Clerk’s Farewell From Barbara Esther
To Friends in SAYMA, July 2020

As I complete my term as clerk of the Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association, I want to share a few thoughts. It is my hope that these thoughts might help our yearly meeting to act on a shared vision and deepen our faith. What is a vision? I might describe it as looking ahead after deep examination and acting with respect and integrity.

What is my vision for SAYMA?
- Diverse meetings bringing together those who enjoy Quaker ways of worship, tapping and witnessing to the living Spirit communally;

- Getting better acquainted, sharing and listening to each other as we seek way forward;

- Notable absence of judgement or negativity toward ideas or individuals, or the history of the Religious Society of Friends. Instead we can use history as a source of both strength and example, as well as a way to educate ourselves as to mistakes and needless suffering resulting from oppression by those who thought they were superior to others. Use of these lessons to acknowledge wrong but also to create a new paradigm: one that emphasizes and lives out an appreciation of the diverse experiences, cultures and contributions to Quaker life; Quaker witness in the world; Quaker testimonies to guide our actions.

- We utterly denied all fighting, strife and outward wars in 1661, but when we use the weapons of criticizing, demeaning, and demanding we have turned away from that denial. The old saying about sticks and stones and words has been proven wrong repeatedly: threatening and hurtful words will result in division, pain, damage and trauma. We must deny use of violent language, as well.

Friends have a long tradition of reaching out to those on both sides of a conflict: to both individuals in a marriage in crisis, both sides wounded in wars, both perpetrators and victims. We must continue to trust the leadings of the Spirit and respect the Inner Light in each other as well as in those outside of the RSoF. SAYMA’s Guide to Our Faith and Practice says, “The testimony of integrity is not simply telling the truth, it is speaking and acting in and from the divine in each situation.” (p. 44)

Going beyond ego to seek to live out the truth revealed to us as we seek it together can transform us. That is my vision for this yearly meeting. I hope it will be so.