

New York Yearly Meeting Epistle

2016

To Friends everywhere:

New York Yearly Meeting met at Silver Bay, New York, on the seventh month, from 24th day through the 30th day, in this our 321st gathering for Summer Sessions. In attendance were 476 Friends including 106 in Junior Yearly Meeting.

We lived and reflected upon how Friends best nurture the Blessed Community at every age. We recognized that the blessed community exists among us to be faithfully discovered anew at every turn. We can nurture the blessed community with faithful listening and a readiness to grow and change, even—perhaps especially—when growth and change are hard. We learned from our new Children and Youth Field Secretary, our Young Adult Field Secretary, our ARCH [Aging Resources Consultation & Help] Director, and our General Secretary, many ways that, by hearing deeply the needs of Friends and potential Friends, we can grow our faithful community so we welcome and learn from one another. This year we began two experiments. One was starting each day with a gathering of the whole community in worship; we found beautiful ways, in storytelling, song, play, and one-on-one responses to queries, to share the indwelling spirit with young and older friends. Several Friends remarked that they experienced the gathered body as more inclusive this year. Another innovation was “Whisper Buddies,” the pairing of experienced Friends with those new to Meeting for Business, to explain the work of the Meeting.

Friends who attended the Friends World Committee for Consultation conference in Peru reported rich encounters with Friends around the world, with great energy around the work of young adults.

We yearn for a more economically and racially diverse body. We actively await leadings that envision action to move toward that yearning, including discernment around the Pay as Led payment system. In Meeting for Discernment, Friends dwelt on the need for trust as leadings unfold: trust in one another and trust in The Source. We honored those who have cared for our Yearly Meeting, some of whom are stepping down after long service. As change comes to the Yearly Meeting, we consider what we wish to become.

In this year of terrible racial violence, we were especially tender about barriers to community that arise from the persistence of racism: how difficult it is to expel the legacy of white privilege, how painful it is that so many Friends and potential Friends are kept from us by mass incarceration and an unequal criminal legal system, by money and time constraints. We marveled anew at the strength of spirit with which some Friends surmount these obstacles. Friends’ awareness of racism and privilege was amplified by more than one hundred New York Yearly Meeting Friends’ attendance at the Seventeenth White Privilege Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We rededicated ourselves to advancing a more equal society that recognizes that of God in every person. Our search for Truth as individual Friends and as a body demands that we seek to create a Blessed Community that is available to all. As Jesus instructed his followers at the end of a chapter we considered in Bible Study, “love one another, as I have loved you” (John 13:34).

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