



Lake Erie Yearly Meeting Epistle

Sixth Month 12–15, 2025

Beloved Friends everywhere: Grace to you and peace from God.

One hundred seventeen Friends from Meetings and Worship Groups in Michigan, Ohio, and western Pennsylvania returned with joyful anticipation to the campus of Ashland University in Ashland, Ohio, for our sixty-third Annual Meeting. Here for our third year, this location feels ever more like home. In-person attendees settled quickly into our daily routine, as our location again provided great support for our business, workshops, worship, and evening activities. New practices helped on-line attendees connect with greater ease for business and plenary sessions.

With the painful separation of the COVID years behind us, Friends were very thankful for this precious time to gather, renew long-standing connections, and welcome newcomers. We showcased a display of “puzzle pieces”, each created by a constituent meeting or worship group, that described some of the characteristics we bring to the yearly meeting as a whole. All ages—from youth to adult programming—experienced immediate abundance of Light; togetherness was love beyond imagination. These connections carried qualities of grace, and yet we are thankful for the intentionality needed to lay a groundwork of safety and acceptance. We are dedicated to continuing to build and extend that culture in addition to relishing its fruits.

In many ways, a sense of abundance blossomed among us. We were enriched by the presence and Spirit-led activity of an increased number of children and older young Friends, and one newborn who provided frequent, and welcome, ministry. Our business was completed without significant difficulty or challenge. Our finances remain stable and adequate for our work. Our newly re-formed Peace and Justice Committee reported an active year of work and plans for the next year. Friends responded to calls for Yearly Meeting service for the coming year; cared for our newborn during business and plenary sessions; were generous with donations and gifts of service during our gathering (carrying trays in the dining hall and writing summaries of workshops, for instance); and gracefully adjusted to a bit of rain and minor changes to our schedule.

We gathered around the theme of “Mending our Nets: The Power of Becoming Whole.” Friends, we entangle our lives with others. In so doing, we become a robust whole, like knots of cord

becoming a net. This form lets us gather joys and collect sorrows, knowing that none is meant to be dealt with alone.

We considered how we respond to the tears in our nets. How can we transform conflicts in our relationships? How can we become whole in the face of death in our community? In our plenary session, Pamela Haines acknowledged the impulse to throw out the broken and buy its replacement. Though replacement is possible for the material at the human-scale, we are called to a mending ethos. Repair is often the only choice—there is no replacement for our Earth or our social net. We have little loving choice but to mend what has frayed. We can darn heels and tie ourselves anew to others in a loving net. It is our mutual responsibility. Mending society relationship-by-relationship is establishing God's Kingdom—it is creation caring for itself. Pamela reminded us not to think only of large-scale rips in our social net, but to tend to mending in our daily actions and choices and our relationships with family, friends, and not-yet-friends. But mending of nets must begin with grieving what has been lost, while also celebrating those sections that remain vital and supportive.

Along with love and connection for each other, we carried constant awareness of the deep gravity of this historical moment—the unprecedented and accelerating erosion of democratic, environmental, and social norms and protections in the United States. We are heartbroken when we consider the consequences of these trends for ourselves and future generations. During our meeting, the crisis provided an opportunity for public witness. Many Friends peacefully expressed our objections at a Quaker vigil on the campus, the local branch of a national “No Kings” rally against autocratic rule, and in worship to hold those who participated in the Light. Our Bible Study sessions reminded us that early Friends also wrestled with despair when they saw the promise of God’s kingdom on earth fade into political chaos and human oppression. These Friends learned to look for blessing and spiritual strength “at home” or within themselves, regardless of external trends.

We carry wounds and experiences that diminish our confidence in responding as Quakers to these crises. We are primed with stories of ways our meetings have not been able to navigate conflict and places where our personal connections have broken and failed us, even with people we knew, loved, and trusted. At the same time, workshops and movies illustrated powerfully how people such as ourselves can model courage and use existing tools to create peace and social change. We hold both this fear and this potential, as well as hard-won personal lessons that guide us towards wholeness: fully experiencing our grief to release old expectations, learning we can love people whose thoughts or behaviors we see as wrong.

We have been recalled to a greater obedience that frees us from worldly obedience—not obedience to scarcity mindsets, individualism, and fear. We can summon personal and collective power to address the world, and claim the irrevocable power to live richly in connection, and to love each other well.

Friends, we left this Meeting refreshed and renewed for the Spirit-led work, small and not-so-small, in the coming year, grateful that we will return to Ashland again. We know that you are addressing many of the same challenges that grip us. As your nets rend and fray, we pray that you will share openly your grief, that you will be called to mend, and that you will rejoice in your propensity to be woven into wholeness.

Written for the sake of that Spirit who has moved through

The Epistle Committee:

Jack Smith,

Jonah Brownfain,

Susan Loucks, &

Alexa Kay

Signed

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Joe Mills". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Signed".

Joe Mills, clerk