

Dear Friends everywhere,

Glory! A brilliant sunny morning after a lightning-filled night begins our first full day of our 141st Annual Sessions. We join hearts for worship and business on the Midwest plains, corn and soy as far as the eye can see, fields flooded with recent rains.

One morning several children discovered a nest and three blue eggs blown from a leafy maple during the night. They puzzled, “Why are the eggs so far from the nest?” Then the children wondered, “If the nest is mudded back in the tree will it again become a home for the birds?” Many Friends in our yearly meeting look deeply to discern how to ‘mud’ their and their monthly meetings’ internal spiritual desires into the world in which we inhabit – an appropriate symbol for the theme of our sessions, “From Mystic Voice to Active Voice”.

We are a community of rural folks, city-dwellers, and urbanites, 22 meetings and worship groups spread through four states. About three-quarters of our meetings and worship groups are small. Small or large, we all struggle with how to manage our collective resources of time and energy to provide pastoral care, nurture our children and youths, reach out to seekers, and witness to our testimonies in the wider world. Although we are blessed with many souls willing to wear multiple hats and young adult Friends willing to assume more responsibility, many of our lives are not centered exclusively on meeting activities.

Both within and among our local meetings, there is a longing to strengthen and deepen our relationships with one another. We are challenged to confront our differences in truth and love. While exploring the use of electronic technologies to draw us closer across the miles, we are learning the hazards as well as the opportunities of electronic communications.

We realize how many of our elders have passed on, and we share heartfelt concern and caring for those who are homebound or infirm.

With the passing of another generation, the Spirit is leading us to minister more attentively to parents and young children. We fervently desire an intergenerational community where many of our interactions include children, young Friends, and adults of all ages. A few of our meetings have seen the numbers of parents and children grow as even childless adults overcome their inhibitions and taste the joy of connecting with our youngest Friends through First Day School. Our yearly meeting has begun to season the exciting possibility of a staff position focusing on children’s ministry.

Over the past year, our hearts have been broken over escalating violence in our communities: more shootings, police brutality, misuse of power and privilege, continued destruction of our natural environment, and all of the manifestations of insensitivity towards anyone who is not a white heterosexual American. Those of us who identify with the dominant culture confess that we have been silent or complicit on too many occasions. We acknowledge the evil in our world as we seek a more intimate connection with the Divine. The challenge is vast and our ship is so small.

One of our representatives to Friends World Committee on Consultation noted that the benefits of bridging cultures are the acceleration of spiritual growth, softening of the soul, and increased humour. We are encouraged to seek involvement with those whose experience has been different from ours. We are not different in the Light, but in what we experience from day to day.

Looking abroad, it is all too easy for us here in the United States to think that we understand people of other cultures when, in fact, our frame of reference creates an awkward lack of understanding. Our good intentions may not always be well met. At least we know that acknowledging our problem is a beginning in seeking a solution. We still believe that God's love will triumph.

During our Annual Session, three goals long supported by our Quaker community were confirmed by the United States Supreme Court and are now embodied in the law of the land: fair housing, same-sex marriages, and affordable health care. These were cause for celebration and are additional evidence of the connection between mystic and active.

Perhaps more than anything else, we have begun to consider how we might be lit by the fire of our Quaker forebears who, enflamed with the righteous knowing of God's love, rolled up sleeves and marched forward under the banners of our testimonies. We long for the experience Francis Howgill described, "The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net..." We long to get back to our mystic roots so they might lead us to action. We long to achieve something one of our members has succinctly described: our Quaker forebears moved easily from mystic to active because mystic was active and active was mystic.