

Epistle
Great Plains Yearly Meeting of Friends
Fifth Month, Fifth Day, 2021

To All Friends Everywhere:

Great Plains Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends gathered for its 114th annual sessions June 3 – June 5, 2021 at Wichita Friends School in Wichita, Kansas. After a year of separation and virtual Zoom gatherings, we rejoiced in being together both in person and through Zoom. We welcomed Friends and visitors from Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Washington D.C. We welcomed and rejoiced in the presence of a new-to-Friends member from Hominy Friends Meeting.

In our Monthly Meeting sharing of State of Society reports we heard sad themes of apartness and not meeting together in person for worship for many months; of welcoming new members and attenders facilitated by virtual gathering for worship; and the blessing of virtual technology that allowed us to connect with new Friends and reconnect with distant Friends. We shared thankfulness that our traditions and worship patterns have continued in altered and creative ways. We are grateful to come together and hold all of our Meetings in the Light, especially those that are undergoing significant transitions.

Colin Saxton brought nurture to our spirits with a theme centered on “Deep Water Faith”. Hebrews 6:19, “*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure...*”, references the anchor, which was one of the earliest symbols in Christianity. God’s presence can anchor us in hope, calmness, and steadfastness. After this stormy year, Colin shared gospel stories of Jesus and deep waters. In Mark 4:35-41 of Jesus’ presence with the disciples in the midst of a storm; in Matthew 14:22-33 of Jesus coming to the disciples over the deep waters; in Luke 5:1-11, of Simon sailing out to deep water at Jesus’ words, even though it made no sense to him – “*Because you say so, I will.*” What does it mean to try to follow Christ out into the storm? In the storm, do we find the power and capacity to be God’s presence?

Our annual Memorial Service for Friends who have gone before us in the past two years carried a sense of expanded loss for us this year. The singing of *Abide With Me* and *How Can I Keep From Singing* felt especially tender so many months into an extensive world-wide time of shared grief.

With a band director in our midst, GPYM has enjoyed an annual Youth Ensemble tradition. Bringing youth from Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma together for musical

rehearsals and public presentation is both a fun and challenging time for our teens, and brings joy and vitality to the hearts of their elders.

We are grateful to have been able to gather together with pandemic precautions. Wichita Friends School graciously provided a COVID-safe space for our gathering. Patrice Stephenson and grandsons provided culinary ministry of delightful and safely-served meals. With thanks, Friends included service projects in the school and on the grounds in their time together.

With peace and joy,

LaVonna Loesch
Presiding Clerk