

Epistle to all Friends
From Intermountain Yearly Meeting
Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, New Mexico, USA
June 9-16, 2019

To Friends Everywhere:

Greetings from host Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico, where we are gathered for Intermountain Yearly Meeting. We begin by acknowledging, with humility and respect, those who have inhabited this land: many generations of Pueblo peoples and their ancestors; Ute, Comanche, Apache, and Dine people who came here to hunt and trade; families with roots in Spain whose villages and towns offer us hospitality as we pass through.

The theme of this year's gathering is "Faith, Fear, and our Future." How do we sustain love, faith and hope in our connections to God and to one another in these uncertain and turbulent times? What does our faith teach us about overcoming fear? As we walk with these queries, we realize there are no easy answers. We also know this: what stirs in the depths of our hearts offers us guidance as we discern the way forward.

Our faith grows out of deep listening. In silence, we try to listen for the "still, small voice" of the Spirit. We try and listen to the words left to us by the fellowship of Friends who have come before us. We try and listen to one another as if we are hearing one another for the first or last time, as if any of the words we receive may carry glimmers of the Light. Our kind of faith requires practice; it is a verb, not a noun.

Often, the most poignant and powerful moments we experience together happen in worship sharing. This year, as always, our group leaders set the tone and offered us safe spaces, even brave spaces, where circles of Friends shared moments of vulnerability, connection, and discovery. We considered the sources of our hope and faith and found out that they are large and small, obvious and subtle. We are renewed in the space and beauty we find here at Ghost Ranch and elsewhere. We glean hope from the children riding their tiny bikes down to lower pavilion for opening night ceremonies. We are inspired by the great work being done by Quaker leaders such as Bridget Moix, our plenary speaker this year. We find grace in moments of laughter with our elders. Creative opportunities for artists and writers remind us that

we are participants in an ongoing Creation. Conversations in both English and Spanish affirm the value of diversity.

As we renew and restore one another, we find new strength for the hard work of sustaining our meetings and taking our faith out into the streets of our towns and cities. Moving out from the source of our faith, we tend first to the sanctuary that our meetings provide. Peace-making is a group effort as our plenary speaker reminded us, so we do what we can to keep our meetings strong. Any number of factors—aging memberships, personal conflicts, the difficulties of offering a welcoming space to those of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and abilities—challenge us in this work. Nevertheless, we find solace, if not faith, in knowing that Friends have been creating and sustaining meetings for a long time. This year, with the intention of sustaining and enhancing the vitality of our communities, we have set aside funds to support Friends as they feel led to visit and share in the fellowship of one another's meetings. We are also pleased to welcome two new meetings to our yearly gathering: Montrose (Colorado) Friends Meeting and Quaker House Meeting in Santa Fe. Still, we realize that many of our meetings are fragile and will continue to demand much of us in the way of attentive love and tenderness.

As we maintain and sustain ourselves and our meetings, we continue to do the work of truth-seeking and peacemaking. In the past year, we have seen our monthly meetings manifest that work in many ways, including our continued participation in the coalition of faith communities offering sanctuary to immigrants. Meetings near the border have been especially active in word and deed: accompanying families threatened with separation under harsh detention and deportation policies; assisting destitute migrants who are dumped by Border Patrol into the streets of towns where they have never lived; gathering and delivering donations to help immigrants in need. We are grateful for support from others who are concerned about this expanding humanitarian crisis. We will continue to shine a light on the harmful policies and procedures causing the deaths of so many migrants trying to cross southwestern deserts.

As our meetings carry on this work, we realize, as Bridget Moix suggested, that there is a “now” and a “not yet” dimension to seeking justice: “now” because we can make decisions every day that support our vision of a world more hospitable to truth and peace; “not yet” because this work takes time, lots of time, and we may not get to see the results. We were reminded of this again during an enlightening evening of presentations from various Quaker organizations. As one Friend put it, an exceptional community plants trees under whose shade they may never sit.

Though our gestures may seem small in the face of massive challenges such as working to mitigate climate change, our minutes remind us of the work at hand. One minute that we approved this year acknowledges the link between peace and climate justice, and asks us to understand our role in the crisis, to accept responsibility, and to act accordingly. Another minute affirms the rights of refugees from all sorts of violence to seek asylum in this country and calls on Friends to support our immigrant neighbors—providing aid, friendship, and safety—as we are able. We realize that resolution of some issues will take time and vigilance, but we believe that the long road ahead will “bend toward justice.”

Our yearly meeting is preparing for a move to Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, and saying goodbye to Ghost Ranch, one of the places that has offered us solace and sanctuary and nourished our yearly meeting over the years. Some Friends remind us that it is not the place but the people that make a yearly meeting. Others speak to the depths of stillness and the beauty that we have enjoyed here. Some Friends focus on looking forward while others savor precious memories of their long-ago-little children playing in the shade of the grand old cottonwoods here. Moving challenges us in different ways, but we walk in the faith that the Light we have carried to and from Ghost Ranch, is the same Light we will bring to our new gathering place in southwestern Colorado. In stillness we find a Holy Presence that will always help us find the way home,

Firm in our Faith
With Hope, Con Esperanza,
And in Friendship,

Molly Wingate, Clerk
and the Friends of Intermountain Yearly Meeting