

FROM THE FRIENDS AT

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting Epistle

Sixth Month 18-21, 2026

To Beloved Friends everywhere:

Grace to you and peace from God. One hundred ten Friends from Meetings and Worship Groups in Michigan, Ohio, and western Pennsylvania gathered on the campus of Ashland University in Ashland, Ohio, for our sixty-fourth Annual Meeting. As we have three times before on this campus, in-person attendees settled quickly into our daily routine, as our location again provided great support for our business, workshops, worship, and evening activities. We welcomed remote participants to the evening plenary and Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business. A visitor commented that our Meetings for Business were notable among Yearly Meetings in her traveling experience for their tender mix of decisions and information with fellowship and relationship.

We hold these truths in tension: joy and loss. The year's theme, "Hope, Joy and Courage in Community," invited us to reunion, re-connection and joy. Noticeably, however, profound losses accompanied our joyful moments. Among them were the losses of dear Friends who have moved away or died (sometimes unexpectedly), and the loss of our newly laid down constituent Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting. We suspect your meetings are also burdened by the losses in our world. Humanity has fallen short of God's charges of peace, love and justice. Creation itself is being burdened by omnipresent injustice, cruelty, and greed.

What, then, are we to do under this burden? We find inspiration in Lamentations. In his grief, the author affirms:

The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.
It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.
It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth,
to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it,
to put one's mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope),
to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults.

For the Lord will not reject for ever.
Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone. (Lam. 3:25–33)

Only after we lift up our problems to Spirit, for they are not ours alone, can we nurture joy and hope. Wielding that joy and hope, we gain the courage to be God's hands on Earth.

Something quiet and holy that happened during our time together showed us what it means to be God's hands on Earth. A huge asset of our Ashland University site

LEYM, C/O AAFM, 1420 HILL STREET, ANN ARBOR, MI 48104 - LEYMWORKE@GMAIL.COM

Online at leym.org



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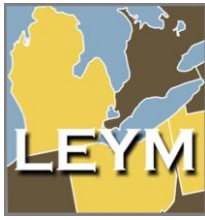
is that the Children and Youth program happens in and among adult programming spaces. A session we call “Birds of a Feather” allows intergenerational activity groups to rise spontaneously. Children and elders played and spoke and wondered together with no wall between them. Conversations moved both ways with warmth and respect. The elders delighted in the children. The children honored the elders. Both spoke frankly, collaborated on joint projects or competed vigorously.

This intergenerational group was embodying the wisdom being discussed elsewhere as parents of young and older children pondered how we raise our children in the way of Friends in today's world. What emerged was more sustaining than simple answers: people listened, people shared. Those who had walked further down the path offered their learnings and those who were just beginning found themselves less alone. This itself is a testimony. We do not raise Quaker children in isolation. We raise them together, held in the life of the meeting, learning from one another across the years. Young Friends, for instance, had this to teach us this year: asked from where hope, joy, and courage spring, the youth identified two sources – friends and family. Children name what they see in the world and do not flinch from it. They remind us that Spirit does not wait for us to grow up before it moves; it is already at work in the youngest among us.

Our plenary speaker offered other examples of how courage leads us to become God's hands on Earth. Friend Joe Volk traced the long unfolding of a life given to peace, from his decision as a conscientious objector to his years of service with the American Friends Service Committee and the Friends Committee on National Legislation. With humor and humble surprise, he spoke of large and small moments of conviction that could have seemed insignificant at the time or else certain to lead to disaster, but which instead opened the Way for unpredictable movement of Spirit. Joe explained that he had no way of knowing where a courageous choice for integrity might lead; but he was sure that none of the ensuing openings could have happened without the moment of taking the risk. Joe honored a mentor who taught him that the question during a moment calling for courage is not whether we will suffer; there will always be suffering. The question is to what purpose we dedicate our suffering.

Doug Gwynn's Bible Study offered still another insight on how to be God's hands in the world. He explored alternative groups of Seekers in the 1600s, some of whom recommended recovering practice from the past and others of whom sought progress toward a new future age and a clearer version of truth. But he drew us back to George Fox's letter to his parents in 1652, in which he admonished them that “Ye have no time but this present time, therefore prize your time for your soul's sake.” reminding us that it is only in the present moment we can hear and respond to our Inner Teacher.

Our hope for you, Friends far and near, is that you will ask for which and whose purposes you suffer. Hold truth as your anchor and source of authority. Prize your



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present moment. Do righteousness inasmuch as you are guided. And know, Friends, that you do not walk alone.

Written for the sake of that Spirit who has moved through us this weekend,

The 2026 LEYM Epistle Committee:
Joann Neuroth, Ellerie Brownfain, Alexa Kay

Submitted by:
Jack Smith, Presiding Clerk