

Dear Friends everywhere,

Wilmington Yearly Meeting met for our summer sessions on July 23 through 26 in Wilmington, Ohio. Our Yearly Meeting theme, “Called to Joy for these Times,” came up repeatedly throughout our sessions. For those who desire a world of peace, equality, community, and care for the earth, these times are full of difficulty, as we heard in many of the presentations we received about the work Friends are doing in the world. But it is also full of promise, and celebration, sometimes in the same places.

Our sessions began on Thursday evening with a time of warm fellowship and creativity. We started with a Quaker Faith and Play story about George Fox, William Penn, and that of God in everyone, whether or not our beliefs are aligned.

On Friday and Saturday, we heard from a number of Friends organizations about the ongoing work they are doing in these times, as well as hearing about new works just begun. Kelly Crouch, a WYM recorded minister, spoke about their work with Ecumenical Commons, a non-profit organization in Washington, D.C., that they founded to care for those serving the public good through, primarily, government service. As a staffer on Capitol Hill, Kelly discovered a need for ministry among young staffers in Congress who had no person or community with whom to speak about their disillusionment, disappointment, and sense of purposelessness in doing work they had expected to be committed to the betterment of their communities. Kelly saw that need and used both their seminary education and policy education to establish a non-profit dedicated to the care and nurture of these staffers, who now have communities of support to which they can turn in the midst of their spiritual difficulties.

We also heard from our newest Meeting, Lakeway Friends, about the “Pop-up Children’s Peace Museum,” for which they have received a local church grant. So far the museum has appeared at the Jefferson County (TN) Pride Festival and an event at the Jefferson City Library, with another event scheduled for the fall.

From Wilmington College president Corey Cockerill we heard about the positive energy at the College, and how it is thriving in a difficult environment for higher education. She mentioned the College’s recent purchase of the former BrightFarms industrial agriculture facility, which will be immediately transformed into classroom and greenhouse space. The classrooms are particularly needed, she said, when you consider that Wilmington has 150 new agriculture majors every year who need to take an intro course in a 24-seat lab. She also spoke about the continuing emphasis on Wilmington as a college defined by community, not just classrooms; and about the continuing progress and growth of the prison education program. We celebrated along with the College the hiring of Noah Kellum, a Friend originally from Kenya, as the new Campus Minister, after Nancy McCormick’s retirement.

On Friday night, the Yearly Meeting USFW sponsored a performance of Frank Levering’s one act play, *The Distance Between Us*, originally brought to us when Frank was a Quaker in-

Residence at the College this past winter. The play, told through a series of letters across the span of twenty years, is set in the first part of the nineteenth century—times that for Friends, on account of the increasing role of slavery in U.S. economic life, as well as the growing danger of Quaker young people marrying outside of the Society, were morally, spiritually, and politically as divisive as the times we are in now. The play suggests that even across these divides, reconciliation may still be possible, through love, though it might take many years.

As the artistry of *The Distance Between Us* was challenging and powerful in its intensity, we were blessed with the artistry of an enriching balm during our open worship on Saturday. JP Lund encouraged us to consider how music brings us in touch with the present moment, and shared a composition drawing from “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” and “Amazing Grace,” to lead us into the silence and reflect on our condition in the present moment.

On Saturday night, in our annual peace lecture, we heard from Mary Stuckey-Newswanger, a member of the Monteverde community of Friends, about the difficult work her community has been engaged in over the past two years in supporting eighteen refugees, from eastern Europe and Central Asia, who were deported from the United States to Costa Rica, a nation where they had no connections and could speak neither of the official languages, Spanish nor English. Mary told us about the many difficulties involved in supporting persons who were separated from parts of their families and had spent months in detention in both the U.S. and Costa Rica. At the same time, she showed pictures of the joy the Monteverde community and the refugees sometimes managed to create together, as the Monteverde Friends provided respite and a safe space for people who had not felt safe nor been safe in years.

Multiple Friends shared that the presence of the Young Friends at several of the Meeting sessions, and in providing lunch on Saturday, was deeply appreciated and joyful. One adult said goodbye and thanks to the Young Friends at the end of the day; the Young Friend turned to one of the Friendly adult presences and said, with mild wonder, “I don’t feel like I did much of anything?” She learned that sometimes simple presence is all that is needed.

Being called in joy includes celebrating the good work of past years. We learned about (and many of us had participated in) the celebrations, in this past year, of the 75th anniversary of Quaker Knoll Camp and the 50th anniversary of the Peace Resource Center. Quaker Knoll has been a place and source of programming that many remember with joy, as well as a place where many young Friends have found purpose as counselors and counselors in training. The Peace Resource Center’s activities and engagement over this past year recognized fifty years of the PRC and included participation by students, Friends, community members, artists, and hibakusha from Japan. These activities not only pointed to the damage done by the United States’ atomic bombing of Japan, but also included conversations about ways to work for nuclear disarmament in the present.

So we are called to celebrate the past, but neither the work of Quaker Knoll, the Peace Resource Center, nor our Yearly Meeting as a whole are meant to be museums, but called to work in these times, and times to come. One of the tasks of our Yearly Meeting each summer is to select

the theme for our next summer sessions. We selected, as our theme for next year, “A Fresh Wind.” During that discernment, one Friend pointed out that the same theme had been suggested nearly twenty years ago—and the theme had not been adopted because there was too much fear about what a fresh wind might mean. We all rejoiced that we are now able to embrace the idea of new things, new momentum, new motions.

In these times, and in times to come, we find ourselves moving from a place of surviving to a place of thriving. We see this in our newest fellowship in Tennessee, in the fresh growth in some of our oldest meetings, and in the way we think about the financial resources of our Yearly Meeting. We learned about a new way of tracking and budgeting to enable better stewardship, and of thinking about existing funds, that opens into thinking about what we want to do and be, not just what we can afford. We appreciate our treasurer, our coordinator, and our finance committee for their dedication to this task and the opportunities it provides.

We conclude with the words used by our Ministry and Counsel clerk in his summary of our Monthly Meeting State of Society reports: “Though it has been a year in which we have seen our testimonies challenged, both by our government at home, and by crises around the world, I am thrilled to read how our Meetings have stood firm with courage, with compassion, with love, and with joy against the de-humanizing and life-threatening forces at work in our world today. I truly believe that we, like Esther, ‘have come to [our] . . . position for such a time as this.’”

We pray that the Inner Light is granting you the same courage and joy that we desire for ourselves.

With love, on behalf of Wilmington Yearly Meeting,
The 2026 Epistle Committee