

We Are VIRTUAL

340th Annual

Letting
Ourselves
BE KNOWN Sessions

JULY 29–AUGUST 2
PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING

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