



April 24, 2011

To Friends everywhere we send greetings from the Methodist Life Enrichment Center in Leesburg, Florida.

We gathered April 20-24 for our 2011 Yearly Meeting around the theme, "Continuing the Work of John Woolman & Lucretia Mott: Healing, Racism, & Testimonies." Unity and healing were a thread that ran throughout our journey. We were offered an opportunity to reflect on our role, for good or bad, in the national shame of racism. The co authors of *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans and the Myth of Racial Justice*, Vanessa Julye and Donna Mc Daniel, led us through lecture, worship and workshops as we explored our individual participation in both the problem and the solution. We were moved when a Friend rose to share Valerie Barlow's poem, "*We Owe You an Apology*".

In the sharing of a visiting friend from Cuba, about her struggle to have unprogrammed worship accepted, we saw ourselves. We know well the experience of being misunderstood by Friends and are seeking way forward on how to help care for that unprogrammed worship group.

We have committed to supporting the spirit of family and extending periods of intergenerational activities. We rejoiced in our revitalized youth program and were enriched when older Friends shared their experiences of living Florida history as part of Wednesday night's Walton Lecture. Many joined young Friends in a trip to the world's largest carriage museum where one of the group explained the role of horse and carriage in the lives of Quakers. The extra time we spent blending reignited the fun of Yearly Meeting offering us many opportunities for laughter.

There was time for worship, in the morning by the lake, around the plenary sessions and in daily worship-sharing on our theme. We spent worshipful threshing on what is next for Southeastern Yearly Meeting. From the silence, Friends spoke of what they liked about Yearly Meeting and what they felt would make the experience richer, how we might "serve as an instrument of God's grace". The sharing was rich and heartfelt.

So many of our Meeting gathered with hope for a spirit of healing. With the approval of the final section of our Faith and Practice, with the renewal of the Young Adult Quaker Program within our body, we go forth from this place feeling that with laughter, love and worship, the healing has begun.

With love and hope for future growth and healing,

The Epistle Committee: Cheryl Demers-Holton, Mimi McAdoo and Elizabeth Croce

Susan Taylor, outgoing Clerk
for Southeastern Yearly Meeting

Young Adult Quakers (YAQ)

23rd day, 4th month, 2011

To Friends Everywhere,

Greetings from the young adults of Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. We write with great joy, to share the news of our newly-revived Young Adult Quakers (YAQ) program.

The desire to create and maintain an active young adult program arose from an unfulfilled need that we perceived in our community, to support the transition of young Friends from the youth program into meaningful participation in the wider yearly meeting. We hope that this program will also serve young adults who are new to Quakerism, or to the yearly meeting, by providing a peer support network, and encourage renewed participation by younger members of the yearly meeting who have not attended sessions recently.

As we considered our leadings regarding the new program, we affirmed our commitment to participation in the yearly meeting as a whole, and our intention to design a program that will support, rather than detract, from that engagement. We ask that Friends who receive this epistle pray for our faithfulness. In addition, we invite correspondence from Friends in other young adult programs to share ideas, resources, and encouragement.

Yearly meeting sessions this year have provided us with spiritual enrichment and opportunities for service. Our central project was an exploration of the recent anthology *Spirit Rising: Young Quaker Voices*. A writing workshop and discussion of the book's material prepared us to lead an evening presentation for the yearly meeting which included readings, music, and the sharing of a poem collaboratively written by the YAQs. We also participated in a fishbowl, in which older adults could ask anonymous questions of the young adults and teens. Both of these activities afforded us the opportunity to share ourselves and our program with the older adults of the yearly meeting, and we felt blessed by the enthusiasm and support we received in return.

The presence and leadership of young adults extended beyond our own program, as we led and participated in workshops, served on committees, presented representative reports, and attended plenary business sessions. We brought these experiences to bear in the conduct of our own meeting for worship with attention to business, as we endeavored to practice faithful Quaker process. We hope that the experience of conducting our own business will help us to participate more deeply in the business of the wider body.

As we develop policy and structure for an ongoing young adult program, we carry a concern that our program be accessible to Friends regardless of financial circumstances. We hope to be flexible and creative in addressing this need.

The creation and support of a new program is a significant undertaking. We recognize that without the logistical support—and, more importantly, spiritual support, nurture, and affirmation—we have received from other Friends in the yearly meeting, the re-emergence of this program would not have been possible. From our experiences in this community, we learn nothing less than the transformational power of unconditional love.

“no longer are you servants, passive and incomplete
now called Friends, from this moment from this seat
stand up, quake as you rise

the Power lies inside of you, Love is the prize
bearing, believing, hoping, enduring-- all
this is the still, small voice of Her child's call"

—Zachary Moon, from "Psalm 151," Spirit Rising

In the Light of God's Love,

Elizabeth Croce and Daniel Doan, co-clerks

The following poem was collectively composed by the young adults in a writing workshop. Our hope was not to create something of great literary merit, but to reflect something of how Truth moves in our lives. It is in the spirit of ministry that we offer it as an attachment to our epistle.

God was not in the storm.
God was in the still, small voice.
Spirit, Goddess,
Christ Jesus,
The Inner Light,
Holy Ghost
At the water's edge at twilight,
The summit of a mountain,
The woods surrounding the Arthur Morgan School.
The values that will follow me all the time.
Walk cheerfully over the world,
Answering that of God
In everyone.
Your Friends
Are mirrors for yourself.
I love God, and sometimes
My deepest loving of God happens
Through loving others--
But I fight it.
Quakerism is who I am
And who I have always been.

SEYM Jr. Yearly Meeting, Teen Group

Starting her first SEYM experience in years alone, Laura learned about “Quanganism” from Lynn Carol Henderson to start our lessons about world religions. This new view of traditional Paganism was a fantastic beginning to the similarities and differences we discovered in other religions. Lynn Carol taught how cranberry juice was, much as in Christian traditions of the communion, symbolic of blood.

The next day, Jane joined Laura in the adventures of the high ropes course, where they learned important lessons about trust. They were joined by some of the YAQ’s and members of Earth First. After a discussion-filled lunch with the Earth Firsters, we joined the juniors for an exciting, intergenerational game of kickball. Following the teen victory, we cooled off at the pool. Realizing the importance of timeliness, we ran to our Buddhism lesson with Peter Crockett. Peter taught us about reincarnation and the eight-fold path, as well as the concept of nirvana. He enlightened us that, contrary to our beliefs, the Buddha’s belly has no significance. During a meditation session, we learned the importance of silence and how difficult it is to maintain when you’re sick and need to cough. At dinner, Donna McDaniel gave us a brief insight into the topic of the Walton Lecture: real Quaker history. We learned some surprising truths about Quakers during the Civil War era. Following dinner, we attended the ever-entertaining intergenerational dance and talent show led by Gary Arthur and Lis Sundberg. The YAQ program, a reading of selections from Spirit Rising, was an enlightening look into how other young Friends view their faith. As a sweet end to a long day, we met in the gold room kitchen to bake cookies.

Saturday began with our final exploration into world religions manifested as a spirit-led discussion of Christianity led by Master Professor Limpke. We realized how we’d been saved from some extremities of Christian beliefs from our Quaker association. At lunch, our discussion moved to QEW and FCNL issues with Marcia Cleveland. We learned from her the importance of lobbying. After that, we had a nice break in our schedule to enjoy some downtime with our younger Friends. We partook in a pretzel-esque game of Twister and an exciting game of Settlers of Catan. Next came the annual fishbowl. Do we really not talk to you enough? Maybe next year we’ll have a yakking with YAQ’s table at meal times so your need to communicate with youth can be met. After a free dinner, we attended the Walton Lecture. To end the day, we gathered in the campsite for a camp fire with s’mores and group singing.

In our plenary session, we decided our theme for next year would be servant leadership. We’ll be learning about the importance of learning leadership through service. Jane will continue to be clerk, so our program next year will certainly be as well put-together as it was this year.

On behalf of all of the teens, we’d like to thank Rolf and Josh for being our friendly adult presences and helping us through the gathering.