

Piedmont Friends–Yearly Meeting & Fellowship Epistle Inaugural Session, Sixth Month, 2022

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

On June 4, a beautiful and joyous Saturday, Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting and Piedmont Friends Fellowship held their joint Annual Sessions on the Guilford College campus in Greensboro, North Carolina. It was a memorable time, marking the unification of two distinct Quaker bodies – Piedmont Friends Fellowship and Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting – into one new Quaker organization called “Piedmont Friends–Yearly Meeting & Fellowship.” It was also our first in-person meetings since the pandemic began and many remarked how good and life-affirming it was to be together in each other’s presence.

The weekend retreat began on Friday evening over Zoom with a roll call of attending meetings and an appreciation of the indigenous peoples on whose ancestral land we now meet. Retreat hosts led us through a series of queries designed to renew our faith, to reflect on the challenges and joys of this historical moment, and to deepen our sense of community. Those who participated expressed gratitude for the queries, noting how effective they were at eliciting honest and personal sharing.

Saturday morning at Guilford College, guest speakers Jonathan and Leah Wilson-Hartgrove shared their personal journeys with radical hospitality at the Rutba House in Durham, the Poor People’s Campaign, and the Restorative Justice project. Their presentation provided valuable insights into how structural injustices in society cause large numbers of people to live “on the edge,” and how radical hospitality “wades into the water” of relationships with those who have been marginalized. The Wilson-Hartgroves shared numerous stories of how these relationships had transformed them, notably how the line between being the host and the guest is blurred. Setting out to offer hospitality to those who have been damaged by a broken economic system, they found themselves ministered to in surprising ways by those they were serving. Several participants remarked that this presentation celebrated the key principle of Quaker spirituality that there is “that of God” in every person. The takeaway for many was that any Friend can walk in the Light in their own unique circumstances, and that this experience is life-changing.

As lunch was being organized, Friends received an update on Guilford College from its new president, Kyle Farmbry.

After fellowship over lunch, many Friends went on a walk of the Guilford Woods with a local Quaker historian and learned about the rich local history of the Underground Railroad, and saw the Freedom tree where nails still sit that once pointed enslaved people towards freedom. Others participated in an art project making parfleches: colorful, hand-decorated Native American pouches which can be used to store small keepsakes or as envelopes to send through the mail.

We then gathered for annual sessions. With thanks to the clerking committee for the months of preparation, Friends met in what was the 51st and final annual meeting of Piedmont Friends Fellowship and the 7th and final annual meeting of Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting. After the respective organizations were laid down, it was with great joy that we minuted the unification and held the inaugural meeting of Piedmont Friends - Yearly Meeting & Fellowship. We recognized John Hunter, a founding member of PFF who was present for this historic moment.

The Minute of Unification reads:

Friends (of the Religious Society of Friends) of the Piedmont region of North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia, gathering at Guilford College, Greensboro, NC, on Saturday, June 4, 2022, affirm the unification of Piedmont Friends Fellowship and Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting into the unified body of Piedmont Friends–Yearly Meeting & Fellowship.

Friends further acknowledge the more than fifty years of Piedmont Friends coming together in fellowship, in support of peace building, and in welcoming inclusivity. Building upon this foundation of collaboration, Friends affirm the unification as strengthening Piedmont Friends into the future.

The remainder of the first meeting of PF-YM&F consisted of reports of various organizations and committees which have faithfully been carrying on their work through this transition, as well as remembering those Friends that have passed in the last year. The State of the Meeting report showed that member meetings have struggled throughout the pandemic with finding ways to safely worship and minister to each other and to the wider community but have found creative ways to do so. Meetings have continued to be a valuable presence in their communities providing both service and prayer.

In the final moments before closing worship, Friends expressed thanks to the speakers and those who shared their gifts in the weekend's program offerings, the clerks table, the retreat planners who took efforts to have zero waste, those who provided the excellent refreshments and bookstore, the seamless technical assistance throughout the weekend, and the beautiful setting at Guilford College. The day ended with a time of silent worship and gratitude.

The weekend closed with Meeting for Worship Sunday morning over Zoom.

Shared in peace,

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

A photo of Friends who gathered can be viewed at Piedmont Friends website:
<https://www.quakercloud.org/cloud/piedmont-friends-yearly-meeting-fellowship>