



Epistle from the South Central Yearly Meeting 2022 Annual Sessions

Greetings, love, and light to all Quakers everywhere from a wildflower-filled hillside in Central Texas and from the far-flung reaches of the Internet. South Central Yearly Meeting (including Friends Meetings and Worship Groups in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana) met in our yearly sessions from the 10th through the 17th day of the fourth month of 2022 under the theme “Led by Faith to Work for Justice.” For the first time since 2019, we met in person at Greene Family Campground in Bruceville, Texas while we continued to welcome Friends who wished to participate online. In the end, 81 Friends (including 4 children) showed up in person, and 33 registered to attend online. We welcomed 12 visitors from outside SCYM, coming from various other Meetings and Quaker organizations.

“Joy” was the single word that a Friend used to sum up the weekend, that is, the joy that comes from face-to-face meeting after a three years’ absence. There is nothing like the actual physical presence of Friends in Meeting!

That said, many of us also saw that it will be useful to keep some online component of our yearly meeting sessions from now on. The continued ability of elderly and infirm Friends to participate without having to travel the vast distances of our yearly meeting is precious to us.

The first four days of our sessions were entirely online, including an open Peace and Justice committee meeting, online workshops from several of our invited participants, the first Meeting for Business session, and our normal mid-week worship on the 14th day.

On Wednesday the 14th, Friends began to arrive from all over the four-state area of our yearly meeting, some traveling from as far away as 500 miles (800 km). From that point on, through our final community worship on the 17th, all our events were in person, and most of them (business sessions, keynote event, workshops, and even meals) were also available to a small but precious online group of Friends.

All gratitude and praise go to our technology team, site coordinators, and yearly meeting planning committee, whose service to the meeting was even more essential than in years past and who went above and beyond any expectations to make sure that we could all be together no matter where we were at.

Everyone who arrived for the in-person sessions had to take a COVID test on the spot and get a negative result before being admitted. Masks were required of everyone in

inside spaces, except during mealtimes. In our excitement, the requirement (and the masks themselves) sometimes slipped, especially toward the last couple of days.

Some events, of course, could only be in person: fellowship around the firepit (with the toasted graham cracker/marshmallow/chocolate confection called “s’mores”), late night communal singing, swimming, walks in the woods and meadows, intergenerational egg decoration, group jigsaw puzzle completion, most of the interaction at meals together (though an online fellowship option was available), and many, many “opportunities” for small group and one-on-one impromptu fellowship where folks who had not seen each other face-to-face got reconnected.

A central event at every SCYM yearly session has always been our Saturday-night variety show. Despite the reduced attendance at Yearly Meeting this year, the show was as vibrant and laugh-filled as ever. We felt a special energy as we listened to bagpipes, group musical performances, amazing vocal offerings, and funny sketches. There were also a couple of dance numbers, including the performance by our outgoing Clerk of a hula dance from her native Hawai’i. This variety show was also available online and we even had one sketch from an online Friend that had us roaring with laughter.

Our theme for this year’s sessions, “Led by Faith to Work for Justice”, came from the Cielo Grande Quarterly Meeting. From the stories we heard of individual friends, we realized that the leading to work for justice often comes before the support that we seek from faith.

The topics covered in our workshops were tightly focused around chosen aspects of our theme: climate change, youth activism, solidarity with indigenous peoples, death penalty abolition, and how to give and get support for leadings toward justice work in our yearly and monthly meetings and worship groups.

Our keynote panel included Friends Istra Fuhrmann (Friends Committee on National Legislation and San Antonio Meeting), Paula Palmer and Barb Adams who related their personal activism, what support they needed and what they received. Kallan Benson, a 18-year-old Quaker climate activist and her father, Carl Benson from Baltimore Yearly Meeting, led three workshops on topics of youth activism, climate activism, and activist Quaker family dynamics. Walter Long of Friends Meeting of Austin presented on death penalty issues. Shelley Tanenbaum of Quaker Earthcare Witness presented on Environmental Justice. Portia Kay Anthos Shenandore-Wheelock of Friends Committee on National Legislation presented on indigenous solidarity. Claire Hannapel of Quaker Volunteer Service presented on multigenerational spiritual relationships with Friends in justice work. Friends Val Liveoak of San Antonio and Jerry Knutson of Southeast Yearly Meeting were on a panel moderated by Liz Wolff of Fort Worth Meeting on Equipping

ourselves to go forward. Val and Jerry later gave a workshop on how to support and discern Friends’ leadings.

A Friend, who spoke for many, felt uplifted by the panel discussion answering the query “How have you been supported by Friends Monthly Meeting and Yearly Meeting?”

We had two Meetings for Healing. Many of those gathered shared their desire for health and wholeness for themselves and loved ones. Following times of loss and isolation, Friends wish to experience the presence of the Spirit in their lives as they come home to their true and most Light-filled selves.

On Friday afternoon, a small group of Friends observed the SCYM tradition of a group reading of the Passion. This year we chose Matthew's version.

Our Peace and Justice Committee brought several items to the yearly Business Meeting:

- Meeting approved a special contribution to Quaker Voluntary Services, a year-long fellowship program for young adults.
- Meeting approved the suggested minute to work for a truth and healing commission concerning the harm done by Quaker and other boarding schools in the past to indigenous children and their communities.
- Meeting approved the suggested minute to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine while at the same time calling our own government to account for its past and continuing crimes against humanity.
- We also agreed to sign on to a letter supporting the dropping of charges against Line 3 water protectors addressed to the Governor of Minnesota and other Minnesota leaders.

Business Meeting received reports from representatives to various Quaker, interfaith, and activist groups, and the work that Friends have done over the past year, and we transacted other routine business.

At our final business meeting, we shared memorial minutes of 5 Friends who had died since the last Yearly Meeting as well as observing the death of one of our Yearly Meeting's founding members and deaths in the immediate families of members. Friends were delighted to celebrate the birth of a child in Live Oak Meeting (Houston) and a marriage under the care of the same Meeting.

Although we had only four children in attendance, we had able and willing volunteers to accompany and do fun activities with them during business meeting sessions. Though few in number, the children were a welcome sight among us. Our children and youth program is dormant, but ready to go when attendance picks up in the future.

Our attendance was way down from pre-pandemic levels, but on the other hand this year's sessions were very vibrant and Spirit-filled, giving us a great hope that we will recover and even go on to grow in Spirit as a community.

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face."