

BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING EPISTLE

1 August 2004

To Friends everywhere:

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends gathered at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia from 26 Seventh month to 1 Eighth Month, 2004, for our 333rd Annual Sessions. Friends found ourselves challenged by the theme for this Annual Session, “Inclusive or Exclusive? Meeting God in Everyone.” Spirit-led ministry throughout our sessions reminded us of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, whose message of radical inclusion led him to minister among the poor, the outcast, and the voiceless of his time. We asked ourselves how have we excluded others in our past, and what must we do to remedy the injustices we see today in our world.

Our retreat opened us to experience the healing power of touch and prayer and helped Friends to be open to the leadings of Spirit during our business sessions. We felt the truth and power in the message we heard in Britain Yearly Meeting’s Epistle (2004), that “prayer is love in action and therefore profoundly subversive....”

Traveling minister Vanessa Julye and Donna McDaniel blessed our gathering by sharing with us historical research they have undertaken, supported by Friends General Conference, on the relationship of African-Americans with and in the Religious Society of Friends from 1688 through the present day. The sources they presented described Friends’ lengthy practice of slave-holding, fears of inter-racial marriage and denial to African-Americans of membership in the Society and admission to Friends schools. We learned that despite our testimony of equality and examples of creative resistance, Quakers share a legacy of racism similar to the world in which we live.

Friends labored, with several threshing sessions, over a concern regarding our relationship with Friends United Meeting (FUM), to which we belong. The concern was minuted by several Monthly Meetings, brought before our Third Month Interim Meeting, seasoned, revisited in Sixth Month Interim Meeting and then forwarded to the Yearly Meeting in session. FUM has a long-standing policy requiring its staff and volunteers to affirm to being celibate outside of marriage while also defining marriage as solely between one man and one woman. Yearly Meeting Friends feel the injustice that this policy has visited upon us all.

Tony Campolo, founder and President of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education, challenged us with humor and biblical passages to center ourselves in authentic Christian witness, as understood in the Beatitudes, and to evangelize from this center. Tracey Peterson, Director of Campus and Quaker Ministries at Earlham College, brought her pastoral gifts to the Carey Memorial Lecture, pulling these themes from the week she had spent among us: passion, leadership and what it means to be an inclusive community. The Inward Teacher meets us at the place of our passions; she urged us to pay attention to that and embrace a “holy boldness.”

Throughout this session, Friends were aware that this was the final Yearly Meeting session with Lamar Matthew as Clerk. Several Friends read a minute they had prepared expressing love and profound appreciation for his six years of service. They then sang a five-verse tribute to him, to the tune of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” with all present joining in the chorus, “Thank thee, kindly Friend Lamar....” Lamar, in turn, thanked Friends for the opportunity to serve.

While the business sessions, workshops and interest groups engaged us, we were mindful that some one third of those present for the week participated in Junior Yearly Meeting and the Youth Program – children, teens and the adults who nurture them. We showed our love to our children this year by singing a song to them during a business meeting session – “How could anyone ever tell you, you are anything less than beautiful?”

Our treasured camping program reveals to us and nurtures the deep spiritual well within our children, as does our Youth Program. We operate “not a ‘camping program,’ but summer religious education in an outdoor setting.” Friends expressed gratitude to Josh Riley, Camp Administrative Director, as he moves on to another calling. In sharing the secret of the program’s success, Josh reminded us of the simplicity of being inclusive: “We love each child for exactly who he or she is.”

In the Light,

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

YOUNG FRIENDS’ EPISTLE

Young Friends kicked off the conference year with a Yearly Meeting gathering centering on gender. Peggy O’Neil led the girls in a guided meditation to explore their inner goddesses, while Alan Schintzius led the boys in breathing exercises, and finding their own totem animals and archetypes. He also shared many stories (and coffee) with them. Those who felt uncomfortable in the gender-separated environments created their own gender-neutral workshop. This culminated in a Sufi dancing workshop in which the Young Friends re-grouped. We

painted Tibetan prayer flags (and each other) and hung them up in the main field. Yearly Meeting was also the birthplace of Clothing Swap, a tradition Young Friends continue to this day. We all shed tears as we bid farewell to our good friend and Youth Secretary, Michele.

In October, Young Friends gathered at Adelphi Monthly Meeting. We participated in a writing workshop, celebrated a birthday of one of our community members, and watched a fire dance. There were nearly seventy attendees.

We assembled at Langley Hill Monthly Meeting in November to enjoy an impromptu workshop led by two of our own Young Friends. An injury resulting from a playful game created the need for a hospital visit. Fortunately, the injury was not terribly serious and the member was able to return to the gathering. The experience reminded the community of the importance of medforms. An attempted re-birth of the scooter races met with partial success, tempered by the cold weather. A candidate for the Youth Secretary position also joined us. Little did we know then that Hope Braveheart would become such an integral and amazing part of our community?

Baltimore Stony Run Monthly Meeting graciously housed us in February, where we enjoyed a love feast in which Friends were not permitted to feed themselves. A representative from Help Increase the Peace led us in a conflict resolution workshop. We explored cultural differences and how to overcome them. Finger-painting and Valentines were also fun activities.

The Bus Trip to Shiloh Quaker Camp in April was the formal welcome for Hope Braveheart, our new Youth Secretary. We sang around a roaring campfire and participated in a Kundolini Yoga workshop led by Makunday Moore, an attendee's mother. More than 80 Young Friends were in attendance.

In June, our dear BYM clerk, Lamar Matthew, came to Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting to speak to us about Quaker process and the spiritual reasoning behind it. He wore an awesome cicada shirt we all loved. It read "Cicadas for peace: billions of us can't be wrong!" Unfortunately, we immediately had to put his advice into practice to deal with a pressing and difficult issue. It was handled with all the grace and maturity for which Young Friends are known. We said a teary farewell to our longtime Friendly Adult Presence, Tom Fox. Our goodbye included a worship sharing and word blast. We wish him the best in his current endeavors with Christian Peacemaker Teams.

It has been a year of transition for our community, as we welcomed many and said goodbye to some. We look forward to seeing where the next exciting year will take us.

With Love and Light,

The Young Friends of Baltimore Yearly Meeting

JUNIOR YOUNG FRIENDS EPISTLE

Dear Friends,

This past week we have had a number of interesting activities and experiences. One was on the first day of Baltimore Yearly Meeting sessions. We had the pleasure of choosing a clerk and recording clerk. It was a difficult process because we only had two people deciding on three candidates. The final people were Callen Rain as a clerk and Erica Messenger as recording clerk.

As our service project, we put on a comedy, *Rumplestilskin*, as a sock puppet show for the Junior Yearly Meeting afternoon program. They loved it.

Later we took a trip to the Arboretum to walk through the memorial garden and do the labyrinth. Kevin Lee, visiting from New England Yearly Meeting accompanied us with drumming as a centering activity. We walked the labyrinth in silence, many tried to walk barefoot on the gravel to improve their earth connection. It was a very spiritual and centering experience for many of us.

One reason we love our room is because of the pool table and ping pong table. We played many games there and all appreciate them being there.

For our overnight, we decided to have sundaes and realized our diversity in the choosing of the toppings, eleven to be exact. Also during the overnight, we viewed *The Breakfast Club*. It was an interesting movie and we enjoyed it. The movie expressed our theme this year – inclusion and exclusion.

One of the high points of the week was that we got to hang out with a great group of Friends.

One of the more annoying games was the game Bop-it Extreme. The highest score in the group was thirty-seven.

A less annoying and more fun game was Bob the Weasel. “Keep it moving, keep it moving...” The few times we played it we enjoyed it very much.

This year was a great success and we hope we’ll do great stuff next year.

Yours in the Light,

Callen Rain

Alex Shulman

Max Shulman Macy Smith

Erica Messenger

Lydia Rain

Daniel Gillespie

Timmy Bedford

Nigel Buchanan-Wollaston