

Piedmont Friends—Yearly Meeting & Fellowship

Epistle

First Annual Session, Sixth Month, 2023

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

On the third day of the sixth month, Piedmont Friends—Yearly Meeting & Fellowship held its first Annual Session as a unified body on the Guilford College campus in Greensboro, North Carolina. It was a beautiful Saturday, allowing us to throw open the doors and windows of our space with joy as we gathered together in worship and cheerful fellowship.

The Friday evening prior we had gathered online to consider a series of queries designed to explore the weekend's theme: "From Pandemic Isolation into Joyful Community." In small groups Friends shared with heartfelt emotion the changes the COVID pandemic wrought in their lives and communities and expressed gratitude for the spiritual space that was being provided to reflect on this concern.

At Guilford College on Saturday morning, the plenary speaker Josh LeRoy, Chaplain of North Carolina's Orange County Correctional Center in Hillsborough, used a story about a healing that Jesus performed to explore what can be learned by example in our efforts to heal our communities and our world. Clarity, creativity, faith, compassion, risk-taking and persistence were reflected in Jesus' actions and those who had faith in him. Jesus asked not to be worshiped, but to be followed in deed – "go and do likewise." Friends shared some of their own experiences of healing provided in or by their communities. Healing is not always at the hands we expect and at times is from 'unexpected channels' where we may risk vulnerability but gain intimacy as we move forward from pandemic conditions into joyful community.

Following our time of fellowship over lunch, some Friends walked the Guilford campus with college staff to learn about its role in the rich local history of the Underground Railroad. Others participated in a poetry workshop exploring pandemic feelings, browsed the pop-up bookstore, napped outside under the trees, made use of repurposed supplies to make collages, or caught up with old and new F/friends.

In the afternoon, the Clerking Committee convened our first Annual Session as Piedmont Friends—Yearly Meeting & Fellowship, the combined body of Piedmont Friends Fellowship and Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting. Following the roll call of meetings, we heard highlights from our first year as a unified body that has focused on the priorities of: creating opportunities for Friends to gather, supporting Adult Young Friends, facilitating the continuing unification of Piedmont Friends, and creating opportunities for Friends to share common concerns and work together toward response and action.

The Spiritual State of the Meeting report spoke to the common thread among meetings of a deep need and desire for community. Meetings are seeking ways to build, rebuild and/or expand efforts to be more inclusive communities as we emerge from the worst of the pandemic. As we have found the exercise of preparing a spiritual condition report within our meetings and then collectively as the yearly meeting/fellowship to be a deepening experience we agreed to establish a standing committee to continue to coordinate this work.

We welcomed reports from organizations and committees that bind us to the wider body of Friends and remembered those Friends that have passed in the last year.

In our closing time together, Friends expressed thanks to the speakers and those who shared their gifts in the weekend's program offerings, the clerking committee and retreat planners, the efforts to have zero waste, volunteers who provided the excellent refreshments and bookstore, childcare provided by a Guilford student, the seamless technical assistance throughout the weekend, the beautiful setting at Guilford College, and the good weather.

Annual Sessions concluded with a time of worship and gratitude.

Messages and ministry during the virtual Sunday morning worship spoke with gratitude to the opportunities the weekend provided to move from pandemic isolation and be among Friends in joyful community.

Shared in peace,
Marian Beane, Sally Freeman, Paul Klever, and Nancy Riemer
PF-YM&F Clerking Committee