

New York Yearly Meeting Epistle, 2017

To Friends everywhere:

New York Yearly Meeting met at Silver Bay, New York, on the shores of Lake George, on the seventh month, from 23rd day through the 29th day, in this our 322nd gathering for Summer Sessions. In attendance were 450 Friends including 112 in Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM), from babies to high school. The week began rainy and unusually cold, but some sun and warmth eventually made its way to us.

As we came together, we acknowledged that the lands we gather on were the Mohawk Hunting Grounds, shared for hunting by many native nations under the treaty, or “wampum,” of “The Dish With One Spoon,” that welcomed all those who came to hunt in peace. We thanked the Mohawks and other nations for their care of the lands and the lake.

We reflected on the theme of “Bringing the Peaceable Kingdom to a Turbulent World.” In our day-long Meeting for Discernment we experienced deep worship and shared spirit-filled messages that lifted our hearts. Since we established Meetings for Discernment ten years ago, we have come to find in them a strong source of spiritual renewal. Friends said that faith provided them the strength to encounter the challenges of our times. The State of Society report also found that our monthly meetings felt supported in turbulent times by faith, love, and community; Friends were urged to acknowledge our struggles as well as our successes when we tell our stories.

Our plenary speaker, Nadine Hoover, formerly of Alfred Meeting (NYYM), is a coordinator for Friends Peace Teams. She looked back over our centuries of faith in action and called on us to renew our lived connection to our testimonies. Her peace-building work has grown out of Friends’ commitment to listening; to speaking truthfully and lovingly; and to setting aside privilege. Our commitment to truth-telling and integrity as a community is essential to our ability to build peace. She said we must denounce racism and prejudice publicly, in order to restore the power of our peacemaking. She reminded us that although we may feel discouraged there have been many advances in social justice, and Quakers have had a part in them.

A number of us participated in “Roots of Injustice; Seeds of Change: Moving Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples,” a program to dramatize how the Doctrine of Christian Discovery shaped the colonization of America. We were asked to inhabit, with our bodies, hearts, and minds, the experience of genocide and cultural destruction. This trauma is still being passed on to current generations of our native neighbors.

We celebrated the work of our energetic Field Secretaries and ARCH (Aging Resources Consultation and Help) Director in finding new and creative ways to bring us together.

Friends approved a pay-as-led system for attending Summer Sessions, drawn by the spiritual importance of being an inclusive community. The Pay-As-Led Ad Hoc Committee will work to develop a specific plan for implementation by Fall Sessions in order to institute it for Summer

Sessions 2018. We affirm that, when it comes to gatherings of Friends in search of divine guidance, everyone is welcome to the table.

We continued our new practice of starting our morning with Community Worship. Friends celebrated the coming together of all ages, with song, story, and silent spirit-led worship.

JYM gathered by age in five groups. (Next year there will be a sixth group for 3-5 year olds.) Many high schoolers stepped into their leading to learn Quaker process this year, accompanied by “Whisper Buddies” who helped illuminate our practices during Meeting for Business.

We strove to conduct Meetings for Business in a disciplined and spirit-led way.

We also met in Worship Sharing Groups, Interest Groups, and other gatherings around common concerns. We came together informally for Contra Dancing and singing on the porch. A Café Night, a Tag Sale, and the Fun(d) Fair raised close to \$7,000 for Powell House and the Sharing Fund.

Many young adults took joy this Sessions in serving the community on committees and in JYM, among other ways, though some expressed sorrow that more were not able to attend. Friends continue to labor with how best to support the presence of Young Adults among us.

Peter Cook, Executive Director of the New York State Council of Churches, spoke with us about bridging social divisions so we can act together with other faiths against injustice.

Late in the Sessions, a Friend acknowledged that the State of Society report said incorrectly that Ithaca Meeting had created the Friends Center for Racial Justice. The report has been corrected to recognize that the Center is a ministry of the Yearly Meeting’s Task Group on Racism. We were reminded to take care that the European-American perspective not dominate our stories.

We expressed deepest gratitude to Christopher Sammond, our outgoing General Secretary of thirteen years, for his years of service to the Yearly Meeting. He led our Bible Study this year, considering the book of Esther. Esther illustrates that empire reduces people to replaceable parts, whereas Jesus viewed people as a family, large enough to include all those who do God’s work. Christopher posed the question, What seeds of empire are within us?

Steven Mohlke, our new General Secretary, comes to us to help us realize our priorities, bringing strong experience with Quaker discernment and management in his monthly meeting (Ithaca), Friends General Conference, and other settings.

In our last Community Worship, led by young Friends, we sang “The Magic Penny” and passed pennies among the worshippers. At the end, everyone had touched a penny. So Love passed among those gathered in worship, and we will take it from Summer Sessions out into the world.

Lucinda Antrim, Clerk