

Epistle from the South Central Yearly Meeting 2020 Annual Sessions
24th to 27th Day, 9th Month, 2020 via videoconferencing platform Zoom

To Friends near and far,

Greetings in the name of peace, love, and the Light! South Central Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) met via Zoom to hear keynote speaker Minga Claggett-Borne on Saturday, April 11, and for business, worship sharing, workshops, and fellowship from September 24-27, 2020. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, we canceled our springtime, in-person annual sessions at Greene Family Camp in Bruceville, TX, and moved them to the comfort and safety of our own homes. While we were physically apart, our spirits were very much together as we met new Friends and reconnected with Friends whom we have not seen since last year.

The theme of this Yearly Meeting was “Loving in the Light: Quaker Response in Times of Crisis,” which, sadly, could not have been more appropriate for our gathering in the midst of so many crises which unfortunately plague our society. We explored this theme through worship sharing, workshops, a panel discussion, and the return of Minga Claggett-Borne for a reprise of her keynote address and a fireside chat. We welcomed workshop leaders from AFSC, FCNL, FGC, QEW, Friends Peace Teams, and a member of SCYM. The use of Zoom allowed members of Friends Peace Teams from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Ecuador, and Colombia to share their testimonies with SCYM Friends. Other Friends joined us from as far as the state of Washington to Washington, DC and northern Maine to share their advocacy work with us. Rex Friend (Midtown Oklahoma City Worship Group, under the care of Norman OK MM) and Sara Bana (Oklahoma City activist) led a very powerful panel discussion and shared with us stories of Spirit leadings to bring about restorative justice.

Our business meetings included reports from different Quaker organizations and SCYM committees. We celebrated the lives and works of seven SCYM members through the sharing of their memorial minutes. We also welcomed the news of the births of children born into SCYM family and a marriage of a couple under the care of the Norman, OK MM. We were delighted to have 118 Friends registered which included 30 guests and visitors. We give thanks for Friends all over our country and the world who joined us.

After we recognized the indigenous peoples of the Americas on whose lands we now live and work, we began our Yearly Meeting on Thursday night with worship in the manner of Friends. We collectively acknowledged the atrocities indigenous peoples endured as their lands were forcibly taken, and as Quakers, we committed to acknowledging and honoring their sacrifice. Friends were encouraged to include the ancestral tribal lands of where they reside as well as their preferred gender pronouns in their Zoom screenname.

During the Peace and Justice Forum, Friends from Olympia Friends Meeting (North Pacific YM) shared a moving presentation on their work with Friends Ugandan Safe Transport (FUST), which

helps in the evacuation of LGBTQ+ Ugandans in danger. The YM approved a minute of moral and financial support for FUST. Friends also approved a minute from the Dallas and Fort Worth Monthly Meetings which stands in solidarity with Indigenous peoples in response to the many crises from which they currently toil. A final minute concerning the plight of detained Palestinian children was raised from the Peace and Justice Forum which was sent by Live Oak Friends Meeting. SCYM Friends approved the minute and thanked Friends who shared this concern with us.

Friends came to these annual sessions carrying the weight of this time of reckoning, of finally acknowledging, and of feeling and living with the horror of knowing that Black and Brown people carry harm from the white supremacy engrained in our culture, society, and legal system. Out of the Peace and Justice Forum, seven Friends drafted a minute supporting the dismantling of systemic racism and white supremacy in our country. The minute was thoroughly seasoned in the manner of Friends, and unity was reached to approve the minute.

The weekend was clouded by the news that SCYM Clerk Gerald Jimmy had been hospitalized due to a serious medical emergency after Opening Worship. We held Gerald, his spouse Danielle Evans, and his family in the Light throughout the weekend, and gave thanks when we received news that his condition had stabilized and improved. Friends were thankful that Associate Clerk Karen Takemoto rose to the occasion to clerk our business meetings and that former YM clerks served as associate clerk.

We gathered for three days over Zoom and were grateful for the new connections we made as well as the reunions we nurtured with old Friends. While it was not the same as when we meet in person, it was joyful, uplifting, and renewing to be amongst Friends. We are grateful for this technology that allowed us to be together while being apart. We gratefully received a note from Friend Sandie Finn of North London Area Meeting (Britain Yearly Meeting) who spent a day with us and wanted us to know how beautiful the day was for her. Friends of SCYM responded to times of crisis by continuing to commit ourselves to Loving in the Light.