

Appendix G Epistle from Canadian Yearly Meeting, held online, 8 to 14 August 2021

“Not by strength of arguments or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine, and convincement of my understanding thereby, came [I] to receive and bear witness of the Truth, but by being secretly reached by [the] Life. For, when I came into the silent assemblies of God’s people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up; and so I became thus knit and united unto them ... to whom afterwards the knowledge and understanding of principles will not be wanting, but will grow up so much as is needful as the natural fruit of this good root, and such a knowledge will not be barren nor unfruitful.

Robert Barclay (no. 19.21 in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 5th ed.,
Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends [Quakers] in Britain)

Loving greetings to Friends everywhere.

Friends gathered online from across Canada and beyond to worship, share stories, and to honour and renew the sense of Spirit at work among us.

We met in the context of a national grief and anger as our settler nation comes to understand how many Indigenous children perished in the residential school system, and we further awaken to the ongoing reality of colonialism and genocide. Changes in the climate of the planet that sustains us also now affect every one of us. Concern for future generations colours all of our discernment. Under the guidance of the hardworking working group called Change and Sustainable Transformation (CAST), we seek to simplify our organizational structure while retaining an ability to respond faithfully to continuing revelation.

A pre-gathering retreat, facilitated by poets from our Yearly Meeting, offered a rich choice of workshops. This experience opened a delightful imaginative space for participants, a portal out of our daily pressures and into receptivity.

The Sunderland P. Gardner (SPG) Lecture spoke into that space. The theme chosen was “Love and Justice, Hope and Imagination.” More than 150 of us attended online. Monica Walters-Field brought us images and music, aided by her granddaughters and her son. She then settled into the informative and touching story of her own life. Arising from this, she issued a call to Friends to talk less and to do more. Quaker process must not be used to exclude, she stated. She challenged us to understand that Friends from the beginning have been activists, and that it is not right that so much time has passed in regard to our major Concerns, with so little actual change. These words and this challenge emerged often through our week together. On the last day we set aside a time to reflect upon the message of the SPG Lecture.

Janet Ross, John Samson Fellows, Kate Friesen, Jane Orion Smith and Keith Barber of Winnipeg Monthly Meeting, led five sessions of Quaker Studies, taking as our starting point Query 18: to “*know one another in the things that are eternal.*” Janet introduced a multileveled definition of acknowledgement that wove through the rest of her talk. She then moved into the territorial acknowledgement. A reading from Barclay including the phrase, “*As I gave way to the truth*” connected with further queries to discover what we are teaching as Quakers that we may not be conscious of. This includes things like patriarchy, colonialism and other hierarchies. We need

to become aware of the impact and violence of these systemic hierarchies; otherwise, we will participate in and continue them. If our Quaker practice is not changing us, we cannot change the world. We must know and understand our own story and understand the part played by these hierarchies in our own lives. What calls you to Quakers? Why do you stay? What is eternal for you? There was rich sharing on these queries in small breakout groups.

Four days this week began with an online half-hour program for children, with follow-up activities at home throughout the day. Ten children registered for the children's program, and two Young Friends age 12+ registered and participated in youth-friendly CYM activities. All concerned brought awesome contributions of insight and energy.

At Meeting for Worship for Business, all nominations were approved. However, many roles remain unfilled. As a Yearly Meeting, we continue a conversation about how to simplify our "doing" as Friends and to release our "being."

At the request of Hamilton Monthly Meeting, Canadian Yearly Meeting will write to appropriate representatives in the government of Canada expressing our concern about the children who died at Residential Schools and whose graves are only now being uncovered. We ask the government to fully support further investigations and ensure the implementation of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015. The letter will be copied to Monthly Meetings for their information and use.

We spent one evening hearing about the work of the Canadian Friends Service Committee in areas of criminal justice, Indigenous Peoples' human rights, and peace. This year is the 90th anniversary of CFSC's social justice work. Friends across our Yearly Meeting feel better informed about this work because of the monthly series called "Get to Know Thee, Friend."

Online educational work of Canadian Friends Historical Association has also enhanced our sense of heritage and community at a time when we have been isolated and separated.

This has been a week of precious connection with one another and of sober reflection on who we are and how we may now be led. We are very grateful to all those who made this online gathering possible. Much joy was expressed at how close to in-person the meeting felt.