

# Epistle

## New York Yearly Meeting

July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015

To Friends everywhere,

We gathered again in this the 60<sup>th</sup> year of a re-united meeting, Hicksite and Orthodox, and the 320<sup>th</sup> since our founding. The cottonwood trees along the shores of Lake George sent the tiny clouds of their seeds like emissaries of Light through our work, play, and worship. After several years of hard but fruitful labor around our leadings and priorities, during which we “sat in the shadows in order to better see them,” to quote the week’s Bible study leader Mary Kay Glazer, we felt an ease and a unity.

Young Adult Friends strove to inject joy into the yearly meeting where and when they could. They participated in community-building events with the Silver Bay staff, facilitated an intergenerational dinner conversation, served the yearly meeting by working with youth, and linked kayaks far out on the lake for corporate worship. “We couldn’t tell where heaven began,” one Friend recalled. “We savored the light of summer.”

In the absence of our Young Adult Field Secretary, who is on leave, Young Adult Friends leaned into learning Quaker process with the general secretary and others, with particular interest in the practice of standing aside and in corporate discernment. The Young Adult Concerns Committee struggled with planning and scheduling, features felt to be all the more important because of the inherent transience of young adulthood.

We were grateful for the language and spirit of a substantive revision to our *Faith and Practice* on the recording of gifts in the ministry. We subsequently recorded the gifts in ministry of Margaret Webb, pastor of Farmington Friends Church. We celebrated the broad and deep contributions of Barbara Spring as she looks forward to her retirement as coordinator of the Aging Resources Consultation and Help (ARCH) program and welcomed Callie Janoff as she transitions into her role as director.

The plenary speaker, our own Don Badgley of Poughkeepsie Meeting, enjoined us to live and work from our spiritual core and become again Publishers of the Truth. He posited that the very survival of the Religious Society of Friends depends on it. He called us to “return to, and share with the world, radical ministries that arise in Experiential Worship.”

From our experience of worship has arisen a recognition of the suffering and injustice caused by racism and white privilege. Having been moved in the spring to become co-hosts, with Friends General Conference and other groups, of the 2016 White Privilege Conference, we nurtured the growing community of those intending to participate in the conference. In worship sharing we are actively learning about past and present racism.

Amid the display tables at a busy thoroughfare of our gathering stood a 6x9-foot mock solitary confinement cell of the type in which thousands of incarcerated Americans live and suffer. Many of us felt a quickening to work against mass incarceration and specifically, against solitary confinement, as well as a new hopefulness in large part due to the concrete actions described by our energetic visitor, Five Mualimm-ak, himself a victim of prolonged isolation in New York State prisons. Friends wrote scores of cards and letters to New York state elected officials asking them to support the HALT Act (Humane Alternatives to Long-term Solitary Confinement), which restricts the use of solitary confinement.

In the shade of a great white pine planted jointly in 1989 by Chief Jake Swamp Sr of the Mohawk nation and the American Friends Service Committee, we came to unity on a letter to Pope Francis exhorting him to repudiate the Doctrine of Christian Discovery that has caused and/or justified such suffering, destruction, and genocide in the Americas and around the world.

Our Healing Center, which has reached a decade of service, rests atop a hill overlooking Silver Bay. Through the loving touch and presence of a core of Friends committed to spiritual healing ministry, its energy emanates through all our work and worship in ways both impalpable and precious.

Among us one day after Bible study a small child was heard to sing as if to herself over and over, “Don’t you see our flowers are here. Don’t you see our flowers are here.” Perhaps we did see. Perhaps we were, as our clerk Jeffrey L. Hitchcock had invited us to be at the start of the week, “tender with and open to one another as we [met] the openings, challenges, and struggles of the week.” We feel great peace, and offer to you this bouquet, variegated yet gathered—who we are and how we grew here.