

North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative)

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To Friends Everywhere,

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me I feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. Philippians 1: 3-7

We are gathered via Zoom for our 323rd annual sessions, Seventh Month 8-12, 2020. The above reading from our gathered Meeting of Ministry and Oversight on Fourth Day expresses our continued connection with you and our prayer for God's grace upon you. Our theme this year is "Living Faithfully in a Fractured World." The following opening reading by clerk, Gwen Gosney, reminds us of our gathered intention to worship as our ancestors and rekindle the gifts of the Spirit of gratitude, joy and the power of love and self-discipline.

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

II Timothy 1: 3-7

As always in the sharing of our State of the Society and other reports, we have a sense of the challenges and joys our meetings have experienced this year. Friends reported the various ways they found to continue to gather in community when it was not possible to continue in person during the pandemic. Friends have expressed desire to find ways to continue use of virtual gatherings in the future. The ability of Friends everywhere to join our meetings by Zoom has enriched our worship and sense of community experience. Each meeting has devised ways to keep in touch with members and attenders who are unable to access the technology to attend functions, in an attempt to keep our communities connected. Our meetings have kept the concern for the health of all, both physically and spiritually, as a priority.

Many meetings expressed how they are being changed by the national focus on addressing systemic racial inequity and violence against people of color. Meetings are looking at their own patterns of behaviour both individually and corporately. Friends are also engaged and active in protests, vigils, and efforts for social change throughout the region. It was felt that this is vital and critical work.

Please find the included Summary of Exercises to learn more about our time together. We welcome continued visitation among all yearly meetings and pray that Friends may feel open to join us next year when we intend to meet at Guilford College, Seventh Month 14-18, 2021.

On behalf of North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gwen Gosney Erickson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "E".

Gwen Gosney Erickson, Clerk

North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative)
2020
Summary of Exercises

Friends met for the 323rd annual sessions of North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative from 7th month 8th-12th, 2020. The Planning Committee chose the theme of “Living Faithfully in a Fractured World” back in the fall of 2019. They had no idea how relevant this theme would become with the development of the Covid-19 pandemic and the world wide response to the continuing murders of people of color over the intervening months.

Early in the spring we began to realize that an in-person gathering would not be possible and at Interim Body in 4th month we decided to have yearly meeting sessions online. It has been an amazing thing to watch Friends adjust to reality and take on new challenges in order to continue despite the complications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Planning Committee, the Hospitality Committee, the Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Recording Clerk and others made the recommendation to simplify the schedule of sessions so as to avoid what has been termed “Zoom fatigue”. We scheduled no interest groups, reduced the number of hours of business sessions, made many reports available online rather than having them all read aloud, and also rescheduled one of our planned evening programs to next year when we hope to meet at Guilford College in person again.

We had good participation throughout our planned activities. We had Friends join us by Zoom from many places beyond North Carolina and Virginia, including England, Nigeria, Japan, Washington DC, Iowa, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Vermont.

After several years of mutual intervisitation and discernment with Five Rivers Monthly Meeting in South Carolina, they have submitted a request to be considered for membership in our yearly meeting. We are looking forward to beginning the process of formal discernment with Five Rivers.

Opening 5th, 6th and 7th Days, Mary Kay Glazer from Greenville meeting led an inspirational Bible Study, "Living Faithfully: Who, Me?", exploring the timely theme of faithfulness. As part of the intergenerational study each morning, Mary Kay read aloud Bible passages followed by a selected children's picture storybook for us to reflect upon. We were given a set of queries to consider in light of the story and would then break out into Zoom rooms of 4-5 to respond before returning to the main room. The queries often led us to reflect upon how life's challenges might deepen our faith. For example: What do these stories reveal to you about being faithful? What makes it difficult for you to be faithful? What makes it possible to be faithful? How is God inviting you to deeper faithfulness? How has community helped or hindered your efforts to be faithful? The children's storybooks were a creative way for us to reflect on our faith and often added a new dimension for how we considered the Bible text for the day.

Michael "Mizey" Mizenheimer from Durham meeting led a great intergenerational evening of fun and fellowship on 5th day. Michael led us seamlessly through a series of activities on Zoom that enabled us to talk in pairs and then later work in teams. Most of us were surprised that we could have such an opportunity for getting to know one another and being playful together using Zoom.

During the evening of 6th Day, John Calvi spoke with us on the theme of "Living Faithfully in a Fractured World - Remembering our Roots". John is an experienced Quaker healer who has been engaged in his ministry for 38 years. The contemplative and loving manner in which he approaches his work was evident in the way he addressed us. Speaking out of the silence, John first gave us an overview of his healing work as well as the importance of balance and rest, both for him and for us in the work we all do in the world. We then entered back into silence several more times during which questions were submitted to John via Zoom chat messages and were read out by Mary Kay Glazer. A few of the concepts he shared with us during this time were: the importance of not joining ourselves into someone else's pain, but bringing Light to their pain; the need to balance pain (both ours and others') with things that bring us joy and that are beautiful in the world; and the importance of care for our meetings for worship because there is a great hunger in the world for the depth and quality of quiet that can

exist there. When discussing working with truly obscene tragedies that can envelop people, he compared the energy that is needed to that which is felt when arriving to Meeting for Worship early and feeling the gathering reverence. He taught us much more than these few thoughts, and we were blessed by his presence and willingness to share with us.

The Young Friends Planning Committee knew it would be a challenge to connect with children and youth in yearly meeting during the pandemic, so they sent packages ahead of time to the homes of all the children and youth who had attended yearly meeting in recent years.

The youngest children each received their own copy of a picture book entitled Good People Everywhere with a personal note written inside the front cover. Then during yearly meeting sessions, two opportunities were offered for story time over Zoom. Goldie Walton and Miriam Barnhill-Wright read stories with 2 children, Alayla Stewart-Nilsen and Isaac Walton. (Andrew Wright managed the technical side.) Parents also joined us and we had a nice time seeing each other.

For older children and youth, the Young Friends Planning Committee created a booklet of stories. In May, this committee asked adult Friends to share personal stories or verses or songs that spoke to how faith can support us through times of crisis. 12 adult Friends from yearly meeting shared written stories and they were put together in a booklet that was then sent to each child or youth at their home. Goldie and Andrew hosted two Zoom sessions where Friends checked-in, chatted and discussed a few of the stories. It wasn't the same as getting together and swimming in the ocean, but it was good to see each other and remember what it feels like to be a community.