Erickson, clerk