

THE OUTGOING EPISTLE OF THE 2017 ANNUAL GATHERING
OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF FRIENDS OF AFRICAN DESCENT

TO FRIENDS EVERYWHERE:

Greetings from the 2017 Annual Gathering of the Fellowship of Friends of African Descent held in at Chestnut Hill Monthly Meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from 25 Day through 27 Day Eighth Month 2017. The theme of this year's Gathering was "The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Us."

The Gathering began with a potluck cookout in the social room of the meeting house which was followed by a period of unprogrammed worship. During the worship there was the singing of hymns and verbal ministry expressing profound gratitude to the Spirit for her many blessings, especially for providing the opportunity for Friends of African Descent to gather together once again.

The Gathering continued Saturday morning in a semi-programmed worship which included a message from our scheduled speaker, Regina Renee Ward. She challenged us to recognize that God has called us and given us the capacity us to engage in works of love to support our communities.

We then resumed with unprogrammed worship during which, our Clerk, Ayesha Imani, turned our attention to the business of the Fellowship. We heard a report on the Fellowship sponsored trip of 35 people of African descent to Ghana, West Africa. The celebration of that trip continued into the evening dinner session during which there was a slideshow of the various activities and venues of the trip including two inspiring visits to Hill House Friends Meeting, an unprogrammed meeting in Accra. Several members of the delegation to Ghana shared the moving experience and sense of homecoming they felt when they set their foot on their ancestral lands for the first time. They also shared the lingering pain of visiting the slave fort in Elmina where their ancestors were beaten, raped and tortured before being forced through the door of no return to be taken across the ocean in slave ships.

During its business meeting, the Fellowship began an insightful discussion about the importance of addressing issues of structural racism, self-determination and community support. A draft minute was considered but it was not ready to be approved. Those in attendance agreed to continue the discussion during the coming year.

Gathering attenders had the opportunity to hear about and celebrate the work and vision of the Ujima Friends Peace Center which just opened two months ago in North Philadelphia. The opening of the Center was one of the commitments made by the Fellowship at its last

Annual Gathering. A report on the Center's activities at the business meeting included a listing of endorsements and expressions of support of the Center by monthly meetings and other Quaker organizations. The celebration culminated at a dedication ceremony at the Center itself during which young people who were involved with the Center's Freedom School work shared their experiences and what they had learned. The Center's first summer Freedom School program developed and used a curriculum combining Quaker principles and traditional African value systems related to peacemaking and mediation. The dedication was followed by an inspiring panel discussion on Quaker activism during which Quaker activists of African descent working in the Philadelphia area each shared the purpose and spiritual basis of their work.

The Gathering experience was one of celebration and commitment. Although we made commitments to continue what we had begun, we realized that there are many more commitments to be made. Those who attended were inspired by the significant progress the Fellowship had made during the last year in both nurturing Quakers of African descent and reaching out to communities of African descent in both Africa and the United States with a witness for peace. We were energized and looked forward to the continuing work of the Spirit in our lives calling us to do ujima, which is to make our brothers and sisters problems our problems and to solve them together.

The Gathering adjourned at 10:40 a.m. 27 Day Eighth Month 2017 to join Chestnut Hill Monthly Meeting in their First Day meeting for Worship. The Fellowship members in attendance thanked Chestnut Hill Monthly for graciously donating their space and hospitality to support the Fellowship during its Gathering.

In peace, love and justice,

The Fellowship of Friends of African Descent