



EPISTLES FROM YEARLY BUSINESS MEETING ANNUAL SESSIONS 2012

April 8, 2012

**Cheerful greetings to Friends everywhere,**

In the loving and celebratory spirit of our yearly meeting, with faith, we urge you to be moved with the message of our theme this year, “Make a Joyful Noise at Every Opportunity.”

*For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace;  
The mountains and hills before you shall break forth into singing,  
And all the trees of the forest shall clap their hands.*

—Isaiah 55:12

**S**outheastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held its 2012 annual sessions and Gathering April 4 to 8 at the Florida United Methodist Life Enrichment Center in Fruitland Park, Florida. The weather cooperated, being nearly perfect for outdoor activities the whole weekend. 176 persons attended, including 35 first-time attenders.

Twenty-nine young Friends in four groups, Wee Friends, Elementary School-age, Middle School-age, and High School-age participated in the Youth Program. The program was well organized and well led. It carefully complied with our policies, developed over several years, to provide a safe environment for the youth who flourished. Adults participated in many capacities. Highlights included a tubing trip to Rock Springs at Kelly Park, making drums and dulcimers which the young Friends could take to their home meetings, participating in drum circles, and intergenerational games.

The participation of Young Adult Quakers (YAQs) enhanced the experience of all Friends from the oldest to the youngest.

The theme of the Gathering was carried throughout our activities, raising our spirits and producing a Spirit-filled community. We rejoiced with singing, dancing, playing instruments, and laughing, accompanied frequently by the joyful sounds of children at play. Early morning “silent” worship was accented with the vocal ministry of birds singing. After breakfast, Worship Sharing reflected on readings, including the Isaiah quote above, and queries, bringing Light to lead us into business sessions.

Our annual Walton Lecture was given by Tom Neilson, an award-winning Quaker folk musician, who related in story and many songs his global metamorphosis from farm boy to draft resister to activist and performing musician to parent to our SEYM Walton Lecturer. In addition to the lecture, Tom gave a mini-concert one evening, met with our youth, and involved the children in the performance of songs.

There were many high points of the four days of music and poetry, readings and dramatic renditions, sharings and moments of inspiration in worship. Many varied interest groups and workshops brought Friends together to share the Light with regard to spiritual leadings, peace, social, environmental, and other yearly meeting concerns.

For many of us, an epiphany came the first evening, as we teamed together in small intergenerational groups to write songs we would perform the next day! Our selected topics included peace, justice, equality, racism, pets, and chocolate. With some trepidation, groups formed, and then intense, noisy

but generally cheerful discussion filled the air. In the morning, we came forward by ones, twos, threes or more, children and adult, newcomers and seasoned Friends—and shared! Wonder of wonders, powerful songs and poems and witty ditties came forth, with evidence of some musical and poetic skill among us. In the best tradition of our Yearly Meeting, loving listening met the efforts of Friends. The learning and self-discovery were enhanced by the opportunity to share our experience of writing songs together.

The testimonies of Friends and our related concerns were of great importance at this Gathering. Quaker Earthcare Witness was well represented and grew during the course of our time here. The Friends Committee on National Legislation connected our state concerns to national and international ones as presented by Matt Southworth, an Iraq War veteran, from FCNL. In the shadow of the killing of Trayvon Martin in nearby Sanford, Florida, social concerns were on the minds of many in prayers and in workshops. Through the leading of an Orlando Friend, inspired by an article in *Friends Journal* and with her meeting's support, a minute opposing mass incarceration and "the new Jim Crow" was brought forth. We gladly received the report from ProNica, the service organization in Nicaragua under the spiritual guidance of the yearly meeting. We welcomed Maria Elena Bonilla of the Acahualinca Women's Center that provides services for people living in and around the city dump of Managua, Nicaragua. SEYM may be the best coiffed yearly meeting, as we came away with new haircuts from the "Worship Shearing" tent, a project to raise money to support a beauty school, one of the projects of the Acahualinca Center.

The yearly meeting advanced its concern to nurture the Friends Worship Group (unprogrammed) of Havana, Cuba. A committee was approved to explore how to improve communications and further address the request received at the 2011 SEYM Gathering, to take the worship group under the care of the yearly meeting.

We were also blessed with powerful messages and strong participation by representatives of other Friends organizations, including Friends General Conference, Earlham School of Religion, and Earlham College. Our representatives to American Friends Service Committee brought us lanyards that were recycled from water bottles and a new booklet, "An Introduction to Quaker Testimonies," for our meetings and worship groups.

We return to the world outside this quiet retreat with a heightened awareness of the problems of the world and the work to be done, but also with refreshed spirits to go forward with songs in our hearts.

Holding the whole world in the Light,  
The Epistle Committee: Warren Hoskins, Andrea Walsh, Caroline Lanker



Phoebe Andersen, Clerk  
Southeastern Yearly Meeting

## 2012 SEYM Elementary and Wee Friends' Epistle

Dear Friends Around the World,

We are writing from the SEYM Annual Gathering in Fruitland Park, FL. On Wednesday we wrote songs about life, peace, chocolate, pets, and revolution with Tom Neilson.

On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, we did worship sharing in the mornings. We did things like the human sound machine, animal yoga, singing hot potato, making and playing drums, painting, playdoh, and parachute games. We also went on a nature walk and saw a poisonous caterpillar, air plants, spiders, and smilax. We made Amigos, a dulcimer with only one string. We celebrated Easter with an Easter egg hunt. But the thing we will remember most is the new and old friends we made this weekend. And making friends is the best a Quaker could get.

Sincerely,

Hoyt Cotter

Dylan Driscoll

Julia Humphrey

Daniel Humphrey

Alaya Knowlton

Hana Knowlton

Dakota Palmer

Kylee Palmer

Christi Porter

Priya Nwakanma

Kiran A. Nwakanma,

Aaron Olson

Henry Rumschlag

Martin Werner-Hernandez





## The 2012 Junior Youth Epistle

To Quakers everywhere,

We are the Juniors of Southeastern Yearly Meeting Gathering 2012. We met in Fruitland Park, Florida. It was very nice to meet new people and old friends. We got to know each other better by playing a group game called Signs. We also tubed down a river in Kelly Park and all learned new things about each other.

We participated in many intergenerational activities. Learning to square dance, the intergenerational Dance and playing giant bananagrams were activities we especially enjoyed. Square dancing was a new experience for everyone and very fun. At the Intergenerational Dance we met new people of all ages while having a great time laughing and dancing silly dances. Finally playing giant bananagrams outside was a fun twist to one of our favorite games. With 144 1-foot by 1-foot letters, giant bananagrams was a challenging and entertaining. This game was great exercise physically and exercised our team building skills.

We enjoyed the Music theme this year, because it was very memorable. For this theme we worship-shared in the car on the way to tubing. Each of us juniors picked a song, read the lyrics, and then told how the song was meaningful to us. We enjoyed Tom Neilson's lecture and concert because we thought it is was more interesting than usual.

Finally we watched Lis Sundberg's documentary on music's role in the civil rights movement. It gave us an example of music in social movements. Overall, the whole experience was very fun and enlightening.

Sincerely,  
The 2012 Junior Youth  
Ben Connors  
Sara Humphrey  
Ariel Rogers-Schwartz  
Kate Sundberg  
Lis Sundberg

SEYM Junior Youth

## Teen Epistle from SEYM Teens

Dear Friends Worldwide,

We started off our journey reconnecting with our old and new friends coming together to discuss our theme of servant leadership.

Thursday began with a junior and teen Worship Sharing with Cheryl Demers. We took a break to play an exciting intergenerational game of kickball. Then we got to the center of our program: *Learning About Servant Leadership* with Josh Rumschlag. Servant leaders are those who lead by example. They aren't necessarily the person with the most ability and power, but have the integrity and communication skills to motivate.

With the addition of a couple more friends, we set off on our adventures to Kelly Park for fun times in the water. With a thunderstorm greeting us at the door, we rallied on for a sun-filled afternoon of snorkeling, tubing, and basking in the sun. However, our day did not stop there. Upon our return, we hopped out of the van into Gary Arthur's enthusiastic contra dance lessons. Later that night at the intergenerational dance, we got to show off our skills. That transitioned into Tom Neilson's concert of personal experiences.

Saturday morning we started off our day by learning about Servant Leaders within music from Woody Guthrie to Tupac. After lunch, Susan Taylor enlightened us about the importance of servant leadership in clerking. Thanks to Joe Guy, we got to experience playing a life-size version of bananagrams learning some interesting new words. Diving right into our workshop with and for all SEYM Friends, the Teen Fishbowl, we discussed questions provided by the adults. We completed our SEYM program by attending the Walton Lecture that evening.

Leading into next year, Noah Connors and Jocelynn Benton will be co-clerking the teen program with our theme of Quakerism.

Aurelio Anderson

Jocelynn Benton

Noah Connors

Laura Martin

Jane Sallen

