

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting 2021 Epistle
2021 Annual Sessions Held Online July 28-August 1, 2021

To Friends Everywhere:

We greet you from our homes in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan where we have gathered virtually for a second year. We are palpably aware of the skills, time and love of Friends with gifts in web-based organization and facilitation who make this kind of gathering possible, as well as the foibles of individual internet connections and interfaces.

Our theme this year, “Healing through Truth,” was woven throughout our program. Our Bible study leader opened up texts of terror, shame and oppression that moved us to consider the wrongs of our current societal environment and reminded us that seeking alignment with Truth is both healing and transformative. Afternoon workshops encouraged us to seek truth and healing as individuals and as a corporate body. We considered the disruption our lives might encounter when we ask Spirit to guide us and lifted up the healing available when we take action in the world.

We have been grateful to start and finish our days with worship. Worship sharing times have been rich, deep, and revealing of the complexity and uniqueness of each Friend. The sense of connection, of profound engagement in the themes of healing and truth telling, both individually and communally, was evident throughout. We discerned together how the tender input from others helps us tell the truth and moves us toward healing.

While we met virtually, we recognize that we live and worship on lands that were taken from native people including the Potawatomi, Seneca, Cayuga, Shawnee, Odawa, Ojibwe, Delaware, Chippewa, Ottawa, and many others. Some of the stories of colonization, Christianization, and genocide of native peoples were brought to life by our plenary speaker, Paula Palmer, who led us in a profound and interactive session titled “From Truth to Healing with Native Peoples”. She drew attention to our particular, local history of land acquisition for farming and Quaker management of three of the many Indian boarding schools in our

region. Paula promised healing for the colonizers as well as the colonized if we engage in the work before us, and offered a powerful path to health that she received from Indigenous leaders - speak truth, acknowledge the harms done, apologize, forgive, atone and repair. She encouraged Friends as individuals and collectively in our meetings to experience the fruits that come from actively engaging with this traumatizing aspect of our past; a release of guilt, new relationships, and joy-filled alignment with Spirit.

LEYM registrant data holds up a mirror to racial, gender, ethnic, and age imbalances that naturally influence our culture. We recognize our lack of diversity and seek to wrestle with our racism and other oppressive habits, traditions, and practices that separate us from those who seem different. How can we continually interrogate our norms, leaving room for and supporting new experiments and openings? We are encouraged to deepen our friendships across monthly meetings, share our ideas, experiences, longings and stories. We are inspired by the possibility of transformation through our encounter of Truth as we hold ourselves accountable to stay open to continuing revelation.

While web conferencing continues to provide desirable accessibility to many and reduced carbon impacts from travel, we notice and grieve the erosion of personal connection across our community that arises from enforced physical distance. It's hard to be present in our life together when duties at home are calling us to walk the dog, go to the grocery store, or even attend to work email. Breakout groups offer a welcomed space for deeper sharing, but there are not the impromptu chances to catch up with Friends when we meet in person, share meals, and immerse ourselves in community. We had no children's program this year as our young Friends are not interested in web-based interaction. We feel a huge loss of the vitality and perspective of children and young families. We also notice reduced collective energy of Spirit in our business sessions, partly evidenced by much lower participation. On screen it is harder to know when we are in unity.

Like other yearly meetings, we are a unique set of people with unique gifts to leverage towards the world's healing. We recognize that some of us are impatient for change while others of us need time to process

information and experiences, especially the difficult issues of white colonialists genocide of indigenous peoples, our own racism, and the on-going genocide of the people of Palestine. We encourage Friends to start from the premise that we are all children of God. From there we seek a personal relationship with Truth where we can align our beliefs with our actions. We leave our LEYM gathering, virtual though it was, a bit more refreshed, steeped in the joy of seeing familiar faces on screen, and with new information and new and renewed leadings of the Spirit.

Jo Posti, Presiding Clerk

Carolyn Lejuste, Susan Loucks, Susan Towner-Larsen, epistle committee