

## 2021 Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting Epistle

*Sixth Annual Session, Fourth Month, 2021*

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

As the Covid-19 pandemic continued to grip our world, the 2021 Piedmont Friends Spring Retreat met virtually April 9-11 for a weekend of fellowship, worship and the Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting (PFYM) annual sessions. Friends gathered from Piedmont Friends Fellowship (PFF) and PFYM monthly meetings and worship groups in North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina. Guests from other meetings and Friends organizations were warmly welcomed. The theme for the retreat was *Cultivating the Garden of Diversity and Inclusion*, with Friends reflecting on the query: *What is most on my heart as we cultivate the garden?*

The Friday evening roll call of participating meetings included a Native American Friend reading names of the nations and tribes whose ancestral lands the meetinghouses currently use. Small groups reflected on queries that focused on the retreat's theme, offering opportunity for sharing, rich discussions and making personal connections.

The Saturday morning session welcomed author and educator Niambi Jaha-Echols speaking on the topic *Healing the Illusion of Our Separateness: Cultivating the Garden of Diversity and Inclusion*. The deeply thoughtful workshop led Friends into an exploration of colonialism in the Quaker community and to re-imagine Piedmont Friends as a blooming, flourishing diverse society. She shared her own persuasion of being "pro-inclusionist" toward combating racism; to acknowledge that each of us carries within us not only "that of God," but inherited trauma and attitudes that we must address and heal. Friends were deeply grateful for Niambi's insightful presentation and the gift of our time together searching for and celebrating our oneness.

The retreat included an intergenerational art activity centered on the Hamsa Hand, an ancient Middle Eastern symbol of the Hand of God. Participants traced and illustrated their own hand's silhouette while the deeper meaning the symbol holds within major religions was explained.

All gathered into a spirit of worship for the Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting annual session. Friends shared in the work of the yearly meeting, received reports from PFYM representatives to various Friends organizations, and reflected on the year's accomplishments, including our individual and meeting adaptations for the pandemic. It was reported that Piedmont Friends, under the spiritual care of PFYM, will serve as the host for the 2022 FGC Gathering in Radford, VA.

The 2021 Piedmont Friends Spring Retreat closed with Sunday morning meeting for worship. Guest Ron Echols concluded worship by filling the space with the healing tones of his singing bowls. Friends departed holding a deep sense of gratitude for the weekend together, for deepening personal connections, and for the contributions of Piedmont Friends in the larger Quaker world and in the Religious Society of Friends.

Shared in peace,

Sally Freeman and Paul Klever, Co-clerks, PFYM