

Greetings to Friends everywhere, from the Mahala Ashley Dickerson Friends Center, located on the traditional lands of the Knik Dena'ina people. Alaska Friends celebrated the opportunity to gather with COVID-19 precautions in spirit and in person after a year and a half of isolation. In order to support the health and well-being of everyone, we engaged in a number of firsts. We insisted on immunizations, wore masks in indoor spaces and provided blended online opportunities. We also celebrated the purchase of the Dickerson property, the many improvements and the amenities for housing and support that the home provides. Daily crane, loon, hawk calls, and a lynx sighting brought great joy.

Our program included a report from Alaska Quakers Seeking Right Relationship with Indigenous People committee on their work and learning. We responded to some of the four invitations from First Alaskans Institute in 2019, which were: 1) Learn your institution's history as it pertains to Alaska Native people; 2) Share what you are learning about the history and present-day concerns and strengths of Alaska Native people to your peers and in your circles: help us "pull back the veil"; 3) apologize; 4) Make reparations. (Examples were: Since you took away language, perhaps fund language revitalization; Since you took away dancing, perhaps pay for drums.) Here are the questions of us:

- 1) Who are you accountable to as you do this work?
- 2) What is it about your practices or outreach that is not reaching Alaska Native people?

In response to our progress in these areas, we were invited to be an accountability partner with First Alaskans Institute in 2020.

We heard about readings on the Quaker missionary presence in Alaska and readings on Native experiences and impacts of colonization. Learnings were hard to hear and acknowledging Quaker involvement and complicity was very painful. This causes us to lean on faith to find new openings for healing and transformation. We also heard about the experience of being an accountability partner with First Alaskans Institute, and our involvements with Native Movement and Decolonizing Quakers. A highlight of our time together was visiting with a representative of the Knik Tribal Council of the Dena'ina people, Isha Twitchell, learning about their work in the community and how we can be good allies.

We strengthened our resolve to act by articulating our intentions in an AFC Commitment to Racial Justice.

We heard updates on the Dickerson Friends Project and cemetery and considered next steps in development and where they may lead us. We spent time naming gifts within our meetings and how we can make our meetings more welcoming to newcomers.

We reconnected with one another, communed around the campfire, caught up on our lives in the last two years, shared children's scavenger hunt findings from the surrounding woods, and enjoyed the tranquility of the lake.

Unique aspects of the gathering were that we leaned heavily on technology with a borrowed Meeting Owl, a blended online and in-person approach made accessible by our technology-savvy millennial Presiding Clerk, Laura Herman. Also, new to this Annual Session were paddle board excursions on the lake. We had three unexpected human and one cell phone baptism in the lake.

We look forward to Alaska Friends Conference gathering next year and in future years and hope it will be without need for COVID-19 restrictions.