

## **Appendix F — Epistle from Canadian Yearly Meeting in Session, August 2022**

To Friends Everywhere

Loving greetings from the 189th annual gathering of Quakers in Canada, our 67th as a united Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. We met entirely online on 7–13 August 2022. This is our third year of gathering virtually.

As is our practice, Yearly Meeting was preceded by a retreat, led this year by Marcelle Martin of Swarthmore Friends Meeting and entitled “Supporting One Another in Faithfulness.” Marcelle guided the Friends who attended in practices meant to deepen our awareness of the movements of the Spirit in our lives, and show us how we can better share these insights with others.

JoLee Sasakamoose gave the annual Sunderland P. Gardner lecture: “Guided by Ancestors: Integrating Ojibwe Teachings with Quaker Testimony for Social Action.” Through both joyful and painful personal stories JoLee explained the two different kinds of knowing – Quaker and Indigenous – that interweave in her life and complement one another. As Canadian Yearly Meeting continues to work toward better relationships with the Indigenous Peoples whose home we now share, experiences such as this lecture deepen our understanding and enhance our ability to communicate.

Worship grounded our experiences throughout the week. We began each day with Meetings for Worship under the care of Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel. Worship was a consistent part of all our gatherings, offering periods of presence and connected fellowship. Meetings for Healing were an oasis of prayer and deeply centred experience. Our daily Worship Sharing groups enabled us to know one another better. Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel also organized an evening presentation – “The Role of Eldership in the Care of the Community” – ably led by Lu Harper and Anne Pomeroy of New York Yearly Meeting.

Meetings across Canada are engaging with profound layers of change and transformation within our Society of Friends and in the larger society. We name in particular a significant challenge: *How can an older generation of F/friends make the much-needed internal changes to our Society that will enable us to embrace the emergent needs of younger generations of F/friends and families with small children?*

In “Ask a Young Friend,” a panel discussion led by four Young F/friends provided much food for thought around these questions and other key issues. How can Meetings be welcoming spaces for queer seekers? Why do we sometimes fail to make our Meetings inviting for families with young children, as they struggle with child care, fatigue, and a desire for appropriate curriculum; their attendance may be irregular or they may be the only family in a Quaker community.

In “Understanding Meeting for Worship for Business” Jeff Dudiak of Edmonton Monthly Meeting explored ways in which the founding meaning behind some time-honoured Quaker practices and processes are being eroded or ignored. We were asked whether this is necessary and useful, or distressing and damaging, as we attempt to offer our faith and practice to new participants. We hope that we can welcome new F/friends into our Society, while also keeping in mind the traditional testimonies and practices that have served us well for centuries. They may or may not need changing.

The State of Society Report prepared by Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel named ways in which Monthly Meetings are meeting these challenges and facing the difficulties in conducting much of our community lives online. Across the country Friends are working to stay committed, united, and guided by Spirit. May we be open to exploring new ways to build Quaker communities.

One morning worship blossomed with the theme of friendship (with and without a capital F) offered to each other and to those outside our own community. At our annual large Worship-Sharing event – “Experience of the Spirit in My Life” – several Friends explored how painful times could offer unexpected blessings of Spirit that can be shared with others. We also held a Memorial Meeting for Worship to remember Friends across our Yearly Meeting who are no longer with us. We note that in this past year there were more deaths than births.

The past three years have brought deep change to our Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, as we conduct more business in online sessions throughout the year. The sessions devoted to business during our gathering included necessary approvals and were marked by important decisions, including a new Minute of Record on Marriage.

Canadian F/friends continue to be sustained and uplifted through Bible Study. This year Colin Saxton (of North Valley Friends Meeting in Oregon) shared examples of mercy found in the Bible, reminding us of the potential of mercy in repairing and mending God’s good world and our own lives. The focus on mercy may lead those who heard this message to move forward in faith in new ways.

Our Special Interest Groups covered a range of topics from conflict in Ukraine and Palestine to anti-racism and children’s rights, and from wisdom found in indigenous plants to acknowledgements of Indigenous lands, indicating indicate the passion and commitment of F/friends as we discern how to act in the world. The evening presented by the Canadian Friends Service Committee highlighted actions that Canadian Quakers are already taking.

We honour the Program Committee, who worked hard to provide a wide range of sessions, and the volunteer technical assistants who helped us to use the online tools successfully. We had a total of 105 sessions and a total of 183 people in attendance. Online programming is difficult for children. A program for them was planned but not enough children were registered. We look forward to a time when our children to meet with one another in person. We hope to move to a hybrid (online and in-person) format in 2023.

For some F/friends the restrictions of online connections represent a significant challenge. Others note that online formats offer greater accessibility for distant or disabled F/friends and allow us to respond to environmental concerns and meet the very real budgetary challenges of our organization.

During Family Night, after a long week spent in front of a computer, a small group of Friends enjoyed performances of music and poetry plus the collection of “Gleanings” gathered by Friends during our time together. Our gathering affirmed for us that Faithfulness is not always about getting things perfect or right. It is rather a commitment to walk together in the Light, so that we gain strength to do what is needed in our world.

As we gather together however we can, may you be blessed wherever you are.