

June 18, 2001

To Friends Everywhere:

Lake Erie Friends felt God's covering presence as we gathered in Bluffton, Ohio, June 14-17, to face the joys and challenges within our Meeting of "Individual Will, Corporate Worship, and Corporate Decision-Making." In order to provide spaciousness for the working of the Spirit in our committee and business meetings, we started our yearly meeting a half day earlier than in the past. As we began we were reminded of the centrality of the worship with which we surround our business, and of the need to let love bring clarity to our discernment. Reading of epistles from other yearly meetings, as is our custom, brought us a sense of oneness with Friends elsewhere.

Our children enticed us to fun, to carry our burdens lightly. The leader of our youth and children's program provided artful, hand-colored tee shirts for all of the young people and their adult helpers this year. These glorious spots of color were a continuing pleasure, reminding us always of the joy among us. We were blessed to be serenaded by the children and entertained by a couple of expert young joke-tellers as part of our Talent Show. This year, for the first time, our high school group was our largest group of young people. We look forward to integrating more of our adult and young people's programs in future years.

Our good friend, Marty Grundy, in her plenary talk reminded us that the Religious Society of Friends has been likened to a three legged stool. The first leg is the individual's personal relationship with the Divine and the personal spiritual practices that support that relationship. The second is the meeting as faith community in which we grow and are formed spiritually. The third is our witness out into the larger world. Each individual Friend over the course of his or her life, and each Meeting, needs to pay attention to each of these three legs. If we ignore one or more of these legs, the entire Religious Society can become unbalanced and precarious. Marty helped us focus our attention on the relationship between the first two, the individual and the Meeting. This theme had been addressed during the previous year through queries distributed by the Yearly Meeting Ministry and Oversight Committee and responded to by monthly meetings. It was also addressed by three of the four workshops during the annual meeting, and by the daily Bible study. Daily worship sharing provided a vehicle for Friends to voice personal joys and concerns arising from their experiences in their home meetings.

In our business meeting we struggled with issues that prompt us to examine the sturdiness of the leg representing the Yearly Meeting itself. We faced unfilled vacancies on important committees, especially affecting the youth program, but the Spirit opened the way for many to respond, and we face the coming year with new energy. The cost of Friends' travels on behalf of the Yearly Meeting may need to be scaled back due to a financial shortfall. Our numbers at this annual gathering are smaller this year than in several years. A concern for broader participation in our annual meeting led us to consider the possibility of changing our meeting time, place and the duration of the meeting. These matters are being explored. We tenderly hold a concern regarding the faithfulness with which Lake Erie Yearly Meeting is listening to the promptings of the Spirit. Where are we being led by God? What are we being called to? How are we to discern that leading? Who among us will respond?

We are reminded by our recently departed friend, Ruth Taber, that "all shall be well." We trust that the Spirit, in loving persistence, is leading us through our challenges into a deepened life together.

On behalf of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting,

Don Nagler, Clerk