

To Friends Everywhere:

Loving greetings from the 189th annual gathering of Quakers in Canada, our 67th as a united Yearly Meeting. Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (CYM) met from the 7th to the 13th of August, 2022, as an entirely online meeting.

Canadian Yearly Meeting is now experiencing our third year of holding the annual gathering as an online event; we aspire to move to a hybrid (online and in-person) format in 2023. For some F/friends, being restricted to online connection represents a significant challenge – for others, the online approach offers the chance for greater accessibility for distant F/friends; a chance to respond to environmental concerns; a way of meeting the very real budgetary challenges of our organization. It is an uneasy place to land in and we continue to explore new ways of meeting together, aware of the gains and losses. May we be open to exploring new ways to build Quaker communities.

This was the second year of using ‘Sched’ as the CYM Planner. It was introduced just before CYM-In-Session 2021, and it seems that people using this scheduling tool feel much more comfortable with its features this year. We honour the Programme Committee who worked so hard on the wide range of offerings available to Canadian Quakers in 2022 and adopted this tool for the online meeting. There were a total of 105 sessions for this year’s programme and 183 people in attendance. Although we were prepared to offer an online program for children, not enough children registered. Online programming for children is very challenging and we look forward to having our children meet one another in person.

JoLee Sasakamoose gave the annual Sunderland P. Gardner lecture: “Guided by Ancestors: Integrating Ojibwe Teachings with Quaker Testimony for Social Action”. Through personal stories both joyful and painful, we were presented with two different kinds of knowing (Quaker and Indigenous) that seemed to interweave and complement one another. As CYM continues to work toward better relationships with the Indigenous Peoples whose home we now share, experiences like this one deepen our understanding and increase our ability to communicate.

Meetings across Canada are engaging with profound layers of change and transformation, both within our Society of Friends and in the larger society. We name in particular a significant challenge: How can an older generation of F/friends make the much-needed internal changes to our Society that will enable us to embrace the emergent needs of younger generations of F/friends, as well as families with small children? A presentation by one wise and learned Friend explored the founding meanings behind some time-honoured Quaker practices and processes are being eroded or ignored. We were asked whether this is necessary and useful, or distressing and damaging, as we attempt to offer our faith and practice to new participants.

“Ask a Young Friend”, a panel discussion by four Young F/friends, provided us with much food for thought around key questions, such as how Meetings can be welcoming spaces to be queer, or why our Meetings are failing to make Meeting inviting for families with young children, as they struggle with child care, fatigue, and the desire for appropriate curriculum, when attendance may be irregular, or the family may be the only one .in a Quaker community.

Friends hope that we can welcome new F/friends into our Society, while we reflect on our traditional testimonies and practices which have served us well for centuries (and may or may not need changing). At one morning worship there blossomed the theme of friendship (both with and without a capital F) offered to each other, as well as to those outside our own community. At our annual large worship-sharing event entitled “Experience of the Spirit in My Life,” several Friends explored how painful times could offer unexpected blessings of the Spirit that could be shared with others.

The past three years have brought deep change to our Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. Our sessions devoted to business were meaningful and marked by important decisions, including a minute on loving marriage. The session “Understanding Meeting for Worship for Business” helped F/friends contemplate the necessary discipline and practices needed to sustain our life together. We were called to reconnect with the theological foundations of our Quaker ancestors, even if we have to update these for today’s world. Understanding our Quaker roots demands a deeply-searching process within, which then must be shared with other Quakers and beyond in terms of integrity and truth.

Canadian F/friends continue to be sustained and uplifted through Bible Study, presented this year by Colin Saxton of Friends United Meeting. He shared examples of mercy found in the bible, as a reminder of its potential place in repairing and mending God’s good world and our own lives. The focus on mercy may lead those hearing this message to move forward in faith in new ways. For those seeking an oasis of prayer and deep centered experience, the Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Healing offered periods of presence and connected fellowship. There were 7 daily worship sharing groups which enabled us to know one another better. There were 13 Special Interest Groups, an indication of the passion and commitment of F/friends as we discern how to act in the world.

We held a meeting to remember Friends across our Yearly Meeting who are no longer with us and note that this year there have been many more deaths than births.

Family Night, held at the end of a long week of being in front of a computer, was attended by a small group of Friends who enjoyed music and poetry performances by some Friends and hearing the ‘gleanings’ gathered by Friends during our week together.

Faithfulness is not always about getting things perfect or right, but rather represents the commitment to walk together in the Light, so that we can gain strength to do what is needed in our world. As we gather together however we can, may you be blessed wherever you are.