

2020 Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting Epistle

Fifth Annual Session, Seventh Month, 2020

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

We are in extraordinary times. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting gathered virtually for the first time July 24-26, 2020 for our annual session and Meetings for Worship. Friends from member monthly meetings and worship groups in North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina reflected on the weekend's query, *"What opportunities do Quakers find in the pandemic and the current awakening to injustice for creating the world we seek?"* We extend our deepest thanks to the team of volunteers from Chapel Hill Friends Meeting who provided technical support throughout the weekend during the ZOOM conference calls. The retreat registration totaled 114 adults.

After opening worship Friday evening, participants were sorted into small groups to reflect on queries about what impact the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement has had on their meetings, their communities, and themselves. Friends shared their pain and anguish as well as their hope and resolve.

Saturday morning Liz Nicholson and Hilary Burgin, Friends from Quaker Voluntary Service, led participants in a workshop tied to the weekend's theme. Their listening exercise, which centered on the query *"What is Spirit's call to you in this moment?"* was rich, deep and powerful. Sunday's presentation on advocacy tools for connecting with legislators, provided by Bobby Trice (Friends Meeting of Washington and Friends Committee on National Legislation) and Christine Ashley (Eno Friends Meeting of Hillsborough and Friends Committee on North Carolina Legislation [FCNCL]), was informative and well attended. Friends gained useful knowledge and strengthened their skills to complete important work.

In preparation for Saturday's annual session, committee and organization reports were sent as advance documents to lighten the agenda and to give more time for building community. Friends accepted these reports from our organizational representatives, and we received with thanks a summary of our member meeting spiritual condition reports. We celebrated FCNCL, approving a minute of appreciation that it is now operating full steam ahead. Marian Beane was approved to serve as our PFYM representative to FCNCL.

We value the fellowship we enjoyed this weekend and the opportunities to strengthen and deepen our connections with each other (albeit online), through conversation and worship. Friends expressed gratitude for Sally Freeman and Paul Klever's spirit-led clerking, and for identifying hope, challenge and gratitude in our proceedings. Sally and Paul expressed their thanks to Christine Ashley and Marian Beane for their assistance in the weekend's preparations.

As one attendee wrote: *"The faults and fissures in our society that have been starkly exposed by the pandemic, police violence, and continuing polarization have made a deep impression on Friends, who expressed the need to put our love into action. In this time of uncertainty we hope to be led by the Spirit to take the next step, and to commit to the further steps as the path is revealed. I feel changed by the current moment, and by our worship together this weekend. May we be fertile soil for the Seed."*

In Peace,

Sally Freeman and Paul Klever, Co-clerks, Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting