



Lake Erie Yearly Meeting of Friends
Together in Ashland, Ohio, June 15-18, 2023

To Friends everywhere:

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting greets you with affection and joy from our first in-person Annual Meeting since 2019, enriched by the virtual presence of some Friends who joined us via Zoom. After many years in the same location, we convened at a new campus this year, and were greeted on our opening evening by a tornado warning that disrupted our first business session of the year, sending some Friends to shelter on a lower level, catching some Friends as they were arriving and complicating registration and access to dormitories, and drawing some Friends, true Midwesterners all, outside to stand under the building's awning to watch the sky. No tornado was sighted, but heavy rain, thunder and lightning accompanied us as we settled damply into our lodging.

The rest of the weekend has featured clear, cool days with light breezes. Our children's program, though much smaller than in some previous years, found much to like about about the new campus, including an indoor space closer to the rest of the meeting's activities, and outdoor spaces that included a beautiful circle of garden swings, leading to the invention of a new game called "Swingball." The small number of youth attenders led to teenagers and younger children spending the weekend together, which was enriching for all.

The dropoff in the number of small children among us, as well as the increased age of many stalwart and beloved Friends, prompted us to consider our future. "Where is spirit leading us?" we asked together. "Where are we being called?" Though we do not yet have the answer, we faithfully await clarity and new direction. We find that, despite the diminishments of age that affect many of us, our faith and fellowship remain powerful.

Friends offered eleven workshops during the weekend, on topics as diverse as nonviolence, Faithful Meetings, the poetry of Friend Helen Morgan Brooks, and Multi-Age Inclusion. The positive buzz about these workshops from those who attended spoke well of the many spiritual gifts being well-expressed among us.

We enjoyed an evening of sharing each other's gifts in an event we called a fair. Friends played board games and sang, while others taught juggling, steampunk creation, jewelry

making, quilling, and more. It was an evening of joy and camaraderie as we learned more about each other's lives and talents outside of our shared life as Quakers.

We were blessed and challenged by our plenary speaker, Emily Provance, who spoke to us of inflexible ideas about limited models of faithfulness and happiness that can stifle spirit in some faith communities. She invited us to reflect on our relationship to these ideas, and offered us guidance in the form of new truths, such as the reminder that there is always hope we can hear God together, and that deep listening, even to people with whom we disagree deeply, opens all involved to the possibility of transformation.

Some among us who identify as members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2S+) community found ourselves connecting with several of the college's cafeteria staff who are young trans and queer people. They seemed hungry to have accepting adults hear their stories, share their joys, empathize with their challenges, and coo over pictures of their pets and sweethearts. This intergenerational sharing enriched us all, and some of these connections seem likely to endure past the end of our time at Ashland. This generation of LGBTQIA2S+ people are growing up in an unprecedented time of acceptance and self knowledge, but are imperiled by family rejection and targeted right-wing attacks in state legislatures across the USA. We hold these young people in our hearts and commend them to your care, and to the care of God.

Friends of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting send you our love from the American midwest, where we faced a deadly natural peril but were unharmed by it, and where we renewed our affection for one another, our faithful connections, and our hopeful determination that our faith will bring us to a vital future. We look forward to sharing this future with Friends everywhere.

Susan Loucks
Presiding Clerk

Epistle Committee:
Su Penn
Aran Reinhart