

## New York Yearly Meeting Epistle

To Friends Everywhere,

We send loving greetings from Silver Bay on Lake George in New York State, where we have gathered as a yearly meeting since the 1940s. We sit on lands that were once Mohawk hunting grounds, shared by treaty with many nations: We thank the Mohawks and other nations for their care of the lands and the lake. For this our 324th gathering for Summer Sessions, we are 501 Friends including 103 Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM), from babies to high school. We are queer and straight, trans and cis, young and old, differently abled, people of all colors, with origins in many lands, bearing legacies of dispossession and harm that we struggle to redress, along with bounties of love and care and gratitude for the diverse truths that we bring together. We join in thankfulness for the divine love that infuses at once our joyful gathering and our shared striving for justice and renewal.

The theme of our Sessions this year was Friends Come in All Ages, Sizes, and Colors: Our Path Toward Being Inclusive. Our theme marked two important landmarks in the life of our Yearly Meeting. This year we implemented a Pay-as-Led program. Half of the attenders contributed above the basic rate, to provide financial support for others to attend. We had seventy-four more attenders than last year. We struggled with expanding our understanding of membership. In both initiatives we look to a future in which the gifts of the spirit among us can be embraced in ever widening circles. We celebrated in particular that our Meetings for Discernment, which we have been cultivating for twelve years, provided a vessel for this unfolding truth.

It was fitting that the plenary session that opened our gathering was led by Chris DeRoller and Mike Clark, the longtime youth directors at Powell House, our retreat center. Chris and Mike led us in group activities that grew our sense of togetherness and mutual awareness. Chris read to us from a book that had once inspired her, “What [the world] needs most today is communities of love, little islands flung everywhere ... to answer without words the million and one questions that arise in the hearts of people—to witness by being.”\* For many of our younger Friends, the Powell House youth program has been vital to their experience as Friends—it drew us together to gather under the mantel of that practice. Chris and Mike quoted young people from Farmington-Scipio Meeting and Powell House high school seniors about their experience of Friends. As Chris and Mike observed, quoting Joan Baez, in a time of crisis we must, “arm up with love and come from the shadows.”

As always our gathering was very rich and diverse in experience—with visitors, interest groups, exhibits, play, Bible Study—but everywhere we felt informed by the fresh breath of promise that growth and change in our body offered. Each morning we gathered before business for Community Worship, hosted by different groups. A Friend named Nikki Holland, the new Director of the Belize City Friends Center, sounded the new note of inclusion by describing how, living in Mexico far from a Quaker Meeting, she learned about Quakerism and sought out the New Association of Friends in Indiana to support her membership.

Among the many issues of passionate concern to Friends: we seasoned a recommendation to divest as a Yearly Meeting from fossil fuels; we heard urgent calls to rise together to protect immigrants and refugees; we were reminded anew of the pressing need to undo white supremacy both structurally in the larger society, in our religious society, and personally. Margery Rubin, clerk of Haddonfield Quarterly Meeting, of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and her husband George Rubin, former clerk of the New York Yearly Meeting, were sent by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, where they now reside, with a minute against hate. We were reminded of the importance of serving our Monthly Meetings, particularly remote meetings, and understanding their needs. We feel a tender call to embrace and nurture our prison worship groups and heed the witness of those damaged by mass incarceration. Our young adult Friends organized a Young Adult Spiritual Nurture Series of gatherings this year; they call on us to support vital infrastructure for building our community and including them in the conduct of business. We considered how to provide staff support for young adults in a threshing session.

Behind the scenes, under the guidance of our priorities process, our staff and committees have labored to make the works of our Yearly Meeting more transparent and accountable.

When we come together in Silver Bay, the power of our gathered love, amidst the grandeur of our natural setting, fills us with a sense of awe and promise, even amidst dire threats to peace, security, and our beloved earth, here and around the world, and fears for the fragile future of our Society. We gather in wonder at the power of God's love to transform us inwardly and unite us in pursuit of a more compassionate world.

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New York Yearly Meeting  
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