

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting

May we look upon our treasures and the furniture of our houses, and the garments in which we array ourselves, and try whether the seeds of war have any nourishment in these our possessions.

— John Woolman

Loving Greetings To All Friends Everywhere:

Friends from Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania gathered for the 48th annual sessions of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting on July 28 through 31, 2011, at Bluffton University, a Mennonite university in Bluffton, Ohio. It is a special joy to welcome each year the younger and older Friends of the yearly meeting. Some Friends, especially those from small meetings, can feel isolated in their home place. Children and their families can feel isolated from the wider Quaker community. At yearly meeting, these Friends have a chance to build a broad, multigenerational, and spiritually-grounded community with other Friends.

And so, we hold up the great joy we experience in meeting again this year with these cherished LEYM Friends who encourage and prod us as we learn to live the Quaker way more deeply. This year, we explored the theme, “Mindful Consumption as a Spiritual Practice.” We were moved by each other to new understandings: in Bible study as we considered the story of the manna in the desert and the Sermon on the Mount; in our worship sharing groups as we considered queries regarding our consumption of time, energy, and resources; in the workshops where we explored Friends’ personal experiences in living mindfully; and in our buoyant recreation with our young Friends. In our meetings for worship with attention to business we embraced the blessing of Friends’ diversity of experience. We labored in love with each other to the measure of our light, knowing that only in this way may we be brought into unity by the Spirit of God.

Our plenary speaker, beloved LEYM Friend Sally Weaver Sommer, happily walked us through her life commitment to mindful consumption, shaped in part by her Mennonite upbringing and by a Puerto Rican sojourn during her childhood among very poor people. Two stories from the gospels have been important on her journey: the parable of the lilies of the field in which Jesus invites us to give up worrying; and the story in which Jesus tells his disciples that it is harder for a rich person to be part of the kingdom of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. The first story comes from the Sermon on the Mount, which for Sally is the most important part of the Bible. She says that Jesus was inviting us to *collectively* seek the kingdom of God *above all else*, and promising that, if we do, *no one in the world will have to worry about their basic needs being met*. The second story simply reminds us that it is hard to be part of the effort of bringing about the kingdom of God if you’ve got a lot of stuff while others don’t have much at all. The implications for us are that we 1) consider the effect of our consumption decisions on ourselves and all of creation; 2) give up an attitude of entitlement; and 3) recognize when we have enough. If we are going to live lightly, carefully and gracefully, we need our loving Quaker meeting to help us resist the human impulses to worry and to desire too much, so that we

can accept the invitation to be part of the kingdom of God. We will find our way to greater things by embracing the lesser things to which we are called.

We are lesser in number this year, and note a general declining trend in reported membership by our monthly meetings. We want to understand this, and look forward to the exploration that will begin this fall by our committees. We also note, however, that although we are small in number, the ministry received at these sessions in our meetings for worship and in the plenary talk has been vibrant and uplifting. Several of our monthly meetings also shared in their state of the meeting reports a spiritual sense of deepening vitality as they seek to find spiritual unity and offer pastoral care for Friends among them. Spiritual vitality was evident in the epistles from other Friends as well, which were shared in our sessions. The [2010 epistle from Great Plains Yearly Meeting](#) gathered us into the life of God at our first session. The [2010 epistle from Ramallah Friends Meeting Consultation](#) moved us, and encouraged us to personally consider boycott. The [2011 epistle from Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns](#) reminded us of our call to radical love and radical inclusion, and changed Friends' hearts. We urge the whole of the Religious Society of Friends to read this epistle.

We send your meetings loving kindness as you endeavor to deepen your understanding of the Quaker way. We pray that our diverse society becomes ever more closely gathered into a fellowship of Friends who find their center in the Light and Love of the Spirit. And we send our Friends home with these words of the old hymn:

As we leave this friendly place,
Love give light to every face;
May the kindness which we've learned
Light our hearts till we return.

Signed in and on behalf of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting,

Peggy Daub, Clerk