

2015 Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting Epistle
From the First Annual Session Third Month, Fourteenth Day 2015

Greetings to Friends Everywhere,

In a spirit of joy and anticipation, and after years of discernment Piedmont Friends Fellowship was led to take under its care the formation of a new yearly meeting. Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting (PFYM) emerged as a result of this nurture and we held our first Annual Session on Saturday afternoon, March 14th, 2015. PFYM intends to act as a 21st century yearly meeting well-grounded in Quaker tradition and history.

The yearly meeting intends to continue and build upon Piedmont Friends Fellowship's 47-year tradition of loving and inclusive fellowship. PFYM seeks to be a loving community of Friends in the Piedmont area and adjacent areas of North Carolina, Virginia and South Carolina, guided by spirit, and deepening our experience of Quaker worship, faith, and practice. The new yearly meeting seeks to strengthen our service and witness to the world through broadened connections with wider Quaker organizations.

Piedmont Friends Fellowship held its spring retreat and annual meeting on March 13-15, 2015. Ninety-two adult Friends and twenty young Friends from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia gathered under budding maple trees and worshipped in the historic New Garden Friends Meetinghouse in Greensboro, NC. Friends greeted each other with excitement and joy, and enjoyed unity in both worship and fellowship.

Within this loving context on the afternoon of March 14, Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting convened its first Annual Session with 76 Friends in attendance. Five North Carolina monthly meetings, a Virginia monthly meeting and a South Carolina worship group minuted their affiliation with the new Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting: Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Fancy Gap (VA), New Garden, Raleigh, and Salem Creek Friends Meetings, and Upstate (SC) Worship Group. Friends then proceeded to establish basic elements of the new yearly meeting through approval of recommendations from the Piedmont Friends Fellowship Yearly Meeting Formation Committee and the Interim Body of Representatives from affiliating meetings—groups that had been working jointly on these recommendations for two years.

First to be approved were The Vision Statement and Core Elements, intended to clarify the guiding principles of the new yearly meeting. The last sentence of the Vision Statement reads, "Our primary goals are to nurture monthly meetings and worship groups by supporting spiritual growth and to witness to our collective truth in the wider world." The Core Elements include inward experience of the spirit leading us to loving ways; Quaker practices of discernment, continuing revelation and outward expression of truth in our lives; inclusiveness and welcoming a diversity of individuals and families into our meetings; strengthening our monthly meetings and worship groups; holding to a simple and sufficient structure in the yearly meeting; and demonstrating transparency and openness in all of our actions. A copy of the Vision and Core Elements document is appended to this epistle.

Next PFYM approved a document which will serve as a guide to the relationship between Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting and Piedmont Friends Fellowship. The two entities will act in Friendly partnership, with the Fellowship developing programming (including youth programming), planning semi-annual workshops and retreats, maintaining a joint website, and handling finances. The Yearly Meeting will turn to the work of nurturing service to monthly meetings and strengthening service and witness in the world. Membership in the Yearly Meeting will require that the monthly meeting or worship group also begin or maintain active membership in the Fellowship.

The final basic elements put in place by the new yearly meeting were approval of a beginning Policy and Procedures Handbook and approval of Friends to serve in the three positions provided in that Handbook: Presiding Clerk, Assisting Clerk, and Recording Clerk. The Handbook also provides for an Interim Meeting of representatives from affiliating meetings and worship groups, which will meet quarterly to do the work of the yearly meeting between annual sessions.

The PFF/YM weekend retreat was rich with activity before and after the yearly meeting annual session. Friends participated in a sharing of our spiritual stories, led by Mary Kay Glazer from Friends General Conference (FGC) traveling ministries. We met in pairs and small groups to answer a variety of queries around our spiritual experiences. One of the highlights of the entire weekend was the storytelling exercise on the history of Piedmont Friends Fellowship and creation of Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting, by way of two or three sentence contributions from over twenty different Friends who rose and spoke out of the silence.

We heard from Lynn and Steve Newsom, directors of Quaker House, which was born in 1969 from the efforts and discernment of Piedmont Friends Fellowship and continues to be a strong witness for peace and healing among military personnel. We also heard about the important work of the American Friends Service Committee in our area from AFSC Friend Lori Fernald Khamala, and the supportive services of FGC from visiting Friend, Eric Evans. Young Friends were treated to a campus tour of nearby Guilford College. Later, some of us participated in a musical drumming session and evening bonfire. Inspired by the yearly meeting annual session, some 18 Friends met to establish a yearly meeting ad hoc working group around local peace and social concerns activities in our various communities.

Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting, in partnership with Piedmont Friends Fellowship, will continue our inward search for spiritual growth and outward witness and service to the world with much joyful unity.

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