

## **Epistles for Sharing at IMYM 2021**

### **1. Northern Yearly Meeting**

We are Quakers who love to be together in worship and work, who love to play and sing, old and young together. This is the 45<sup>th</sup> annual session of our Northern Yearly Meeting. Our gathering site is the Zoom virtual connection. Even as we long to physically be with each other, we rejoice to see all of the dear faces appearing on our screens. We slow down to hear our voices and our deepest yearnings. We acknowledged that we are meeting in the home lands of 16 nations south of Lake Superior, with reading of the names and music as well.

45 years ago, we were a brand new yearly meeting, who said, if there is work for us to do, we will go forward into it. This year, Friends, while moving into the new venue of online, maintained traditions of living experimentally and experientially. Our first Meeting for Worship was discernibly gathered. New life and leadings were supported in the context of Quaker discernment. Greatly expanded interest in the sister meeting relationship with El Salvador Yearly Meeting comes from both communities. We supported the leadings of 2 traveling ministers to visit El Salvador Yearly Meeting and their schools. The new experience of providing anchoring committees will support these friends and help them to prepare for this travel and ministry next year.

Building bonds between our 30 monthly meetings in our yearly meeting was accomplished with focus on topics: First Day School in a pandemic, how welcoming our meeting places are, care of elders, inclusivity issues for virtual participation in Meetings' activities, and outward work based upon inner reflection. During every hour of our online presence with each other, becoming an anti-racist organization was lifted up via the query from our Worshipful Spirit-Led Anti-Racism Working Group.

Our corporate body united with a request from 2 of our Monthly Meetings for our Clerks to write a letter of concern to the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, to request adequate and appropriate support within the prisons for our religious meetings of worship to meet regularly there. One piece of our anti-racism focus during this session was to agree to change the status of our Worshipful Spirit-Led Anti-Racism Working Group from an ad hoc group to a standing committee.

In worship sharing, Friends decided to listen around the subject of overcoming racism with attention to discovering who is missing from our family circle of Friends, what we are holding back from our community, and taking away, and when we look with our "spiritual eyes" what do we see as our differences, among other queries. Sharing was rich, self-exploring and sometimes difficult to speak.

Friends' experience and experiment were furthered as our Plenary Speaker, Regina Renee Ward challenged the gathering to address, from the heart, several queries. Noting that Friends often have a hard time sitting with pain or uncomfortable feelings, but move too soon to joy and blessedness, Regina Renee challenged Friends to enter into non-intellectualizing self-examination. As Friends earnestly spoke from their own experience and understanding, fruitful insights were shared. The plenary continued with worship sharing around how Friends are living their Quaker values during Covid 19 and what might be done in the aftermath to form a more just and actively anti-racist community. Fittingly, the session ended with a showing of Zoe Mulford's "The President Sang Amazing Grace" with the Jeff Scher animation and the singing of Amazing Grace in the style of our Nightingales, our spontaneous singing group that arose decades ago from our yearly meeting. A closing video of Daniel Nahmod's "Planting Seeds" sent us homeward to nurture the seeds of this weekend.

Living experimentally together via these online annual Yearly Meeting sessions showed us that the Spirit's presence can be felt in this sort of gathering, though we dearly missed our physical presence with one another. As Sunday evening came to a close, we were invited to all unmute and greet each other. We did do that, and we were enthusiastic in our greetings. Greetings, alas, felt like only a good beginning. When all is said and done, Zoom can only begin to offer the opportunity for those deep on-going conversations and connection, as well as the joy of all ages being together for worship.

## 2. Monteverde Monthly Meeting (Costa Rica)

May 2020

Greetings to Friends Everywhere,

*“Perhaps our greatest service is simply to find ways to strengthen and live closer to our goodness. This is far from easy. It requires an everyday attention, an awareness of all that diminishes us, distracts us, and causes us to forget who we are. But every act of service bears witness to the possibility of freedom for us all. And every time anyone becomes more transparent to the light in them, they will restore the light in the world.” From Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, My Grandfather’s Blessings*

Our long experience of worshiping and working together has created a sense of spiritual belonging. Although we find ourselves in the midst of amazing upheaval due to the Corona virus, we continue a feeling of connectedness as we worship together in the spirit at our regular times but in family groups, in pairs, or individually in the forest. The social balance has been upturned; we are vulnerable and feelings are volatile. Both kindnesses and gifts are magnified, as are tensions and conflicts. How can we address and use these conflicts and gifts as a path to greater spiritual depth and connection? Over time, there are deeper lessons to be learned, but for now we are still finding our way.

As we search for guidance in this journey, we reflect on the wisdom of Sue Trostle, who died in November, and the many lessons she taught us: her ability to find that of God in everyone, her focus on love, kindness and joy, her spirit of adventure and risk-taking, the importance of being open to and accepting what comes our way and of appreciating all the blessings that surround us.

For 69 years Friends have been talking and writing about the journey of Monteverde Quakers. The new documentary film *Sweet Home Monteverde* traces that journey grounded in peace and environmental stewardship and gives us yet another source of inspiration.

So many of these lessons, from our history, from our many elders, are reflected in the work of Monteverde Friends School, our major ministry as a Meeting. Last fall students organized a climate march in which 500 people took part. In the midst of a successful school year, everything was disrupted by the close of the physical school, and yet students continue learning through diverse tools and the dedication of our phenomenal teachers and staff.

We also use these lessons to help us be truly aware of our many gifts, especially the unexpected gifts of this time of upheaval: deeper reflection on what is truly important, more unpressured time to observe and appreciate small things, reminders of the joys—and perhaps challenges—of friends and family, a greater sense of belonging, awareness of our responsibility for caring for others, more kindness in how we treat one another.

*“...and with our hearts we chart the waters never sailed before.”*  
*From Somos el Barco, by Lorre Wyatt, from Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal*

In Peace,

The Epistle Committee: Helena Guindon, Kenna Manos, Harriet Joslin  
Carol Evans, Clerk  
Monteverde Friends Meeting

### 3. Australia Yearly Meeting

**Here in Australia we think of you all as our Meetings worldwide face this time of multiple hardships.**

Australian Friends gathered in Spirit this July mid-Winter, called to walk unfamiliar paths with an open heart, courage and curiosity, in our first experiment with an online Yearly Meeting. Presenting novel opportunities in this time of novel coronavirus, we gathered across the country and around the world, in kitchens, loungerooms, studies, dining rooms, meeting houses and outside.

After a ‘discomforting’ year defined by disastrous droughts, fires and floods, the struggle to contain Covid-19, and a deep recognition of the injustice of systemic and individual privilege, we offered each other comfort as electronic reflections embraced our Yearly Meeting. Whilst much work for this Yearly Meeting has been discerned ahead of our gathering, we ask: *do our virtual meetings allow a place for Spirit to rise?* Friendly School heard from Murray Short (The Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri), who questioned whether we have moved too far towards individual infallibility, away from community discernment.

An ‘oceanic’ invitation to right past wrongs was extended by Mingku (Shane Mortimer), a Ngambri Elder and traditional owner who reminded us that removal of children from First Nation families continues at a greater rate today than before. He shared a recent discovery of significant First Peoples’ artifacts at Mount Ainslie in Canberra, a joy shared by First Nation archaeologist David Johnston, who recounted the open-hearted journey of the Watson family, on the discovery of a [stone axe quarry](#) on their farm near the Silver Wattle Quaker Centre.

Care of the Earth and creation have been at the heart of Quaker witness since our earliest Friends. We must do everything possible to address the causes of the climate emergency we face. If we cannot participate energetically in person, we can nurture and support younger Friends financially, emotionally and spiritually. Our FWCC Asia-West Pacific Section session reinforced our concern to support young people in Australia and overseas. *How are young Friends feeling about the future of the world? What do young Friends ask of the older generations?* Ryan from Canberra Meeting is responding by making a movie about what we can do to save our planet [Now!](#)

In keeping with our Yearly Meeting tradition, we met online for ‘Share-and-Tell’ sessions, for coffee- time and shared music. There was also dedicated on-line time for children and parents. Our Meeting has been lovingly ‘held’ by the invisible, tireless work of hosting and technical teams networked throughout Australia, with Elders and pastoral carers adapting to new forms of ‘promptings’.

The Backhouse Lecture, delivered by Fiona Gardner, encouraged us to make time to nurture our spiritual practices in all aspects of our daily lives. We were urged to heed the promptings of Love and Truth in our hearts - regardless of how ‘strange’ they may seem to others, knowing that *“I am a Quaker. My spiritual commitment means that my work is never done. I will live courageously.”*