

Piedmont Friends—Yearly Meeting & Fellowship  
Epistle  
Second Annual Session, Sixth Month, 2024

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

Piedmont Friends-Yearly Meeting & Fellowship, commonly known as Piedmont Friends, held its 2024 retreat and annual sessions May 31 to June 2 with both virtual and in-person participation.

For the Friday evening gathering, we met over Zoom and introduced ourselves by responding to the question, “What gives you joy and hope?” Afterward, Friends responded to a series of queries that opened our hearts and prepared us to further engage in the theme of the annual retreat, *How are Friends Called to Respond in These Tumultuous Times*. We enjoyed getting to know each other at a deeper level.

Approximately 70 Friends gathered on Saturday, June 1, on the Guilford College campus for the second annual meeting of Piedmont Friends-Yearly Meeting & Fellowship. Upon arrival, we greeted Friends, old and new, and enjoyed a bountiful table of delicious breakfast foods brought by those led to share in this way. The day was warm and sunny, the campus green and inviting. We settled into a full day of worship, conversation, reflection and activity with a sense of joy in being together.

Our plenary speaker, Amelia Kegan from the Friends Committee on National Legislation spoke on the essential role of people of faith in a time marked by war, the rise of white nationalism and authoritarianism, and climate catastrophes. Amelia recounted a passage from Mark 4, in which Jesus and his disciples were in a ship. A great storm arose while Jesus was sleeping, and the disciples were frightened. They called out, “Carest thou not that we perish?”. Amelia stated that the disciples were not so much doubtful of Jesus’ power to calm the storm, but fearful that he was unaware of their plight. She encouraged us to be faithful in reaching out to others, in our own and other communities, where people may feel forgotten, offering caring and companionship to those who are marginalized, disenfranchised, and in need. Comparing this moment to the 200-mile mark of a 250-mile race she ran, where conversation with another runner kept her awake and alert, she encouraged us to keep each other awake as we move forward.

Before lunch, Friends were encouraged to learn about Quaker Call to Action-NC, an initiative inviting Friends—both individuals and meetings—throughout North Carolina to discern how to be engaged in protecting the election and strengthening democracy. Kyle Farmbry, President of Guilford College, welcomed us to the lovely campus with strong Quaker roots.

After lunch, many Friends participated in one of the following activities: a walk through the Quaker Woods to enjoy nature’s beauty and learn more about how African Americans supported each other in the underground railroad, guided by James Shields; conversation and handwork in the friendly handcraft circle; and browsing tables of

books, Quaker organizations, and a George Fox literature display. Other Friends found chairs under a shade tree to rest and opportunities to be in fellowship.

The clerking committee assembled Friends in the afternoon for the second annual session. The names of Native American tribes who had lived on meeting house grounds were read as part of the roll call of the 16 Piedmont Friends member meetings and worship group. We experienced a tender silence as the names of those Friends who had passed during the past year were also read.

We welcomed reports from representatives of Quaker organizations and committees carrying out our vision in the wider world.

Clerks acknowledged with gratitude the individual Spiritual State of the Meeting reports provided by nine member meetings. Common themes became the core of the Spiritual State of the Meeting Report: joy in returning to in-person worship and other gatherings; appreciation for the technology that kept Friends together and currently widens our outreach; appreciation for the unifying power of worship; the welcome many meetings have extended to families and young children; service to address social injustice in local communities and the wider world; and challenges faced as meetings grow toward being anti-racist faith communities.

Friends engaged in thoughtful discernment regarding the recommendation that Piedmont Friends become a signatory to the Vision Statement for Peace in Palestine and Israel. Discernment included the concern that Friends consider how we as monthly meetings might further the work envisioned in the statement and “own” the statement. Clearness was reached to become a signatory, with an understanding that Piedmont Friends will continue to carry the concern for peace in the region of Palestine and Israel.

As the day drew to a close, we recognized the 400th anniversary of George Fox’s birth by listening to inspirational excerpts from his writings. In reflection upon our time together, Friends spoke of much we were grateful for, including the following: our childcare coordinator, who provided programming for young Friends; the care taken to conduct the annual gathering in a zero-waste manner; the wisdom and guidance of the clerking committee. Other Friends expressed appreciation for the challenging ideas brought by our plenary speaker, the opportunity to sing songs of freedom, and the abundance of good food and fellowship. We celebrated how Piedmont Friends has matured during our short time as a unified organization. Friends concluded the annual session with worship and left the beautiful Guilford College campus with full hearts.

Friends gathered by zoom for worship on the next day. Friends joined in worship from their homes as well as their meetinghouses. The worship ended with appreciation for all who made the annual retreat joyful, rich and centering.