

## **ACCOMPANIMENT IN A TIME OF ADVERSITY**

***An Epistle from the Trans Day of Visibility Gathering at Swarthmore Friends Meeting and Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania and online on March 29, 2026***

*Co-hosted by: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Swarthmore Friends Meeting, Swarthmore College Peace & Conflict Studies Department, Friends Journal, and Pendle Hill*

### **To all Friends everywhere:**

We, 75 Friends gathered from 14 yearly meetings, in person and online, younger and elder, of many genders, greet you in the Light that knows no division and makes all whole. Our gathering, which encompassed Quakers from the USA, Britain, Canada, Costa Rica, Ireland, Kenya met in worship, heard one another's witness, and we have been changed. Friends communities vary in the words we use to describe our faith and experiences; we hope that this epistle will be received with hearts open to the spirit behind the words.

### **OUR TESTIMONY**

From our beginnings, the Religious Society of Friends has known that there is the Light of God in every person. This truth calls us to live authentically, to see one another wholly, and to resist all that denies the Divine within. We, including transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, and intersex Friends, carry this Light together and share it with the whole body. This witness, shared within our community, testifies to integrity and authenticity: living undivided in a world that demands conformity.

Many within our community face rejection, violence, and laws that deny dignity and safety, and all are diminished when any member is harmed. We are told that some of our lives are a controversy rather than a testimony. We reject this falsehood. These lives are not up for debate. When the Spirit moves, it often leads beyond what the world is ready to accept. Generations of Friends have known this. We knew and were faithful to it when Friends led on the role of women in faith communities. We are called to know it again. This work is our testimony.

### **OUR EXAMINATION**

We — transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, and intersex Friends, and those who stand with them — have not always been faithful. We confess to, at times, choosing comfort over courage, silence over solidarity, and writing minutes of

affirmation over actually practicing accompaniment. We ask ourselves, how much are we losing because some stories are silenced? We repent of these failures and turn again toward the Light, which shows where we have fallen short and how we are called forward.

Trans, intersex, and gender nonconforming Friends have always been part of us — like Clara Lone Cox, Roberta Dickinson, and Sally Gross — along with countless others whose courage was unseen and whose contributions were forgotten, whose stories were always known to those who lived them, and which we are only now beginning to more fully receive. Their faithfulness was a gift, whether or not it was acknowledged. Trans, nonbinary, genderfluid, and intersex Friends continue to be a part of all of our communities. When we can be known and recognized in our full selves, our spiritual gifts can be more fully exercised.

## **OUR CALLING**

Called beyond affirmation, we move toward faithful presence, guided by continuing revelation. We cannot be whole when any within our community are asked to live in shadow, and many among us have lived in exactly that shadow, sustained by an Inner Light that was not always fully seen or supported.

Messages in worship reminded us that in the in between places, the naturally brackish places where fresh and salt water meet, new life emerges. By being more faithful to ourselves, by living authentically and following the leadings of Spirit, we are better prepared to meet the Light of God in others.

Accompaniment means walking together through valleys and upon mountains, moving as one body. It means bearing one another's burdens, rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep. It means carrying each other's light when the path grows dark, remembering those in bonds as if bound with them, and suffering with those who endure adversity as our own body, because it is.

We are building Friends Meetings and communities where transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, and intersex Friends do not merely exist, but lead, shape, teach, and flourish — where their leadings are welcomed, their spiritual gifts are received with joy, and reciprocal care is made visible in daily life. Faithfulness takes form in courage, in love made visible, and in standing with one another each day. Silence broken in community can become a light we will carry forward.

## **ADVICES AND QUERIES TO FRIENDS**

Friends, we offer these advices and queries for reflection and action. We are all of us imperfect, and, our actions matter, no matter how small or large.

*On Accompaniment:* Offer spiritual care that walks alongside, not ahead or behind. Provide clearness, listening, and trust as Friends discern their leadings, recognizing that gender-diverse Friends are guides and ministers, not only recipients of care.

*On Meeting Practice:* Make loving welcome visible in language, leadership, and presence. Use respectful pronouns, support Pride participation, ensure trans-inclusive publications, and ensure gender-diverse Friends hold real authority and leadership. Provide gender-neutral bathrooms. Let meetings show clearly: you are beloved, you belong, and you are needed here.

*On Material Support:* Accompaniment requires more than words. Share resources, stand with those facing harm, and assist with practical barriers such as documentation or transportation, especially when basic needs like health care and drivers' licenses are denied.

*On Youth and Families:* Ensure young people know they are cherished — not as projects of care, but as whole persons with gifts to offer. Support both youth and families with care, patience, and practical help.

*On Learning and Transformation:* Do not place the full burden of teaching on those within our community most affected. Do the work of learning. Listen with care across the many cultural contexts in which Friends navigate gender diversity. Be willing to be changed. We are all teachers, and all students.

*On Public Witness:* Stand together for the full dignity, rights, and authenticity of all people. Let faith be visible in the world, especially when it costs something.

*On Worship:* Return again to the Source. Ask where we are being called, and trust the Spirit that continues to lead us into deeper truth.

*Queries for Discernment:*

- In what ways does our meeting receive and honor the gifts of all members, including the many gifts of transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, and intersex Friends?
- How are we offering and receiving spiritual support among those discerning gender journeys?
- What stops us from faithful accompaniment, and what is needed to move through those barriers?
- Do transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, and intersex Friends experience themselves as cherished and central to our community? How do we know?

## **OUR COMMITMENT**

We do not send this epistle as those who have arrived, but as those still being taught — by the Spirit and by one another. Within our community are Friends who have lived these truths with courage, patience, and authenticity, often without the full support of the community, and their witness calls us all into deeper integrity. Among us are also Friends whose understanding has deepened more recently. Both are part of this body. By answering the Light of God in each other, we are able to forgive and reconcile. What we commit to now is that no one among us will carry that weight without the full support of the whole.

To trans, nonbinary, genderfluid, and intersex people, we pledge to continue working to make our communities places where we support each other in showing up as our full selves. Friends communities should be places where all can belong and be accepted.

We commit ourselves to this work: to examining our meetings, our practices, and our lives; to offering not only words but actions; and to standing together, not as distant allies, but as one body. We commit to trusting continuing revelation, even when it unsettles us.

## **OUR HOPE**

In a time marked by fear, division, and harm, we remember another way: the way of accompaniment, the way of truth, the way of the Light that makes all whole. Through spirit, we can transcend the limitations placed on each of us and overcome exclusion with community.

We invite all Friends to join us now. We are part of one another. We hear the call to live into the testimony of Ubuntu: I am because we are. Let our worship,

presence, and actions bear witness to what we have seen, known, and been together — the love, courage, beauty, and deep spiritual life that belong to all of us when we are truly one body.

We walk this path not because it is easy, but because it is faithful. May we walk boldly in the Light — holding one another's burdens, celebrating one another's joys, and learning from one another — so that all may live whole and free.

*From a gathering of Friends at Swarthmore, Pennsylvania and online, March 29, 2026, held in worship and sent forth in hope that it may be read, shared, and lived among Friends everywhere.*

*Signed on behalf of the gathering:*