

**11th April 2021**

**To Friends Everywhere,**

We send warm greetings from Ireland Yearly Meeting, held online from 8 – 11 April 2021. Only a short time ago how strange such an arrangement might have seemed. Friends sitting in little (equally- sized!) boxes in a virtual space using buttons to ‘unmute’ and ‘chat’, with their ‘padlet’ of documents to hand! Clerks seeing who wishes to speak and instantly sharing documents on screen with everyone!

Our gathering is testament to the way we have adapted to changed circumstances since the cancellation of 2020 IYM last April and demonstrates the many positives we have been able to draw from adversity. While we agree that online meeting cannot replace the fellowship of meeting in person, it has allowed many more to join us at Yearly Meeting and has saved many hundreds of carbon miles of travel!

The IYM theme, A Time to Act Together in Faith and Hope, speaks to that enduring spirit of resourcefulness. Those reporting on the two pilgrimages Irish Friends made to 1652 country in 2019 told of the debt of gratitude we owe our founding fathers and of the sense of community and continuity found in worshipping together in Swarthmoor Hall. We learned too of the visits Stephen Grellet and Elizabeth Fry made to Ireland in the early 19th century and the legacy to this day of their pioneering work for social justice.

We were reminded that the connection between faith and action has been a constant feature of Quaker witness and challenged as to how we take forward our Testimonies of peace, equality and simplicity in our own Meetings. In considering what is distinctive about the contribution Quakers make to social action, we reflected not on what Quakers do, but how and why – the spiritual imperative of hearing and healing the world’s wounds that is part of being close to God.

We have heard how fresh energy has been injected into our well-established vehicles for social action and charitable outreach. Quaker Service has appointed a new Chief Executive who outlined how the charity has adapted successfully to the provision of services to vulnerable families, children and prisoners in Northern Ireland during the pandemic. Irish Quaker Faith in Action has set up a website with a facility to receive online donations which has given a new impetus to their ability to support Quaker work at home and abroad.

We have been encouraged to support campaigns that reflect our Peace Testimony – ‘Stop Fuelling War’ and ‘Campaign to Stop Killer Robots’ – and we agreed to sign an interfaith statement that urges UN member states and all people of goodwill to commit to preserving meaningful human control over the use of force, and to enact a pre-emptive ban on fully autonomous weapons.

The enormity of the issues we have to confront may seem overwhelming. However, in our discussion on sustainability, we were reminded that hope is the decision not to give up. We were encouraged by the experience a young Friend shared of her work for climate justice: focus on the solution; approach with a sense of community; bring love into the equation and hope flourishes.

As we explored how we act together in faith and hope, we were reminded of the importance of our relationships. How do we nurture relationships within our own Meetings to take our testimonies forward, to build community and to create opportunity for all to become involved? What are we doing to confront the difficult issue of the lack of diversity within our worshipping communities? Do we do enough to make links with other organisations and to speak out about our concerns? How do we connect with each other and with the natural world?

These are all challenging questions, but our experience of meeting via Zoom has taught us that we have been able to develop and build our relationships even in an online space. Indeed, Young Friends have shown us how to enjoy a 'virtual hug'!

Our individual and personal relationship with Christ was at the heart of the Public Lecture, 'Resurrection and Personality', delivered by our Friend Eoin Stephenson from Limerick Meeting. We were reminded that the resurrection is core to our faith, and that Jesus of Nazareth is experienced as a friend in ordinary life, by us as ordinary people, each with our different personalities. In this relationship, in this encounter with a living presence, it is possible to grow as open personalities, balancing our positive and dark aspects and addressing the challenge of fear. And it is this quiet presence that we hope is with us in death, experienced as if we are coming into a new life.

We hope to meet next year in person, taking with us the positive lessons we have learned from the unique experience of this online Yearly Meeting.

Signed on behalf of Ireland Yearly Meeting,

Denise C. Gabuzda, Clerk, Ireland Yearly Meeting  
Elizabeth Dickson  
William D. A. Haire and Philip McDonagh, Assistant Clerks, Ireland Yearly Meeting