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Baltimore Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

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The Epistle Reported to Annual Session at Frostburg, MD 8th Month 10th Day, 2014

To Friends Everywhere,

Friends gathered for the 343rd Annual Session of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, from Eighth month, 4 to 10, on the campus of Frostburg State University, in Western Maryland. Our theme this year was “Transformation and Healing”. Our opening retreat focused on bringing our differences into the light. We were reminded that the only constant in life is change, and that change can generate conflict. The word “discernment” kept arising for us as we were led to consider new ways of seeing our differences as something that has the potential to strengthen or even transform our relationships. These themes continued to nourish us throughout the week. Morning Bible study, inspired by a passage from Luke (6:28) - “bless those who curse you” - encouraged us to expand our understanding of who is part of our beloved community. Worship sharing groups also met each morning to consider queries centered on healing and transformation.

Sue Regen, carrying a Travel Minute from Rochester Monthly Meeting, New York Yearly Meeting, shared with us her ministry on “Forgiveness as a Spiritual Practice”. She led us through a guided meditation called The Arms of God Prayer, moving us towards opening our hearts to someone with whom we are struggling. On Wednesday afternoon Mark Tayac, founder of the Tayac Territory Singers and Dancers, and his son Naiche Tayac, shared with us the culture and music of the Piscataway nation, reminding us that American Indians are still here among us. He spoke of how the drum is the heartbeat of life, and that all people everywhere have the same heartbeat. One of our Friends from Kenya shared that the dances made him feel at home. Earlier in the day, the delegation from Friends Theological College, in Kaimosi, Kenya had blessed us with the message “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other.”

Margery Post Abbot, a released Friend whose ministry is supported by the Multnomah Monthly Meeting, North Pacific Yearly Meeting, spoke of how “power over” dominates and demeans, while “power of the Light” enables us to walk side by side as equals. She reflected on the power Margaret Fell knew as the source for transformation of the human heart, and of the world. She shared a vision of “the wild power of love let loose in the world” and called us to witness to a new way of being, faithful to the new creation.

Our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business moved us toward healing and transformation. We approved a Minute on Inclusion, affirming the right of all individuals, including transgender people to understand and express themselves with authenticity and integrity. We shared our deep concern for the child refugees crossing the United States border, for those who are unjustly incarcerated, and for those who are suffering in Israel and Palestine. We agreed to bring back to our Meetings a concern for climate change, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. We

welcomed our new Development Director, and approved our first ever capital expenditure budget. Together, we worked on building a “mini cabin” as a fundraiser for our camping program. We heard of the “ministry of presence” that will be the focus of our longstanding inter-visitation program, and received a report from our Vision Implementation Committee, urging us to take simple, achievable steps to strengthen our connections with each other. We were reminded when reports come before us, to look for that of the Spirit, not the fatal flaws.

Our Presiding Clerk Betsy Meyer completed her term of service. We joined in a joyful and tearful appreciation, and a hymn based on the 23rd psalm.

We enjoyed times of play and laughter, including a high energy all-age celebration featuring ice cream and a candlelight labyrinth, and our sometimes raucous Saturday evening coffee house. The presence of our children and young people among us, and the visibility of our thriving camping program, are a continuing source of energy and joy. We treasure the feeling of family we experience here in Baltimore Yearly Meeting. We are grateful to the many volunteers who help us keep our Yearly Meeting’s commitment to support young families and serve our youth well.

Our Clerk shared a message that seemed to capture where we find ourselves:

In so much of what we do as a worshipping community, we are wandering in the wilderness together, seeking Divine guidance, or we are in exile together, struggling to articulate a common understanding based on our experiences of the Divine. We feel frustrated when we cannot see where we are going or agree on the end product. But we have to realize that the journey is more important than the destination. It is the journey together that makes us a worshipping community. And on the journey we are healed and transformed.

As we undertake this journey together, we are challenged by words lifted up during our Memorial Meeting: “Who will take up the work that this Friend has laid down.” Perhaps the answer lies in a song the children shared with us in spoken word and sign language:

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.



Epistle of Young Adult Friends Accepted 8th Month 10th Day, 2014

For Twenty Thirteen - Fourteen:
A Long-Form Haiku

In winter we came
and gathered amongst our Friends,
warm in Washington.

We had three workshops.
Tory Smith and Liv Henry
discussed policy.

They taught us about
combating the use of drones

via lobbying.

We were pleased to have
Bill McPherson, Pulitzer
Winning journalist.

We sat in the sun
and listened to his tales of
war and history.

Then Friends from ad hoc
Vision Implementation
Committee joined us,

for apparently,
Friends struggle talking to YAFs,
so we lent our help.

That night we relaxed,
playing games and sharing love,

grateful for our Friends.

Homewood held May Con,
and though our numbers were small,
many joys were shared.

Chuck Vekert discussed
combat and PTSD,
sharing ways to cope.

This was followed by
a trip to the Museum of
Art in Baltimore.

That night we ate out,
a long-time YAF tradition,
this time Golden West.

Annual Session
was spent with Friends young and old
working together.

In Business Meeting
we continued to struggle
with the YAF Facebook,

contemplating change
because of technology
and the internet.

But we still worshipped,
swam and played games with Young Friends,
and went out to lunch.

As YAFs keep growing,
we would like to thank all Friends
for love and support.

As many may know,
kindness can move great mountains,
and though we struggle,

it is nice to know
we always have each other,
together as Friends.

In love and in light,
B.Y.M. Young Adult Friends
Refrigerator.

Epistle of Young Friends Accepted 8th Month 10th Day, 2014

This year, the Young Friends community gathered together for five conferences and Annual Session, consisting of enlightening workshops and fun activities, which helped to foster a greater community. As we welcomed the rising 9th graders and entered the new year, Young Friends discussed important issues that the community faced as well as assessed how to best support outside communities.

In September, Young Friends reunited at Adelphi Friends Meeting with smiles and laughter, setting a joyful atmosphere for the conference. We enjoyed a workshop on journalism that stressed the importance of reporting issues that have very little press coverage, such as the self-immolation of Tibetan monks. This also focused on finding the truth through Quaker values along the journey. In



response to a letter from PCYM, Young Friends addressed gendered sleeping spaces and how attempt to be inclusive of all gender identities so that we can greater foster a community of love and light. This letter included our minute on sexual activity and our views on how gendered sleeping spaces enforce heteronormativity and isolate our Queer community. Friends enjoyed a dance party in the evening, and wrapped up their activities with a game on sharing world resources during First Day School in the morning.

Friends met again in November at Friends Meeting of Washington for a weekend filled with playgrounds and comfy Adirondack chairs. Young Adult Friend Jossie Dowling resented a workshop on connections and relationship webs. This flowed into a discussion on privilege and how class affects the world, including among Friends. We reflected on homelessness and the diversity of income levels in the community. This opened our eyes to how all of the members of our community lived. Also at November Con, Friends helped Campbell Plowden send medical supplies to the Center for Amazon Community Ecology indigenous tribes in the Amazon Forest by selling candy bars. We also helped Young Friends, who were doing work in South Africa, by donating soccer supplies for a child's summer camp.

In February, Friends convened at Stony Run Meeting for a postponed Love Con. Young Friends attended a workshop on trans*issues led by a woman name Chloe Schwenke who works as the vice president of global programs for the organization Freedom House and with the trans* communities across sub-Saharan Africa. We learned that to be yourself, it takes courage and self-confidence. The feelings of trans individuals in our community were also brought to light and supported in a trans-friendly sharing group.

Come April, Friends were bused to State College Meeting in Pennsylvania for work con. After arriving after midnight on a cold and rainy night, Friends went to bed without Meeting with a Concern for Business. The following day, some young friends were driven to Shaver's Creek Environmental center to do service, while other young friends stayed at State College to do landscaping. Friends learned how to do multiple yard work skills such as chopping wood, building wood piles, planting seeds, and cleaning out ditches. The service combined with the physical labor cleansed us spiritually and mentally.

At the last conference of the year, Young Friends met at Sandy Spring Friends Meeting. In the midst of final laughs with friends and reflecting on the seniors' best moments, we enjoyed a fulfilling workshop on consent led by Maggie Dorr. In addition, we watched aerial dancing by a talented Young Friend and hosted a prom. On Saturday evening, we said a tearful good-bye to the graduates and praised their many achievements past and to come.

During Annual Session this year, Young Friends gathered to have a productive and fulfilling spiritual experience. Our workshops included conflict resolution, self-reflection through journaling, and self-care and Pilates. These workshops helped us to reach consensus with greater ease and comfort. We attended two plenary sessions, which included a lecture on power made manifest and the American Indian culture of the Piscataway. Friends also played fun games such as wink and unified capture the flag with Junior Young Friends and Young Adult Friends. We also had exciting midnight swims and an entertaining coffeehouse. For a fun intergenerational treat, Young Friends planned small group sessions including icebreakers and games to unite the various diverse age groups of the community, which is known as Produce. We had some enlightening business meetings which included queries on the usage of technology and the inclusion of neighboring communities on campus. Questions were also posed on how to make All Age Business Meeting a more engaging experience for Young Friends and the broader community alike.

The only issue that came to the Nuts and Bolts committee was that the name "Executive" sounded too corporate and exclusive for a community that is built on openness and acceptance. In light of that matter, the name has officially been changed to Nuts and Bolts Committee (NBC). Overall, there were no major problems that were pertinent to the health of the community.

In conclusion, this community was filled with a lot of light and love. Young Friends grew not only in their knowledge, but also in their understanding of issues relating to privilege, consent, gender identity, and underrepresentation. We helped support others through fundraising, community service, and conversation, which helped Young Friends expand their greater appreciation of life and the community.

Epistle of Junior Young Friends Accepted 8th Month 10th Day, 2014

Over the week of Annual Sessions, we, the Junior Young Friends of Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM), participated in many fun and educational activities offering opportunities for transformation and growth. From the beginning of this great adventure, we began as we intended to go on by using our hands and feet to tell people about ourselves.

Educational activities were an important part of the adventure. We had a fishbowl where we explored our



swimming, and Down, Mr. President (a game where the players each put a finger to one of their ears and the last one to do so gets tackled by everybody else). We also did improv, made t-shirts, and played card games and sports. A recurring theme of our daily name circles was the effect of temperature on our ability to sleep well.

This week of seeing old friends and making new ones was a wonder for us all - and we would like to thank all involved.

Epistle of The Women's Retreat

To Friends everywhere:

We send you greetings and hope this letter finds you warm, sheltered, and hopeful.

Over the weekend of January 24-26, 2014, 130 women from meetings across Baltimore Yearly Meeting gathered at Skycroft Retreat Center for our annual Women's Retreat, to explore the theme: "Wholly/Holy Present: Open. Embrace. Release." It was bitter cold outside. The plenary room, with its wide windows looking out over Middletown Valley, was full of the color of hats and scarves and knitter's yarn. The community we build together is like a beautiful crazy quilt, made up of many bits and patches, that keeps us warm.

On Friday evening, we were welcomed by the Patapsco and Annapolis Friends who organized this year's retreat and introduced ourselves by meeting. Betsy Meyer, Clerk of Yearly Meeting, and Meg Meyer, Clerk of Interim Meeting, read the Yearly Meeting vision statement approved in 2011, and invited us to reflect on it phrase by phrase. Out of the silence we lifted up the phrases that touched our hearts. We reflected on God's infinite love, and reminded ourselves that we in Baltimore Yearly Meeting are first of all a "worshipping community."

On Saturday morning, our plenary speaker was Jen Karsten, Director of Pendle Hill. She began with an opening prayer of inviting us to "welcome the gift of our differences." She organized her presentation around a list of words and names from A to Z—another patchwork quilt to lift our spirits. She told stories of inspiring women, from Granny D to Elizabeth Fry and Rigoberta Menchu. She read passages from the writings of Elizabeth Watson, Zora Neale Hurston and others. She described spiritual practices, and offered bits of practical wisdom. "H" was for "Honoring" ourselves and others: "there are no flaws," she said, "only differences." "I" was for "Invite Stories; Share Stories." We are all unique, she told us. We even worship differently. We need to listen to each other in a way that communicates that we really want to hear. At the heart of her presentation was J for "Journey" She described Joseph Campbell's typology of the archetypal hero's journey, from leaving home, to returning home with some precious gift or knowledge. Being a hero, she told us, means giving a part of yourself to something bigger than yourself. Whenever we commit to something, we are starting out on a journey. We need to see within ourselves the possibility of being a hero. "M" was for "Mistake": Make lots of them, she said. Take risks. "U" was for the Bantu phrase "Ubuntu", which translates "I am, because we are." This was a favorite saying of Nelson Mandela's and one that can serve us well. Knowing our history, and seeking wisdom from our mentors, empowers us to move courageously outward. In conclusion, she reminded us that we are all part of the work of developing our own Quaker culture. She urged us be adventurous, and to engage the known and unknown for the good of all.

Throughout the weekend we gathered again and again for group singing and quiet worship. In worship sharing groups, in workshops, and over meals, we made space to listen to and learn from each other. Much as a quilt might bring us comfort on a cold night, so did our patchwork of encounters. We not only connected with interesting people we had never met before, but we had a chance to hear stories from people we thought we knew--stories that transformed our



relationships and deepened our appreciation for each other.

Workshops offered opportunities for yoga, chanting, writing, walking, sharing gratitude, exploring scripture, and remembering the earth. We were invited to a showing of the powerful documentary by a BYM Friend: “Marii Hasegawa: Gentle Woman of a Peaceful Kind,” the story of a Japanese-born American woman who dedicated her life to speaking out against the injustices of war. A Sacred Circle Dance re-affirmed our connection to mother Earth.

Interest group time on Saturday afternoon offered a chance to plan for the future of “Quaker Women and Friends for Sane Gun Laws” which grew out of a concern at last year’s gathering. Another group met to share our experiences with the all-BYM reading project for the year: Michelle Alexander’s “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness.”

We were amazed by the creative energy in our community. The foyer and plenary room were lined with tables where Friends displayed their handwork: jewelry, pottery, greeting cards, spinning, weaving, as well as handcrafts from other countries. An arts and crafts room offered space and supplies for us to make our own creations. Bright colors and beauty were all around us.

As the wind howled outside on this ancient mountain our traditional sharing at the “coffee house” talent night warmed our hearts and filled the room with laughter. What a patchwork of women we are! Perhaps what we have made this weekend is a kind of freedom quilt. Our journey is far less desperate than the journeys undertaken by people held in slavery who used quilts to mark the way to freedom, but we are all travellers looking for signposts. May the quilt of our gathered community guide us and warm us along the way.

With love, Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women’s Retreat

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