

Friends Church of North Carolina Annual Sessions, 8/11-12/2023
Quaker Lake Camp and Conference Center, Guilford County, Climax, NC
Epistle to Friends Everywhere

The sixth Annual Sessions of Friends Church of North Carolina were held at Quaker Lake Camp and Conference Center at Climax, in Guilford County, North Carolina on the 11th and 12th days of the 8th month, 2023.

The sessions were opened by Presiding Clerk Roger Holt with for our Lord's blessings on the gathering.

Superintendent Mike Wall reported that there was good news and bad news across the Yearly Meeting. While we are beginning to return to normal following a couple of rough years due to the COVID Pandemic, we find that some small Meetings are struggling. Also, over the past few years we are losing more old members than we are gaining young members. There also continues to be a need for more pastors as our pastors age and retire or pass away.

On the bright side of the equation, the Superintendent introduced three pastors who were new to the Yearly Meeting and allowed them to address the gathering – Georgianne Hartline at Winthrop, Dusty Ball at White Plains, and John Voncannon at Back Creek. He also reported that conditions were improving with two of our Meetings who were recovering from crisis with assistance from the Revitalization Committee.

Worship on our first night opened with spirit filled songs from the ladies trio from Concord Friends. Jay Marshall, Dean Emeritus of Earlham School of Religion, brought a message referring to our theme for this year's gathering: Ephesians 2:10: "***For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***" Dean Marshall pointed out that our past can weigh heavily on the present. Sometimes that can be helpful, while sometimes detrimental. He reminded us that we live in the present, and that our long Quaker history brought us here. We have a future to prepare for, and we must live in ways that show a sense of who we are and our core values. Jay reminded us that we are God's handiwork – therefor we are God's beloved children. As we try to discern what we are to do and say to the world in this time and place, we must not let the past stop us from what God calls us to do now!

The second day of sessions started with a "***devotion on the porch***" of the Quaker Lake Lodge led by Valli Chilton which centered on our need to worship in Spirit and in Truth.

Later as approximately 130 Friends gathered on day two of our annual sessions we received reports from affiliated organizations that included the great things that are happening in Kenya, Tanzania, Mexico, Belize, and Jamaica. These reports truly reminded us that God is good and God is in control. Reports were also received on the work being done by the Young Friends Activities Committee, Friends Campus Ministries, the Ministers' Association, and Quaker Lake.

Following lunch, a Memorial Service was held for Friends who had passed away since our last gathering. A number of Friends gave touching testimonies to the faith and service of the departed.

A recognition of the retirement of longtime Pastor Harold Salmons after a half-century of service was followed by a reception hosted by Winthrop Friends.

Members of Friends Church Baltimore who had generously prepared and shared some Kenyan treats throughout the day shared from their worship traditions. Friends were engaged and edified by the spirit filled worship, praise, songs, and message.

Following the evening fellowship meal, Samuel Crews of Forbush Friends provided a period of inspirational music and song.

Dean Jay Marshall brought the message for our closing worship. He pointed out that church is more than a social club. We were reminded of two basic Quaker tenets:

- 1) God calls us all to something and equips each of us with at least one gift of ministry.
- 2) All life has sacramental potential.

Jay pointed out that the faithful life includes listening to God's leading, preparing ourselves to respond, and then responding to God's call. How you served in the past is not necessarily how you are called going forward, and that is okay. He pointed out that our faith communities shape the values we display and our path forward. Our life needs to reflect our values by doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. (Micah 6:8).

The Friends gathered at the Sixth Annual Sessions of Friends Church of North Carolina share this message with Friends around the world with the hope that we may all approach the coming year with the knowledge that "we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Prepared by Roger Greene, Southern Quarter.

Read and Approved 10/14/2023, FCNC Representative Body, Asheboro, NC, Roger Holt, Clerk

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