

OHIO YEARLY MEETING

c/o Olney Friends School
61830 Sandy Ridge Road
Barnesville, Ohio 43713
Eighth Month 1st – 5th, 2023

"The earth is the Lord's and all they that dwell therein. ... Lift up your heads oh ye gates and the Son of Glory will come in."

Psalm 24:1, 9

Greetings in the Lord to Friends everywhere.

Imagine, if you will, the famous (among Friends at least) Doyle Penrose painting of "The Presence in the Midst," but instead of worshiping with their heads bowed in prayer, imagine the gathered assembly looking slightly up, beyond the image of the risen Christ, to the wall behind the facing bench. Now, imagine that on that wall there is a large screen on which is projected small images of names and faces of other Friends from near and far, as near as a sick bed in Barnesville or a Mennonite Church in Findlay, Ohio, as far as a retirement community in Florida or even in New Zealand, Ghana and Honduras.

If you can imagine that, then you may begin to imagine the strange and wonderful blessing that it was to attend Ohio Yearly Meeting during these strange and wonderful times of the coming of the Living Christ in our age. For He has promised to be present whenever two or three are gathered in His wonderful *name*, and we have experienced that Presence and realized that the promise did *not* say that we must be gathered in the same *place* to know that Presence among us.

We have gathered at the Stillwater Friends Meetinghouse for the 2023 annual sessions of Ohio Yearly Meeting. "Unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain that build it..." We are sensing the unseen yet peaceful Presence and direction of Christ's Spirit with us, in us and among us. Friends sometimes speak of having leadings. We were reminded that a "leading" comes to us through having a relationship with our Lord. The Gospel messages shared arose out of our quiet worship and deepened our understanding of that relationship. Our background music has been the sound of birds and the chatter of young children.

We remember the vision of Richard Hall, a recorded minister of the traditional style that many of us still living were privileged to know and to hear, a vision of the walls of our meetinghouse coming down to accommodate all the people being drawn to us. And another vision he had of wires, going out and coming into the meetinghouse, connecting us with Friends all over the world. Though Richard lived during the dawning of the computer age and before anyone had ever heard of the internet, we have experienced that connection through Zoom. And though the bricks of our meetinghouse are still solidly in place, we feel the walls of division and

misunderstanding between different branches and cultures of Friends and even in our own communities and families no longer preventing our hearts from being drawn together in the Precious Love of our Living Savior.

What visions remain for us to experience? We can only imagine what blessings lie ahead of us as if we continue to be faithful to Christ's calling on our hearts. During our business sessions we heard reports of His work among us during the past year. In one evening program we reviewed the painfully mixed history of our ancestors' relationships with the indigenous peoples of this beautiful land. In another we envisioned together how we have come to this time and place and how we might faithfully move forward. In worship and in fellowship with one another, we know that it is good that we are here.

We look at the hungry, hurting multitude in the world around us, and we hear Him say, "You feed them." We feel we have so little, barely enough for one another in these troubled times. He says, "Bring me what you have," and he shows us how to thank God for providing it, to divide it up and share it with the people where they are, and He reminds us to gather up the leftovers. Then after all have been satisfied, and we are amazed, he quietly journeys on, seeking to feed hungry souls everywhere, still promising to be with us, wherever two or three are gathered in His name.

The Truth revealed through His Holy Spirit is much deeper, more far reaching than our intellect can comprehend. Our circle of community far away has become near at hand. Repentance is worked by our maker as we open our hearts to Him. The purifying power of His Love works in us daily as we turn our minds toward Him.

Of course, we wish we had more, could do more, could share more with you. We welcome, embrace and are blessed by those we have, and are grateful for those who have gone out from among us into the world. And so it is in the heavenly realm that is being birthed among us, that as we are faithful in our stewardship of what we have been given, we are given more, and we give and receive it all to the Glory of God.

On behalf of Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends,
Charles C. Thomas, Jr.,
Clerk