

Summary of Epistles 2021  
FCNC  
Yadkin Valley Quarterly Meeting

An Epistle articulates a collective sense of experience and how God has moved among Friends during a gathering, be it a yearly meeting session or a Young Friends gathering. It is approved by that group during a meeting for business. Epistles have potential to facilitate understanding among Friends, and they help us appreciate that we are part of a world family of Friends. In summary of the general holding of 2021 sessions worldwide, the Covid 19 pandemic had affects on the gatherings. Many were virtual totally or in part and most were absent of youth and children gatherings. Yet the determination to meet and grow Spiritually and to further spread the influence of Friends was very evident.

Britain Yearly Meeting (held online): The theme Friends considered was "For our comfort and discomfort: living equality and truth in a time of crisis". Friends wrestled with what it means to be truly committed to anti-racism and faith-based action for climate justice. Our individual tasks are our Quaker spiritual discipline: loving our neighbor - on our street and across oceans; and caring, cherishing and protecting our natural world. Let's not be self-conscious about speaking of the Quaker faith that underpins our action.

The 44th session of the General Meeting of Friends in Mexico was held by Zoom for the first time. This technology brought together people from several different countries in a celebration of fellowship. They were moved by the message of hope of Karla Jay from FUM who reminded them that "the darkness will not last forever." Children and young people participated in a workshop which encouraged them to write about their spiritual pathways. They recognized how the Spirit is shown to us in compassion, friendship and solidarity and when we see it, we feel motivated to action.

Ireland Yearly Meeting's theme, A Time to Act Together in Faith and Hope, speaks to that enduring spirit of resourcefulness. They 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. 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?

The theme of the 201st annual sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting was "From Revelation to Revolution: Walking Together in Radical Love." Friends shared experiences where they were called from being ordinary people with an ordinary capacity to love to people who could love radically. One friend spoke of being called to care for an immigrant family, one of working with incarcerated youth, and one serving as a hospice chaplain. All spoke of unexpected blessings. When we open ourselves to divine revelation, we are emboldened to give up the ways of this world and pursue spiritual revolution.

Wilmington Yearly Meeting asked the query, based on their theme of compassion through action, in what ways is your Meeting feeling called to put compassion into action, both within the Meeting, and in your community? An underlying concern for compassionate action was expressed in the discussion and decision on the fate of our three Quarterly Meetings. We came to a sense that where the Quarterly Meeting has been valuable for fellowship and spiritual formation, it may continue. In other places, we are able to release Friends from an obligation which carries no encouragement or spiritual uplift. We are moving toward centering our concerns around our present world, and not obligations to the past. What we found in our annual sessions is the depth to which we are held in God's healing compassion. We were able to envision a future of wholeness and life, in which we are able to match compassion and action.

Uganda Yearly Meeting met in November 2021 at the foot of Mt Elgon amid the splendor surrounding this mountain that stands 14,176.51 feet high. There were around 200 Friends in attendance and the theme of the meeting was from Hebrews 10:22a. "Let us draw near to God..." Their commitment is to walk together to build the Friend's Church in Uganda. They experienced a stirred worship where many were moved to do more for God. They are working to plant a Friends Church in a settlement camp in Uganda, place a nurse in a Friends School, and continue to grow their own Monthly Meetings. Their workshops included Environmental conservation, Generation gap of the Christian family, HIV/AIDS, Covid 19 and Stewardship/Finance.

Intermountain Yearly Meeting met in June 2021 with many precautions of Covid 19 in place. Many Friends were not present and missed and the younger Friends were not able to be present and greatly missed. They gathered to listen to the guidance inwardly and from one another to better live out their testimonies in the service of the Spirit and justice for all. The theme was Race and Faith. Some of the Monthly Meetings have begun to consult with our Indigenous neighbors and draft statements honoring their communities and heritage. We lament the history where there have been efforts to eliminate their languages, cultures, and ceremonies and that Quakers were part of that. Other parts of the sessions caused us to query: If, as our faith tells us, there is that of God in everyone, how will we challenge racism in our midst?

Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Germany and Austria was held in October 2021. Around 100 Friends participated in the 91<sup>st</sup> Yearly Meeting by being present or joining virtually. The children and youth were missed but had their own small program earlier. John 16:33 In the world you have tribulation... and "Friends on the move – shaping a shared future?" was the theme. Stefan Mann helped us see that "our Quakerly values – from peace to equality- provide the right tools for us to stand up not just for small improvements, but also for major change". Another speaker from the Protestant church of Baden made us think about a purely civil German security policy and the strengthening of democratic values. After one worship meeting a person shared that as she looked down the slope she saw fog and gloom but uphill was warming sun rays and clarity. She compared this situation with our spiritual lives as Friends: we see the dark and gloomy, yet we turn toward the Light and let it guide us.

Pacific Yearly Meeting's 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Session met in July 2021 virtually for the second time and included Quakers from California, Nevada, Hawaii, Mexico, and beyond. Their membership is 1173 and 50 members were grieved at their memorial meeting. Meetings were encouraged to set goals for growth as appropriate for their strength and light of current members. Discussions about love and justice continued throughout time together. In Bible study we were reminded of the instruction in Micah 6:8 "to do justice...". We heard Quakers' stories of advocating for racial justice, housing equity, farmworker rights, and environmental justice, as well as providing financial support of undocumented students.

Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative) met in July 2021 virtually and the theme was "Tapestry of Transformation: Sharing the Light". God invites us to love all our neighbors. 13 constituent meetings have made efforts to safely continue worship during the pandemic. Opportunities have been provided to keep people involved in the work of the Yearly Meeting of racial, social and climate justice. The participation of youth and children was greatly missed. The closing of the session included words of George Fox for Friends everywhere: "Sing and rejoice ye children of the day and the Light, for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt; and the Truth doth flourish as the rose, and lilies do grow among the thorns and the plants atop the hills, and upon them the lambs doth skip and play."

Friends' Yearly Meetings all over the world confront varying concerns yet we all are call to the Light in service to God and people near and far.