



Miami Friends Meeting House
Waynesville, Ohio
1811

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



Fall Creek Meeting House
Pendleton, Indiana
1857

Epistle, Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions 2022 (Approved 2022-06-12)

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting of Friends gathered for its 202nd annual sessions on Sixth Month 8-12, 2022 on the campus of Mt. Saint Joseph University in Cincinnati, OH. Our sessions had the theme, “Embrace the Healing Power of Community.” Having met entirely online over the preceding two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Friends present felt deeply blessed to meet with one another in person. We maintained a hybrid format to enable participation online, and valued the involvement of Friends not able to meet with us in person. Our opening meeting for business and first plenary presentation both began with acknowledgments: of the indigenous Shawnee and Miami peoples forcibly removed from this, their ancestral land by European colonizers; the enslaved Africans and their descendents, whose forced and stolen labor created prosperity for the colonizers; and the institutionalized racism that has continued to transfer wealth and power from people of color to those considered white, including most of us.

The tumult and sufferings of the world touched each of us and made our theme timely. Throughout our gathering, the need for healing – of our ecosphere, our society, our Religious Society, our meetings, and ourselves – came into focus. We received reports on our Yearly Meeting revealing smaller membership, fewer volunteers, and dramatically lower participation by children and young Friends. Sadly, committees serving Friends under the age of 25 continue to have inadequate staffing. We noted that the pandemic accelerated, but did not cause, these trends.

The healing hand of the Divine reached out to us in many forms. Worship-sharing elicited our personal experiences of the healing power of community. The Living Witness of Paul Buckley and Peggy Spohr inspired Friends with many examples of this power. In her plenary presentation, Gloria Stearns-Bruner introduced us to ways in which music and the sharing of our own stories can help to heal trauma. We reflected on how we might get to “know one another in that which is eternal” (George Fox). Plenary speaker and workshop leader Angela Hopkins, founder of Friends Center for Racial Justice in Ithaca, NY, led us in considering how Friends meetings can become anti-racist faith communities. A

Healing Center gave us opportunities to receive gifts of physical and emotional healing from one another. Our presiding clerk guided our business with a spacious pace, clearly rooted in worship. Love and concern pervaded the meetings for business, with deep appreciation for steadfast and Spirit-led service by many Friends.

Hope rose to the top of our awareness as our annual sessions drew to a close. First-time attenders participated fully in the week's activities and expressed gratitude at the welcome they received. Our annual variety show was filled with mirth and energy. Friends finishing terms of service to the Yearly Meeting continued into new roles and several Friends accepted committee posts for the first time. We faced our challenges. We experienced our love for one another and our devotion to our Religious Society. Following George Fox, we glimpsed the infinite ocean of Light that overcomes the ocean of darkness and death.

Rachel Ernst Stahlhut, OVYM Presiding Clerk
Martha Viehmann, Assistant Presiding Clerk