

**Epistle from Lake Erie Yearly Meeting
in Annual Sessions at Bluffton University
in Bluffton, Ohio, July 27-30, 2017**

To Friends Everywhere:

The one hundred-plus adult Friends gathered for our 54th Annual Sessions addressed the topic “Quakers in the New Millennium.” Our plenary speaker, Greg Woods, member of Columbia, MO, Friends Meeting in Illinois Yearly Meeting, spoke specifically to “*Reviving Quakerism in the New Millennium.*” He challenged us with the question, How can we build the Beloved Kingdom on Earth with only people who look and act like us? We were asked not to rest on the past laurels of abolition and women’s suffrage, but instead to see how the spirit is moving among us now.

In powerful language, Greg gave us a vision of Quakers in the new millennium by offering three suggestions. The first was to deepen our worship by preparing to be present ahead of Meeting for Worship. Did we expect the divine to be in our midst? Were we ready to be transformed?

The second suggestion was to reach out to others so that they know that we exist and what we believe. We fail each other when we are quiet about our faith. We fail our youth when we do not teach them about our Christian roots and about the profound devotion of early Friends.

The third suggestion was to welcome newcomers and to reach out to young adults. We need to ask ourselves how we feel welcomed when coming into a new space. If we are more public and more proactive, people will be more drawn to what we have to offer.

We shared a tender moment when a 12-year-old boy rose to speak to how hard it is to “be community” when we live so far apart and see each other so seldom. Friend Greg spoke for us all when he said, “You are wise beyond your years.” May we learn from this young man’s wisdom.

We need to share our radical message with the world, that we are all ministers who are able to be called by God to serve. Let us stop hiding it.

In worship-sharing sessions, we considered two related queries arising from the central theme of these sessions:

1. How do we continue to make Quakerism relevant in today’s world in order to inspire young adults? and
2. In what ways can we, as Quakers, incorporate people of different generations and backgrounds, especially young adults, into our spiritual community?

Meanwhile, our workshops covered a wide range of topics: Campus Outreach/ Ministry to Non-Quaker Campuses; There Is No New Normal; Beyond Reform: Quaker and Prison Abolition;

Lucretia Mott Visits LEYM; Friends, Gnostics, and the Still-Speaking Spirit; Trending Immigration Topics under President Trump; and Are You Now, or Have You Ever Been, a Young Adult?

These workshops invited us to consider not only the depths of our roots, perhaps extending back to Gnostic thought and sensibility, but challenged us to consider in what ways our Quaker identity calls us to engage with the modern world. How does the Spirit call us to address mass incarceration and threats to immigrants and refugees? How do we call young people into our precious vision?

Several important matters came before our sessions, on which we reached unity. We approved a minute to be sent to Friends Fiduciary, which holds the Yearly Meeting's funds, asking them to expand its Quaker Values Screening Criteria to exclude investments in companies that support or are complicit with Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands, its economic exploitation and control of the Palestinian population, and/or its violations of international human rights law. We approved scholarships to support adult Friends from the Yearly Meeting who want to attend the White Privilege Conference in Grand Rapids next spring. And we introduced a video designed to familiarize our child care givers and others with the sexual abuse prevention policy adopted by Lake Erie Yearly Meeting after much work over the last three years.

In sum, we left the 2017 Annual Sessions of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting with new knowledge, new friends, and a new commitment to welcome interested visitors into our Meetings and share our faith with others as Way opens.

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