

To Friends Everywhere,

Loving greetings from the 186th annual gathering of Quakers in Canada, our 64th as a united Yearly Meeting. Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends met over 5 days between the 8th and 13th of August, 2020.

In this extended season of diverse isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian Yearly Meeting, like other Meetings across Mother Earth, has had to find new ways of being, new ways of meeting together while separate, and new ways to perceive and acknowledge the Light that grounds us, and the Spirit as it moves among, through, and all around us in our separate solitudes.

Canadian Yearly Meeting's plan for 2020 was to meet in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but like the rest of everyone's plans for this year, this was disrupted. Our Program Committee, while accustomed to the many labours involved in gathering Friends together across a vast country—the traditional home of over 600 Indigenous Peoples, stretching over 5000 kilometres from west to east, and across 5½ time zones—had to conceive an entirely new format for Yearly Meeting 2020. An Interim Program and Support Committee was formed to research technologies which could meet our needs and to choose strategies to go about our virtual gathering. We honour the Interim Program and Support Committee's dedication, and that of our Clerks and the many others who have brought the gathering of Canadian Yearly Meeting into a new virtual dimension.

This Gathering of Yearly Meeting in Session, in addition to being different in most physical ways, has had the unique characteristic of not holding Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business. The business of Yearly Meeting has been conducted throughout 2020 by Representative Meeting, which has met in an online forum in frequent but shorter meetings, and will continue to do so. Since our Monthly Meetings also have been unable to meet in person, the communication among individual Meetings, their Representatives, and Representative Meeting has been imperfect, but like everything else this year, it is a work in progress. We are committed to learning, to being patient with one another and ourselves, and to mastering the new technologies which aid us in carrying out our mission.

We have discovered that there are blessings to be celebrated. Many Friends who would not have been able to attend otherwise - those who physically could not have endured the travel, those who wouldn't be able to spend the time or the funds to travel, and those who choose not to travel because of the environmental impacts were welcomed into our Yearly Meeting Gathering. The challenge of new technology has been partially overcome, but for many Friends more time and learning is required to allow for comfortable use. Some isolated Friends and attenders have expressed particular gratitude for the possibilities that online gatherings open for them. In addition, we are aware that our carbon footprint is greatly reduced, which is congruent with our concern for the environment.

235 individuals registered for our Yearly Meeting sessions: 203 were registered from within Canadian Yearly Meeting, with 32 visitors who came from Canada, the USA, Britain Yearly Meeting, Kenya, and Kuwait. 22 identified themselves as Young Adult Friends; 13 were new to Quakers, and 70 were attending Canadian Yearly Meeting for the first time. Since we do not have the usual expenses of a physical gathering, but acknowledge the continuing needs of Canadian Yearly Meeting for basic funding, our registration has implemented a "pay-as-led" experiment and an "attend-as-able" expectation. We also acknowledge that some Friends do not have access to the technology by which we come together and we hope to find ways to include them better.

Yearly Meeting began with intergenerational welcoming activities, as usual, and was followed by small breakout groups reflecting on the movement of the Spirit during the

pandemic year. As Friends gathered via Zoom for silent worship, they were warmed by seeing one another's faces. There was vocal ministry reminding us of love and tenderness, as well as tenacity and mutual support.

A Friend who has travelled in the ministry invited us to listen deeply during our time together—and always—for the Spirit as expressed through its many voices, and reminded us that we need to discern when our own egos are at play, clouding our listening and understanding. We were asked to look at the racism and white supremacy ideology that we all house (both individually and collectively within Canadian Yearly Meeting and the broader community of the Religious Society of Friends), because it is part of the very fabric of current society. We must grow our hearts wider and stronger in order to do the hard but crucial work to heal these harms and divides and come together in wholeness.

Following the opening Meeting for Worship, visitors from Britain, Kenya, and the United States introduced themselves. A Friend from the John Joseph Gurney tradition of Quakers expressed feeling warmly welcomed, and affirmed that we are all children of George Fox.

The lives of many Friends who have died since our last Yearly Meeting in session were celebrated in a Memorial Meeting for Worship. Friends found it profoundly moving and uplifting to learn more about beloved Friends, and to celebrate their gifts.

Our tradition for Canadian Yearly Meeting in session is to create a daily newsletter throughout the yearly meeting gathering called “The Daily Quacker.” This year, for the first time, it was published online at quaker.ca as “The Daily e-Quacker”.

We heard the report from the Change and Sustainable Transformation working group. After giving the statement of purpose for Canadian Yearly Meeting, the clerk of the working group presented a suggested structure for holding Canadian Yearly Meetings in the future. The 2021 Gathering is currently planned to be held in Winnipeg in August, 2021, on Treaty 1 territory, traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota, and the heart of the Manitoba Metis Nation. Since this year's gathering of Canadian Yearly Meeting is not constituted as a decision-making body, this report was received in order for Friends to do further discernment individually and within their local Meetings, as we find our way forward as a Yearly Meeting.

The week progressed with Meetings for Worship and Worship-sharing, 14 small Worship Sharing groups, our traditional “Experience of the Spirit in my Life,” and an event with LGBTQ+ Friends. The physical, social, and spiritual challenges of life during a pandemic, especially for Friends who are aging or living alone, or both, were voiced and supported. As ever, Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel cared for the worshipful nature of the week, both in and out of Meetings for Worship, for which we are grateful.

There were special presentations: “Two Row on the Grand: A Learning Journey,” regarding the relationship of settlers with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and “Quaker Leadings and our Calling in these Times,” with Alastair McIntosh of Glasgow Meeting. Alastair urged us to think in depth about our concern for the environment and global warming, and the climate of racism and how we respond. He asked us to consider what we can uniquely offer that is not being done already in the secular world, and called for our actions to be based on spirituality, reminding us that we have practices and experiences of deep discernment. “Defunding Criminal Justice – Transforming, Abolishing, and What Comes Next,” offered the opportunity to explore this vitally urgent issue. These inspiring presentations nurtured our faith and inspired us to action.

Part way through the week, the need for a Meeting for Healing was made known and was quickly put in place. It was a tender time of sharing, where the Spirit's healing presence was palpable. Zoom was no barrier to the love shared, and the time was just as rich as in past years.

A chat platform incongruously called “Discord” was used by many Friends to discuss

issues, meet and enjoy casual conversation (by text and video), and 'hang out' as we might if we were together. Young Friends, Young Adult Friends, spontaneous discussion groups around specific concerns, and other events not on the pre-meeting schedule occurred here. And, of course, there was singing.

We miss the camaraderie, the intimacy, the hugs, the spontaneity of meeting in person, but we are grateful that the world of technology has advanced so far as to make possible this level of gathering. The future is, as it always is, unknown, so we cannot tell whether or when to anticipate how we might meet again physically, but we rest in the Spirit, bear witness as the future unfolds, and wait expectantly for way to open.

We reach out to Friends across the world to greet Friends in these times of uncertainty, separation, disruption, and the challenge of new ways. It is a time of both death and rebirth, and offers many positive things as well as hardship.

This is a richly fertile time of change and transformation, looking at what is essential and what we are ready to do away with (both in our daily lives and within society). We need to prime ourselves and build our resilience to do the hard but necessary work ahead of us, addressing the many injustices of racism, poverty, sexism, LGBTQ+ issues, the environmental crisis, and other concerns which, as we re-form a new world, may we approach with new energy and commitment. May we step into true activism by letting our lives speak. As we move through the dark times of a pandemic, may we find the Light ever present in our lives, drawing us together.