

Summary of Epistles 2022

FCNC

Contentnea Quarterly Meeting

Friends Church of North Carolina received greetings from many Friends groups throughout the world this year. While themes of annual meetings varied, all expressed joy at being able to meet together, whether in person or virtually.

Illinois Yearly Meeting sent love from “amidst the cornfields and soybeans of Illinois.” They met at their 148 year old meeting house. Their theme for annual sessions was “Creating Unity Despite Separation.” Due to the separation caused by Covid, they have kept their yearly meeting alive through the use of Zoom. They celebrated Juneteenth at annual sessions and established an anti-racism committee called the Racial Equity and Education Committee. Speakers helped to develop the theme of unity. When seeking unity, Jesus words, “Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you,” can soften and open hearts.

Ohio Yearly Meeting has met for 143 years in the Stillwater Meetinghouse in Southern Ohio. They met in person and virtually. As they came together, they questioned what made them one. The answer that they heard and felt was: “It is the Living Christ who gathers us into one community, one communion of Love.” Two of their evenings were devoted to worship and a third evening to exploring what it means to be a Friend.

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting held its 202nd session with the theme “Embrace the Healing Power of Community.” They began their sessions with acknowledgement of unjust actions which harmed the Shawnee and Miami peoples, as well as enslaved Africans. They also acknowledged institutionalized racism. They had various speakers and workshops. As their sessions came to a close, they felt a sense of hope. They said, “Following George Fox, we glimpsed the infinite ocean of light that overcomes the darkness and death.”

Southeastern Yearly Meeting met for their Annual Gathering virtually and in person in Fruitland, Florida. Their theme was “Welcome as You Are.” They held workshops on racial justice, aging and dying well, mystics and laughter, earth care, national legislation, Spiritual Nurture for Friends, LGBTQ+ concerns as well as a Bible Study on the Sermon on the Mount. They also wrote a minute encouraging noncompliance with Florida legislation primarily regarding LGBTQ+ issues.

Meeting in person and virtually, the Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting met for their 5th Annual Sessions, welcoming Friends from as far away as Ohio, Honduras, and the Philippines. They have established a “Committee for Safeguarding” which is making progress on the issue of protecting children and vulnerable adults. Their Equity and Inclusion committee proposed a Minute on Right Relationships with Indigenous People which was approved. While they do not have a Faith and Practice or Book of Discipline, they expressed their beliefs through two statements: Galatians 5:6 “The only thing that counts is Faith expressing itself in love.” They also quoted Isaac Pennington, 1667: “Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and not laying accusations against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.”

The Canadian Yearly Meeting held virtual sessions for seven days. They met with grief and anger over the deaths in the past of so many indigenous children in the residential school system. They expressed concerns over climate change and the welfare of future generations. A presentation was made with the theme: “Love, Justice, Hope, and Imagination.” Five sessions were done on Quaker Studies. Programs were also held for children. At a business sessions, they decided to write to government representatives in support of investigations into the deaths of indigenous children whose graves were just now being found. They spent one evening hearing about the work of the Canadian Friends Service Committee which has been working in the areas of criminal justice, Indigenous Peoples’ human rights, and peace. They expressed gratitude to those who had made the virtual meeting possible.

Britain Yearly Meeting sent love greetings to Friends everywhere. They met at Friends House in London, Hempstead, and online. They held an “All Together Worship” on Sunday which brought together 200 Friends in person, 78 meetings, and 290 individuals online. Due to the challenges of climate emergency, wars in Europe and elsewhere, a global pandemic, and cost of living crisis, they expressed the need to explore the interwoven strands of faith, community, and action. They felt a need to listen deeply, to trust the Spirit to lead, and to move forward in faith. They were saddened to hear personal stories of racism and resolved to continue to strive to be an anti-racist church. Their epistle ended with the question: “What do love and justice require of us?”

Australia Friends held their third virtual Yearly Meeting. Their State of Society address posed challenging questions: “Where is the evidence of truth moving amongst us; is our endless busyness keeping us from knowing one another in the Spirit?” It was felt that they needed to be open to the “moving of the Spirit in pursuit of peace, embracing of gender diversity, and responses to climate emergencies.” Out of their business sessions came two Yearly Meeting statements, one on peace and one on climate emergency. In addition to adult sessions, sessions were held for the children via zoom.

Friends of Nordic Yearly Meeting expressed joy at being able to meet in person and online. The theme for their gathering was “Seeking a Quaker Spirituality for Our Times.” It was suggested that Quakers should practice holding “hospitable spaces” in these new and uncertain situations that we face today. They were reminded that meeting for clearness is a cornerstone of Quaker thought. They noted that the most valuable parts of life are being destroyed in the natural world, and war removes free will and independence. Quakers need to be torchbearers for hope. The epistle ended with: “A blackbird calls. Another responds. We are walking together in pilgrimage.”

The Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand met virtually under the care of Christchurch Monthly Meeting and the Yearly Meeting Arrangements Committee. Due to the online format, they were able to welcome visitors from the Friends World Committee for Consultation and the Asia West Pacific Section of FWCC. Much work is being done by AWPS to facilitate communications and collaborations in this part of the

world which holds half of the world's population with many different languages. They were reminded of the need to work toward more language inclusiveness. Gratitude was expressed for the "vitality, insight, and generosity" of their Young Friends. The Young Friends reminded them that they are a reconciling and affirming church and need to make that clear to those who are looking for a spiritual home. They also expressed the importance of children and have created a new paid position with a support group to better engage the children. They also expressed gratitude for work being done on Restorative Justice.

The Friends World Committee for Consultation Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting met in Paris with 40 meeting in person and 40 participating through Zoom. Their theme was: "From Crisis to Connection: working creatively to heal our fractured world." They noted that they met under the shadow of the war in Ukraine. On Sunday morning they met virtually for worship with Quakers in Kiev and learned of work being done to help those being affected. They expressed support for those Quaker organizations that are working to end the conflict and offer support. During their sessions, they were "inspired and challenged to create peace on earth, to dare to dream of turning weapons into spades, and to challenge the mistaken notion that the military option is the only option." They also considered the global issues of peace building and climate justice and posed the question of what can be done to make a difference. They noted that in order to heal a fractured world, we must heal ourselves, our families, and our communities. They left their annual meeting feeling renewed and grateful for the time spent together.

Many concerns were expressed by the various Yearly Meetings. Among these were: unity, anti-racism, social justice, inclusiveness, climate change, peace, and love. Scripture quoted in the FWCC theme guides us to what we all need to do: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:2 (NRSV)