First Day 7/25/2021
Closing minute

We held our annual sessions online again this year, due to the pandemic and the lead time required for planning. We miss being on the Scattergood campus where we can sit under the actual maple tree and feel real breezes, but we are grateful that technology allows us to meet safely.

The theme of our programs was “Tapestry of Transformation: Sharing our Light”. Our Entertainment Committee planned morning Bible study, afternoon workshops, and evening collections, along with many chances for informal online visiting. Program sessions were well attended and enriching despite the fact that participating meant long hours in front of screens. We were pleased that this Yearly Meeting gathering helped us deepen our understanding of one another and how the Spirit is teaching us in our thirteen diverse worship communities.

Morning Bible study was spirit-filled, under the guidance of Elizabeth O’Sullivan. Friends considered the close knit community that nurtured Jesus as a child, and the fact that communities sometimes fail to recognize God among them. They explored the idea that there are “weighty Friends” in the natural world, and the importance of maintaining our connection with “the lilies of the field”.

Racism, and racism among Friends, was the topic of our midyear gathering, where our guest, Vanessa Julye, provided history lessons. Some of this week’s sessions helped us ponder these lessons in our hearts and with one another. We find ourselves exercised by the recent news of nearly 1,000 bodies of indigenous children and adults having been found on the grounds of two former boarding schools in Canada. Friends spoke openly and tenderly about the history of Quaker boarding schools and their role in traumatizing families and destroying cultures. Although we personally did not cause this harm, many feel responsibility to help repair it. An evening collection titled “Sharing our Light and Building Community in Africa” facilitated by Chris Roesel of Penn Valley Meeting was also an opportunity to share deeply and consider privileges we have but are unaware of.

In one evening program we considered together examples of how our meetings have worked to discern and follow the Light. We found connections with one another in some of our
common shortcomings, and found encouragement as we recognized that Light emerges in spite of our stumbles.

Interest groups allowed us to visit with staff from Friends organizations. Justin Hurdle, Julia Gledhill and Alicia McBride joined us from the Friends Committee on National Legislation for informal conversation about their new and ongoing work. Lucy Duncan from the American Friends Service Committee gave us updates and spoke about some of AFSC’s anti racism projects that she has been a part of, including a new program “Quakers Uprooting Racism” which is a collaboration between AFSC, Pendle Hill, Friends General Conference, and the Friends Council on Education.

In a workshop with Rebecca Musselman we enjoyed learning about and trying out a technique that Ames Friends Meeting has been using called “Experiment with Light”. We considered the similarities and differences between using this technique and what we do in Meeting for Worship. In another workshop we were impressed by the expertise of a panel on sustainable farming that included Scattergood’s Mark Quee, Kathy Dice and Tom Wahl from Iowa City, Kathy Byrnes from Des Moines, and Lee Tesdell from Ames Meeting. A lively discussion on farming and caring for land followed.

Both our state of the meeting reports and epistles from other yearly meetings taught us that many are struggling, as we are, with the way video-conference technology has helped to include some people but exclude others. We ended up strongly affirming the benefits of this technology and our desire to continue using it even when most can return to being physically together. We are also pleased with our website technology, which has helped us communicate among each other and helped seekers to find our meetings.

Wonderful reports about Scattergood School inspired us. We are humbled by the good work that is done there. Feeling a need to be more connected to the school, we approved and allocated funds for a joint project to address racism and the environment.

We found much joy in listening, on sixth day evening, to an online concert and storytelling session with the Quaker musician, John McCutcheon.

On First Day morning, Jana Schroeder helped us understand the AFSC experiment to learn how to live our faith as we seek to serve a diverse and unjust world. “Heart listening
sessions” have helped AFSC understand that people on all sides are harmed by unjust systems. Serving this world often involves letting go of control, but we can give up the privilege of having things done our way, and still be included.

We were reminded, from Jesus’ words about the lilies of the field, that we can give up control. We can let our agendas and our selves be changed by the Spirit, the Spirit of Christ that does teach and guide us if we listen.

We now conclude our 2021 annual session, planning to meet again at Scattergood Friends School and Farm, near West Branch, Iowa, from seventh month 27 to 31 of the year 2022.

Carol Gilbert, clerk
Bob Winkleblack, assistant clerk