



**Philadelphia**  
**Yearly Meeting** *of the Religious Society of Friends*

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## **Greetings to Friends Everywhere**

We gathered at DeSales University in Center Valley, Pennsylvania on 7<sup>th</sup> month 29<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> month 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009, for the 329<sup>th</sup> sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. The lovely setting of rolling green hills nourished our souls.

The multigenerational opening session began with an antiphonal style Welcome. We welcomed many types of Friends, including: Friends who feel hopeful about the future and Friends who feel some despair about our current direction; Friends whose service comes through prayer and contemplation and Friends whose prayer comes through action. We gave Thanks to the relationships that sustain us including the biodiversity that supports all life – from the millions of micro-organisms in our soil to the animals that fill the oceans and jungles to gardens across the world.

In these sessions several challenges to Friends who live in the world but not of it were made manifest. They came in different forms:

The Internal Revenue Service notified Philadelphia Yearly Meeting that it must garnish the wages of Priscilla Adams, an employee who is a war tax resister. Though there could be some unpleasant repercussions for the Yearly Meeting, once again we united in support of Priscilla's witness and refused to cooperate with the IRS.

Inspiring reports about the work of our committees were presented, but the perennial problem arose of finding enough Friends to do the work we have been called to. There was concern that the world involves us in "busy lives" that so drain our energy and focus that not enough is left for the work of our Meetings. As one Friend said, work on committees should be done in the spirit of God – with Love and Joy! We found ourselves challenged to identify where we are touched by the fire of the Spirit.

Following several years of planning, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, with the Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren, co-hosted at the Arch Street Meeting House a national ecumenical gathering for peace, "Heeding God's Call," from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of the 1<sup>st</sup> month, 2009. Being together as a very theologically diverse group and participating in different forms of worship was challenging and energizing for many participants. Inspiring speakers opened those present to the seriously hard challenge of what it means to listen to and respond to God's call to us to commit our lives to bringing peace to the world – locally and globally. A witness against hand gun violence at a Philadelphia gun shop - known as the source for many guns used in crimes - had been planned in advance. During that week 12 conference participants and local clergy sat in at the shop, were arrested, and brought to trial. Not only were all acquitted or dismissed, but the judge allowed each one to describe his or her witness during the trial. (These moving testimonials, as well as the speeches from the gathering are available at [www.peacegathering2009.org](http://www.peacegathering2009.org)) In addition there were some large demonstrations outside

the gun shop and another at the trial. A twice weekly vigil continues. Many ideas for pursuing peace arose from the gathering and the work for turning these ideas into action is ongoing.

Speakers Peter G. Brown, co-author of "Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy," and Keith Helmuth, from the Quaker Institute for the Future, spoke to us about the catastrophic consequences for the entire biosphere of our current economic system that depends on "endless growth and expects limitless potential wealth." They helped us understand not only the perils but the impossibility of continuing to depend on such a system; perilous and impossible not only for technical reasons, but because of what it does to our souls and our communities. Their call for us to understand and to act was compelling. The reality of our entanglement in this system was painfully illustrated to us later as we considered the budget for the upcoming year. We saw graphically how our investments have shrunk as a result of the economic crisis, and what the impact on funding our work may be. While we were relieved that our budget could balance, this time, we find ourselves confronting ourselves: we are part of a system; indeed, we depend on a system that is destroying God's Earthly creation. Despite general confusion, and in some cases fear, about what is required of us, we do have faith that God will lead us. This may be the issue that galvanizes us into a true community and touches us with the fire of the Spirit. The Saturday evening speakers (Joe Volk, Hollister Knowlton, George Lakey, and Carl Magruder) gave us some first steps. We were urged to design specific non-violent campaigns that would enable us to force the institutional changes we need. Also, though we understand that individual life changes alone will not bring the systemic changes we seek, it is important for each of us to align our lives with our message as we take it out to the wider world. "We are called to live in a now and not yet world."

Although Friends feel the depth of many challenges that we struggle with, there is still a strong sense of hope that the way is opening. As a Friend said, this is a time for Quakerism because the attitude of the world at large seems to be turning toward values we cherish: right relationships – economic, ecological and spiritual – to each other and to Earth itself.

*God, how are you directing us?  
How might we walk in that Light  
which transforms all our endeavors into acts of love?*  
**Our souls are crying out "Show us the way."**

On behalf of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting,



Thomas Swain, Clerk