



91A Fourth Avenue / Ottawa ON K1S 2L1 CANADA

Phone: 613-235-8553 or 888-296-3222 / Fax: 613-235-1753 / cym-office@quaker.ca / www.quaker.ca

August 13, 2016

Epistle of Canadian Yearly Meeting 2016

O wait to feel this spirit, and to be guided to walk in this spirit, that ye may enjoy the Lord in sweetness, and walk sweetly, meekly, tenderly, peaceably, and lovingly one with another. And then ye will be a praise to the Lord, and anything that is, or hath been, or may be amiss, ye will come over in the true dominion, even in the Lamb's dominion; and that which is contrary shall be trampled upon, as life rises and rules in you.

- Isaac Penington's Letter to Friends in Amersham, May 1667

Loving Greetings to Friends everywhere,

Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends met for the 183rd annual gathering of Quakers in Canada, our 61st as a united Yearly Meeting, on the beautiful Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta in Camrose, situated in Treaty 6 territory.

During the week, the themes of grief and nurture arose in many programs and events. Many of us are saddened by the loss of CYM-in-Session for 2017 because we love CYM-in-Session for its blend of corporate decision-making and spiritual grounding. Our pre-gathering retreat explored how we may nurture our community during the upcoming fallow year in which we will not meet in person. We also grieved the deaths of several strong and spiritually grounded Friends. We shared our grief throughout the week, but most particularly during our Memorial Meeting and our session on the "Experience of the Spirit in my Life." These experiences of sadness remind us of the need to care for ourselves and others.

The Sunderland P. Gardner lecture explored the topic "Continuing Revelation: Quaking with Grace and Joy in Modern Times." It challenged us to consider how an inward condition of exhaustion can contaminate our ability to manifest the love that underlies our witness to each other and the world. This was echoed in our Bible study, which was an exploration of the Bible and how it relates to Friends' testimonies. It reminded us that in overburdening ourselves we do violence to ourselves, and that this flies in the face of our peace testimony. When we take on too much, we deny ourselves the opportunity to practice communal discernment and experience the joy that can come from it.

We struggled to find ways to save our strength in order to dare greatly when the Spirit demands it. This condition of exhaustion was echoed by Clerks and others who serve our Yearly Meeting, and suggests that CYM-in-Session and its associated events and bodies, while beloved, can harm the people who serve them. Our faith in each other is high, but our expectations of each other are sometimes higher than we consent to or can sustain. We were made aware of the ways that Clerks and people serving in other positions were

being immobilized and sometimes pushed away by the labour involved. Just as we must take responsibility for the effects of our consumer habits on the Earth, we must mitigate the effect of what we take from the people who serve CYM.

We were moved by Friends who exhibited courage in revealing truths about their experiences living as the Other in our society. During our LGBTQ evening Friends challenged us to imagine experiencing gender dysphoria and gender fluidity. Our community is deepened when we have the courage to be vulnerable together.

We delighted in the presence of Young Friends and welcomed their involvement in the wider meeting, although they were few in number. We carry an ongoing concern about the importance of caring for Young Adult Friends, understanding their priorities, and making sure those priorities are reflected in our processes. We responded joyously to their request that we support them in fostering their community and strengthening their connection to the larger CYM community. Friends expressed appreciation for the rich children's programming, which included daily worship.

We were encouraged to build harmonious relationships with our environment and surrounding communities. Friends participated in a service project to protect the local watershed, and nurtured our relations with the Maskwacis First Nation through mutual visits.

We were also urged to communicate our faith openly. This year's session brought a means to do so: there was much excitement about the minute from Canadian Friends Service Committee detailing how we can take action in support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which examined the cultural genocide experienced by Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

Despite our sense of loss, we are facing a new future and stumbling, with God's grace, toward healing. Our commitment to hiring a senior staff person and the newly-accepted personnel policy bring us relief at having learned from our past mistakes as well as gratitude for the sometimes difficult work of the Friends who serve our blessed community. Many of us are finding a quiet joy in clerkship and committee membership. We are looking directly at difficult issues that would be convenient to avoid and are willing to address issues of financial and human sustainability. This shows a level of courage and care that can help us live up to the patterns and examples of our spiritual ancestors over the centuries.