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**The Committee of Joy – 2 to 10 August 2019
at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

To Friends Everywhere

I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. (2 John 1:12)

“We acknowledge that Canadian Yearly Meeting is gathering in the city of Winnipeg, which lies at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, a focal point of routes travelled by Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years. Winnipeg is within Treaty 1 territory, traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota, and the heart of the Manitoba Metis Nation. The water for this city comes from Treaty 3 area, from the shores of Shoal Lake First Nations 39 and 40. The electricity comes from generating stations on rivers in Treaty Areas 1, 3 and 5. The terms of the Northern Flood Agreement with five Indigenous communities in northern Manitoba remain unfulfilled.”¹

Our pre-yearly meeting retreat – focused on the words of 17th-century theologian Robert Barclay, who spoke of scriptures as “a witness to the fountain, but not the fountain itself” – led us to examine our experience of the written scriptures in our own spiritual journeys. We explored the words we use to centre and ground ourselves.

The spirit of joy was with us throughout yearly meeting. On Saturday evening Friends made a joyful noise celebrating new and renewed connections with meetings across Canada. On Sunday afternoon’s memorial meeting we gave thanks for the grace of God in the lives of faithful Friends who had died over the past year and a half. Their spirit is with us still. On Monday evening we shared our experiences of the spirit in our lives.

The annual Sunderland P. Gardner Lecture – a cornerstone of Canadian Yearly Meeting – was presented by Etienne Paul Mungombe, a birthright Friend from Uvira in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Forced to flee to a refugee camp in Tanzania, he completed theological training and was ordained as a Friends Pastor. When forced to flee from his country a second time, he and his family came to Kakuma, a refugee camp in Kenya, where he started the Kakuma Friends Church and served as pastor. He later completed training in peace making and an Alternatives to Violence program called Healing and Rebuilding

¹ The Land acknowledgement read by the clerk at the opening of our Meeting for Worship for Business on 4 August 2019.

our Community (HROC). He led workshops to support refugees and displaced people recovering from trauma, and began a program for refugees living with disabilities.

Since his arrival in Montreal in July 2016 Etienne Paul has established a Friends Church, and helped to found the Union des Églises des Amis/United Friends Churches in Quebec. In his lecture – entitled “African Refugee Journeys: Listen, Love, Learn, Act” – he shared his journey, his experiences, his hope, and the sorrows of refugees. He invited us into their singing and worshipping community, and together we sang “A Shelter in the Time of Storm.”

The week of business sessions after the manner of Friends opened with a welcome from Native Elder Betty Ross from Cross Lake First Nation in Treaty 5, Manitoba. Betty spoke of her life journey from childhood, spending more than fifteen years in two oppressive residential school systems, and of her healing as she found her voice for her people and the land. Her message for us was that we need to be strong about who we are so that we can fully engage in the work that needs to be done.

The daily Bible study sessions, entitled “The Cost of Colonialism – The Joy of Jubilee” continued the theme of reconciliation. Steve Heinrichs, a settler Christian from Winnipeg, currently the director of Indigenous-Settler Relations for the Mennonite Church of Canada, presented a vision for re-imagining Christian identity and practice, focused on the ways that our settler minds have used the Bible to rationalize the domination and exploitation of the First Nations Indigenous hosts and their land. He challenged us to re-examine our traditions and to unite in a radical vision of reparations and equitable land redistribution.

We are deeply appreciative of those who kept us centred during our Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business including the presence of the Young Friends at the clerks’ table. We especially value the welcoming care from Winnipeg Friends, a gift to us all. Meetings for Healing provided a space where Friends were held in deep prayer and loving concern. Members of Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel provided a spiritual presence throughout our gathering. On Thursday evening they hosted our Committee of Joy. They asked how we find, lose, and create joy. We responded in spontaneous joyful song. Throughout the week, their quiet, comforting wisdom, understanding, and good humour held us.

Special Interest Groups helped us grow as we explored new approaches and areas of service. In breakout sessions, smaller groups used the Claremont dialogue model to envision our future as a yearly meeting.

The LGBTQ2+ was an amazing evening. Sarah Owocki spoke of becoming a parent and read her letter that was published in *The Globe and Mail*. Lara Rae spoke about “Coming Out with Grace: Gender Transition as Spiritual Practice.” After discussion and dialogue we were entertained by two wonderful drag performers: Miss Kitty and Betsy Tie-Dye (Steve).

Friends who visited the Canadian Museum for Human Rights recognized a few familiar faces of Friends engaged in human rights work and were inspired by the Mandela exhibit. A large group of Friends who attended the Hiroshima Day event were inspired by Ellen Judd’s talk and the beautiful light from paper lanterns floating on the water.

Our last evening together was filled with laughter, talent of all kinds, and a generous sprinkle of gleanings. With gratitude we acknowledge the many Friends who have worked together to create a Community of Joy. Let us carry our joy through to a community of hope in August 2020.