

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.