New England Yearly Meeting Epistle 2016

Dear Friends everywhere,

We send you joyful greetings in the name of our Inward Teacher, known among Friends today by many names.

New England Yearly Meeting held its 356th sessions August 6–11, 2016, at Castleton University, Castleton, Vermont, exploring the theme, “Being the hands of God—a Call to Radical Faithfulness.”

A parallel call is found in a poem attributed to Teresa of Avila:

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\begin{align*}
Christ has no body now on earth but yours, 
No hands but yours, 
No feet but yours. 
Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion looks out at the world. 
Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. 
Yours are the hands with which He is to bless people now. 
\end{align*}
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As a unifying thread running through most of the week’s programs and activities, the theme of radical faithfulness reminded us that what we are doing together as a Yearly Meeting is holy work. In these unsettled but holy times of crisis and decision we can be the hands of God only when we place ourselves in the hands of God.

In the reading of memorial minutes for New England Friends who had passed away recently, we were mindful of George Fox’s advice to be “patterns and examples” of Spirit-filled lives and thus become blessings to the world. Many of those Friends were exemplary not just for their lifelong dedication to good causes, but also for their willingness to become instruments of divine will—even when that path promised to be difficult, discouraging, and costly.

Yearly Meeting programs and activities took us deeper, into the radical commitment and openness that are required if we are to be transformed to minister to a broken and suffering world. The wide range of topics and current issues that we considered during the week all led to the basic questions: “What are we called to do about this concern as individuals and faith communities?” “What barriers—both personal and organizational—are holding us back from this work?” “What are specific steps that we need to be taking, now?” Plenary speakers, Yearly Meeting staff, and anchor groups offered many rich insights in response to these questions.

In discerning what we are called to do, Quaker meetings typically begin by naming and nurturing their members’ diverse gifts and trying to match them with appropriate committees and offices. But “living in radical faithfulness” draws us back to something closer to the call for inner and outer renewal that early Friends heard and obeyed. This point was illustrated in Bible Half Hour stories in which God chose
seemingly unqualified people as servants and sent them on unexpected missions that required inner calm under harrowing conditions.

An authentic leading, in contrast to a personal preference or private agenda, may come to us as a surprise, as something absurd, or counterintuitive. It can be baffling or mysterious because it arises from a deeper place than most humans’ sense of morality and purpose can fathom. In an authentic leading, one does not carry a strong stake in the outcome. In the end, a leading is a leading; God demands obedience whatever the cost and difficulty and whether we initially feel qualified.

Some barriers to radical faithfulness were noted during the week. We may wrongly assume that a divine leading involves only things of earth-shaking significance. We may in our weakness choose personal comfort and security over the promises and risks of change, hoping for a crown without a cross. We may stay silent out of fear of failure, ridicule, or opposition from defenders of the status quo.

We may waste opportunities for radical faithfulness by waiting too long for perfect knowledge or perfect abilities. Protecting ourselves from the full range of our deepest feelings—from despair to anger—may prevent our hearts from being “cracked open” and made accessible to the leadings and power of the Spirit. These very human reactions are learned, and we must unlearn them to move forward.

Other barriers to moving forward in radical faithfulness are old habits, outdated thinking, and rigid structures. We work best, we learned, when our organizations are nimble and flexible, pruned of dead wood and crowded branches that block out the light.

Our youth and youth leaders were a vibrant and inspiring presence among us. Also, Friends from Vihiga and Malava Yearly Meetings in Kenya, Cuba Yearly Meeting, and Miami Friends Church visiting New England brought a powerful Christian witness.

With great tenderness we explored such difficult issues as unacknowledged white privilege and insensitivity to gender diversity. But we also recognized the many ways we do foster inclusion and diversity. We continue to feel great sorrow for the victims of conflict and violence at home and around the world, and we look for ways that we can be healing forces.

New England Yearly Meeting made a significant commitment to take concrete steps in the coming year to address the global climate crisis, in response to a call from world Friends at the 2016 FWCC World Plenary in Peru. Several Young Adult Friends in our Yearly Meeting who had participated in the 2015 New England Climate Spring conference were instrumental in guiding this proposal through our meeting for business.

Racial tensions and wounds persist in ourselves, in the Religious Society of Friends, and in our country. Many are complicit in a culture of white supremacy that hinders white Friends’ ability to respond appropriately, openly, and compassionately to people of color. We were led to map out some of the concrete steps we will take to begin recovering from this grievous shortcoming in our Quaker bodies and faith communities.

We came to a fuller appreciation of the role of the beloved community in identifying and cultivating our gifts. Working in relationships empowers us while keeping us from outrunning our Guide. Even when we are physically isolated, we know that we are supported and loved by our community. Working
together also brings us inner peace by relieving us of the burden of feeling responsible for every problem.

With greater clarity about what it means to be the “hands of God,” New England Friends concluded this year’s sessions with a renewed sense of energy, purpose, and urgency.

The harvest is great but the workers are few. May we tend faithfully to the portions we have been given and leave the rest to all the other living hands of God. Even a tiny pebble dropped into the middle of a pond eventually has an impact on the shore. May we open our hearts, our minds, and our eyes to the work that God wants us to do and with humility begin doing it now.

In the Light,

New England Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends

Fritz Weiss, presiding clerk
New England Yearly Meeting Epistle 2016

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In the Light

New England Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends

Fritz Weiss, presiding clerk
Epístola de la Junta Anual de Nueva Inglaterra 2016

Queridos Amigos en todas partes

Les mandamos saludos gozosos en el nombre de nuestro Maestro interior, conocido entre los Amigos de hoy por muchos nombres.

La Junta Anual de Nueva Inglaterra se reunió en sus 356as sesiones del 6 al 11 agosto del 2016, en la Universidad de Castleton en Castleton Vermont, para reflexionar sobre el tema “Seamos las manos de Dios—un llamado a la fidelidad radical.”

Un llamado paralelo se encuentra en un poema atribuido a Teresita de Ávila:

Cristo no tiene ahora más cuerpo en la tierra que el tuyo
no tiene más manos que las tuyas
no tiene más pies que los tuyos
Tuyos son los ojos por los que Cristo mira con compasión a este mundo,
Tuyos son los pies con los que él camina para hacer el bien
Con tus manos él bendice todo el mundo.

El tema de la fidelidad radical fue la hebra entrelazada que unió gran parte de las actividades de esta semana, recordándonos que lo que hacemos juntos como junta anual es obra santa. En estos tiempos de crisis y decisión, tiempos santos aunque perturbados, sólo podemos ser las manos de Dios cuando nos ponemos en las manos de Dios.

En la lectura de actas memoriales de Amigos de Nueva Inglaterra recién fallecidos, reflexionamos sobre el consejo de George Fox de ser “modelos y ejemplos” de vidas llenas del Espíritu, y bendiciones para con el mundo. Muchos de estos Amigos fueron ejemplares no sólo por dedicar toda su vida a buenas obras, sino también por la disposición para ser instrumentos de la voluntad divina—aun cuando ese camino parecía difícil, desalentador, y arriesgado.

Los programas y actividades de la junta anual nos llevaron más hondo hacia el compromiso radical y la vulnerabilidad que son necesarias para ser transformados en ministros a un mundo sufrido y quebrantado. Toda la variedad de inquietudes y temas de actualidad que consideramos durante la semana nos llamó a hacernos preguntas claves: “Como individuos y como comunidades de fe, ¿a qué acción somos llamados?” “¿Cuáles son los obstáculos – tanto personales como organizativos – que nos impiden hacer esta labor?” “¿Qué acciones específicas necesitamos hacer ahora?” Las presentaciones plenarias, los empleados de la junta anual, y los grupos de ancla ofrecieron muchas y muy ricas percepciones como respuestas a estas preguntas.
En el discernimiento de lo que Dios nos llama a hacer, generalmente las juntas comienzan nombrando y alentando los diferentes dones de los miembros, tratando de vincularlos con cargos y comités apropiados. Pero vivir en la fidelidad radical nos hace volver a algo más parecido a aquel llamado a la renovación interior y exterior que los primeros Amigos escucharon y obedecieron. En los estudios bíblicos escuchamos varias historias que sirven de ejemplos de estos llamados, y de cómo Dios escogió a personas que no parecían aptas para servirle, y las envió en misiones inesperadas que requerían la tranquilidad interior en medio de condiciones desgarradoras.

A diferencia de una preferencia personal o una agenda privada, cuando brota un llamado auténtico puede parecernos sorprendente, absurdo, o ilógico. Puede ser desconcertante o misterioso porque viene de una profundidad más honda de lo que puede sondear el sentido de moralidad o propósito de la mayoría de seres humanos. En un llamado auténtico, la persona no siente un fuerte interés personal sobre el resultado. A fin de cuentas, un llamado es un llamado; Dios exige la obediencia a pesar de cualquier riesgo, dificultad o pérdida, aunque al principio no nos sintamos aptos.

Durante la semana nos dimos cuenta de varios obstáculos a la fidelidad radical. Nos podemos equivocar al suponer que un llamado divino sólo tiene que ver con cosas de gran magnitud. En nuestra debilidad podemos escoger la comodidad y la seguridad personal en vez de las promesas y los riesgos de la transformación, esperando recibir una corona sin cruz.¹ Podemos callarnos por temor al fracaso, a la burla, o a la oposición de parte de los que defienden el statu quo.

Podemos malgastar oportunidades de fidelidad radical al esperar demasiado por un conocimiento perfecto o una capacitación perfecta. Cuando nos protegemos de todo el espectro de nuestras más hondas emociones – desde la desesperación hasta la ira – podemos estar impidiendo que nuestros corazones sean quebrantados y abiertos de un golpe a una nueva vulnerabilidad al poder y las guianzas del Espíritu. Estas reacciones tan humanas son frutos de un aprendizaje y tenemos que desaprenderlas para seguir adelante.

Otras barreras a la fidelidad radical son las viejas costumbres, las formas anticuadas de pensar, y las estructuras rígidas. Trabajamos mejor cuando nuestras organizaciones son ágiles y flexibles, podadas de ramas muertas y tupidas que excluyen la luz.

Nuestra juventud y sus líderes fueron una inspiración vital entre nosotros. También, Amigos visitantes de las juntas anuales de Vihiga y Malava en Kenya, de la Junta Anual de Cuba, y de la Iglesia de los Amigos de Miami nos trajeron un poderoso testimonio cristiano.

Con gran ternura exploramos temas difíciles tales como el privilegio de los blancos no reconocido, y la insensibilidad a la diversidad de géneros. Pero también reconocemos las muchas maneras en que sí alentamos la inclusión y la diversidad. Seguimos sintiendo gran

¹ Referencia a un famoso tratado de William Penn, “Sin cruz no hay corona” (No cross, no crown)
tristeza para con las víctimas de conflictos y violencia en nuestro país y en el mundo entero, y buscamos formas de ser instrumentos de sanación.

La Junta Anual de Nueva Inglaterra se comprometió a tomar acciones concretas durante este año para enfrentar la crisis global del cambio climático, respondiendo a un llamado de la Plenaria del Comité Mundial de Consulta de los Amigos reunida en Perú en el 2016. Varios jóvenes adultos de nuestra junta anual que habían participado en la conferencia “Primavera del Clima” de Nueva Inglaterra en 2015 sirvieron como instrumentos claves para guiar esta propuesta en nuestra sesión de asuntos.

Las heridas y las tensiones raciales persisten en nosotros, en la Sociedad Religiosa de los Amigos, y en nuestro país. Muchos somos involucrados en la cultura de la supremacía blanca que impide a que los Amigos blancos respondan apropiadamente y abiertamente, y con compasión a personas de color. Fuimos guiados a planear algunas acciones concretas que tomaremos para comenzar nuestra recuperación de este grave defecto en nuestras organizaciones cuáqueras y comunidades de fe.

Llegamos a apreciar más profundamente el papel de la comunidad amorosa en el proceso de identificar y alentar nuestros dones. La cooperación en el contexto de relaciones nos presta fuerzas y nos frena de precipitarnos más allá de nuestro Guía. Aun cuando estamos aislados físicamente, sabemos que nuestra comunidad nos apoya y nos ama. El trabajo conjunto también nos trae paz interior, aliviándonos el peso de sentirnos responsables por todos los problemas.

Con una claridad más profunda de lo que quiere decir “ser las manos de Dios,” los Amigos de Nueva Inglaterra clausuramos las sesiones de este año con un sentido renovado de energía, propósito, y urgencia.

La mies es mucha y los obreros pocos. Quiera Dios que cuidemos con fidelidad la porción de la obra que se nos ha dado, y que dejemos el resto a las demás vivientes manos de Dios. Hasta una piedrecilla que cae en medio del lago tiene su efecto en la orilla. Que abramos nuestros corazones, mentes, y ojos a la obra que Dios quiere que hagamos, y con humildad comenzemos a hacerla ya.

En la Luz,

Junta Anual de Nueva Inglaterra
de la Sociedad Religiosa de los Amigos

Fritz Weiss, presiding clerk
To Friends everywhere,

From August 6th through the 11th in the year 2016, the Young Adult Friends of New England Yearly Meeting gathered as part of their annual sessions. The theme of the gathering was “Being the Hands of God: A Call to Radical Faithfulness.” We went into our gathering hoping to balance engagement with the wider meeting and engagement with each other. Many YAFs enjoyed the lounge space, where games and socializing were common. We went on our annual lake trip, and many friends engaged in fellowship together while catching and comparing Pokémon throughout the week.

There were also four YAF programs. Our opening program, led by Hilary Burgin, welcomed many YAFs into the gathering and allowed us to explore various aspects of our faithfulness and callings through worshipful art. In the days that followed the opening program, there was a core group of YAFs who attended programs and engaged in community together. Our next program, led by Gordon Peters, invited us to consider the dynamics of safety, namely how safe we felt to fully be ourselves within our lives and especially within the Quaker community. The third program, led by Hilary Burgin and Nia Thomas, brought the Young Friends and Young Adult Friends together to share in fellowship, reflect on our experiences of transitioning from one community to another, and examine our relationship with our spiritual communities. This program replaced the “Young Friends kidnapping” tradition, as YAFs wanted to try a more serious program with the entire body of Young Friends instead of just the graduating class alone. Our fourth program, led by Gordon Peters, was centered on naming our individual gifts and discerning the roles that they play in our personal lives and communities. We discerned that gifts can sometimes be transient, often valued in certain settings but not in others, and can feed or deplete us.

Many YAFs offered their gifts and leadership to the Yearly Meeting by showing up in roles such as staffing for younger friends, leading YAF affinity groups, serving on NEYM committees and panels, working in administrative roles, hosting meal time conversation tables, leading afternoon choices and workshops for the wider community, hosting the latter half of the coffee house for the first time, and serving on the Sessions Planning Committee as well as on the Racial Inclusivity Task Force. We also acknowledge the newly formed YAF Pastoral Care Committee that debuted at Sessions this year and honor and celebrate the newly appointed Young Adult Engagement Coordinator, Hilary Burgin.

In writing this epistle, it has become apparent that while many YAFs are scattered throughout Yearly, sharing their gifts with the wider community, this results in us not being able to fully convey the experiences or express the viewpoints of all young adults at Sessions. We recognize that Yearly Meeting is a difficult time for many of us to feel a strong sense of community within YAFs, though it is our love for this community that drives us to be spread throughout Sessions.
We observe that among YAFs, there continues to be a struggle to fully hold our youngest friends and older YAF friends as we recognize, even here, generational differences. Young Friends transitioning into Young Adult Friends are experiencing the many responsibilities of entering adulthood and thusly some have not felt able to actively participate in or attend our programs and gatherings. Similarly, some older YAFs have felt as though their needs are no longer being met in the YAF community. Some have expressed discomfort and disconnect due to feeling underrepresented and are unsure where their spiritual community lies. These difficult truths have led some YAFs to question if we should split into two different age groups. It is our intention to see the maintenance of this community that so many call home, but these sentiments speak to a deeper issue that needs to be addressed.

This issue is not within the YAF community alone. Throughout our time together many conversations emerged among YAFs concerning dissonance between the younger communities and the rest of the Quaker body. Many Friends identified spaces in which some older friends struggle to view YAFs in equal light and voiced that they sometimes feel unheard, unseen, tokenized, or infantilized. In addition to YAF circles, these sentiments have also been heard among younger friends.

These themes were present when the Racial Inclusivity Task Force asked Friends to notice the systems of racism that persists within this predominantly white culture during sessions this year. This work brought to light some unproductive patterns within the Yearly Meeting—patterns which mirrored resistance and marginalization that were existent in last year’s gender inclusivity work. While there were strong examples of this exercise being embraced by the wider community, there was a sense that some older Friends were struggling to embrace areas of growth and change in the community that many YAFs have readily embraced for some time. Additionally, members of the Racial Inclusivity Task Force met with the youth of JHYM and Young Friends to introduce them to the work and it was observed that some of these dissonant feelings were alive in those communities as well. This generational division seems to permeate amongst NEYM in different ways and different spaces. Yet through all of this, there is an undying union and sense of community.

As for us, the YAFs of NEYM, we are young adults aged roughly 18–35, we are students, we are employees, we are journeyers, we are activists, we are children, we are parents, we are elders, we are youth, we are LGBTQ+, we are people of color, we are Quakers, we are in love with this community, we are here, and we are upset. As we continue these conversations and explore the needs of our community and its members, we hope to find ways to reshape aspects of our communities that do not support us and breathe new life and inspiration into them and into the Yearly Meeting as a whole. It is in this spirit that we leave the YAF community and the larger body with these queries which can offer actionable steps forward.

What is expected of us?

Can we meet those expectations while being authentic to ourselves?

Who represents us?
Are we a unified body?

Who or What do we feel called to be?

How can these noticings be transformed into action?

How can we put our gifts to use in the wider community when it feels no one is seeking them out?

How can we truly be heard?

Can we be accepted for who we are?

In love and radically moving forward,

The Young Adult Friends of New England
Dear Friends Everywhere,

We 43 Young Friends from New England Yearly Meeting met in August for six days of tenderness in community, program and business, shared absurdity, finding our bearings, and losing ourselves to the spirit.

Throughout Sessions, we worshipped all over the place, with some friends even rising for early morning worship at 6:30 a.m. During intergenerational worship, Young Friends Lizzy Szanton, Mosie Burke, and Roy Veatch led a group of close to 500 friends in worship, reading a poem connected to the theme of Sessions (which was “Being the Hands Of God: A Call to Radical Faithfulness”) and leading the group in song before centering down. Later, adult Resource Person Maggie Nelson led the Young Friends in working with clay as we worshiped. Which was molded more: the clay or the Young Friends? On a sunny morning, we worshipped with two young farmers and spiritual activists who encouraged us to choose love and let our hearts grow wild.

Young Friends also attended the Plenary panel to hear three activists from our community: one with a little boat and a big message, another who urged us not to side with the silent majority, and the last who spoke of wading in the water in radical faith. Although it was more than some of us could take in, the spirit was continuous and bursting. The voices of the speakers were firm and determined, urging on the faith and action of our community of Friends.

Later, four Young Friends (Finn Anderson, Charlie Gorham, Jesse Grace, and Mary Provencal-Fogarty) sat on a panel of our own. Out of the silence, they spoke about the relationship between their work and the divine. Their words swayed our spirits.

One morning, two visitors from Kenya, Margaret Kadima-Mazela and Agneta Injairu, led an interest group during which Young Friends sang songs in Swahili and learned about the lives of young Quakers in Kenya.

The Young Friends met four times for business over the course of Sessions, following the theme, “Being the Hands of the Clock: A Call to Radical Overtime and Excessive Agenda Manipulation.” Our Nominating Committee presented the slate for the upcoming year’s Ministry and Council. Young Friends shared gratitude for the work NomCom and concerns that the coming year’s M&C is mostly male, following a longstanding pattern. We need, Young Friends voiced, better representation of our community on these committees. Also in business meeting, Young Friends Coordinator Nia Thomas brought to our attention the declining number of incoming Young Friends. In reports from our larger Yearly Meeting, Young Friends heard about the Friends World Committee for Consultation’s Minute on Climate Change and the work of the Long Term Financial Planning Committee.
In adult business meeting, Young Friends Drew Chasse and Lizzy Szanton reflected on their experience attending the April White Privilege Conference in Philadelphia. Young Friend Kenzie Burpee joined her fellow Sly Grapes (as the White Privilege Conference delegation was fondly named) to run an hour-and-a-half program of skits, discussion, and worship for Young Friends and adult visitors to practice anti-racism work.

The Young Friends community and all of Yearly Meeting mourned the retirement of Nat Shed, beloved director of Friends Camp. In adult business meeting, tears blurred the eyes of both speaker and audience as all shared their inexpressible gratitude for the years Nat devoted to feeding the souls of young Quakers with humility and joy. A group of Young Friends shared a tender and playful tribute song, set to the tune of George Fox, and all gratefully welcomed Anna Hopkins as the new director.

A day later, Young Friends hosted Coffee Shed, an intergenerational variety show in honor of Nat. Acts were endearing, rousing, and poignant, and left all visibly joyous for the radiance of our community.

In the hot August heat, Young Friends also hitched a ride on a yellow school bus to the local lake, where we played Frisbee, swam, danced, and welcomed the incoming ninth graders.

The Young Friends ended the week with a raucous presence at the under-attended Yearly Meeting contra dance, a dance party of our own, and a ceremony for the graduating seniors. We leave each other with sleep-deprived hearts spilling over.

With Love,

NEYM Young Friends
Retreat Season 2015–2016

The first retreat of the year took place in September at Framingham Friends Meeting and was only attended by community members in Ministry and Council (M&C). There, M&C learned how to hold a clearness committee, uphold and share Quaker values, and revel in the joys of clerking business meetings.

Our October retreat, centered at the deliciously secluded Mount Toby meetinghouse in Leverett, Massachusetts, was a joyous weekend spent reveling in the beauty of nature and ourselves as we explored the topics of self-love and self-care.

In the chilly month of November, we gathered at Portland Friends Meeting to talk about racism, from its onset to the present Black Lives Matter movement.

During our 3-day Midwinter retreat, Young Friends gathered at Friendly Crossways in Littleton, Massachusetts, for a long weekend of religious exploration and warmth in community to buffer the persistent wintry weather.

After Midwinter, the Young Friends met at Wellesley Friends Meeting in February to learn about sexual health from Lisa Geelhood, relationships and gender expression from a panel of Resource People, and each other and ourselves in an open fishbowl discussion.

In early March the Young Friends were told of the death of graduated Young Friend Ishmael Rosas. The loss hit hard, and though not all of the Young Friends knew Ishmael, we all grieved in our own way. It was aptly timed that the next retreat, at Hartford Friends Meeting, focused on healing and reconnecting with our childhoods. Resource People were made available to talk through grief, a group of RPs facilitated discussion on wellness and self-care, and community members were offered the option to attend Ishmael’s memorial at Storrs Friends Meeting. The grief was balanced out with a joyful trip to a local playground, where we laughed the day away.

The last general retreat of the year was at Westport Friends Meeting, where we explored the qualities of meaningful service and spent some time helping maintain Westport Friends Meeting. We gave all our love to our graduating seniors, and expressed our gratitude for a year of spiritual growth in community.

In July, the seniors of the group ventured to Monadnock Friends Meeting where they reminisced about their time in Young Friends, prepared for the future, and got some farming done in between. Young Friend Jesse Ball helped the seniors learn to make his famous garlic bread (and eat it too!)
Upcoming Retreat themes and dates for 2016-2017

Ministry and Council Retreat  
early fall at Framingham Meeting in Framingham, Massachusetts

Climate Conscious: Stewardship of the Earth  
September 30–October 2nd at Mt. Toby Meeting in Leverett, Massachusetts.

What's Justice?!  
November 18–20 at Portland Meeting in Portland, Maine.

It's not the oat man...who are Quakers and what do they do?  
December 27–30 at Friendly Crossways in Harvard, Massachusetts.

Mindbodysoul  
February 10–12 at Wellesley Meeting in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

Sexuality, Gender + Relationships  
March 17–19 at Hartford Meeting in Hartford, Connecticut.

Artivism: Creativity into Action  
May 12–14 at Westport Meeting in Westport, Massachusetts.

Senior Retreat  
Mid-summer at an undecided location
Dear Friends from all over the world:

Greetings from the 2016 NEYM Junior High (entering grades 7–9) Yearly Meeting in Castleton, Vermont. Our theme this year is Being God’s Hands. Related to the theme, we talked with Quakers from all around the world about their personal experiences. We also bonded through games and activities.

On Saturday we all met together and introduced ourselves. Throughout the week we played a variety of games such as The Big Wind Blows, intergenerational Capture the Flag, and JYM ball (an NEYM invention). Playing together was fun and helped us channel our abundant energy.

This week we were visited by Friends who had lived out our theme in a wide variety of ways. Candido Quelevys and Melissa Hernandez-Cruz from Cuba taught us how to express ourselves through cultural dance. On Monday, we had a panel of speakers who described to us how they were called by God and how their lives changed because of that. We learned how at certain points the panel members were unclear about their callings until God helped them through. Leadings come in different forms and in unexpected ways. One described the experience like riding on a roller coaster. Margaret Namikoye Musalia and Agneta Kwayumba Injairu, Quaker pastors from Kenya, described their missionary work and how they used their faith to educate children and lift up women in other countries. Angela Hopkins and members of the Racial Inclusivity Taskforce spoke to our community about the struggles they and other people of color faced in various forms of racism. We were challenged to not only notice and recognize racism that is present in our lives but to also then answer the question: What can I do to create a more inclusive community? Some of us were moved to tears by what our speakers had to say.

For us Junior Highers, this week was full of adventures. A highlight of this time was our trip to the local Bomoseen State Park. While we were there we hung out with the Young Friends and held a regatta using makeshift boats. We also had a fantastic time at the Castleton pool and playing Dance Dance Revolution at our late night lounge, which also included pizza and ice cream. We connected through rhythm with our drum circle and through creative projects that included painting Mandela t-shirts as well as decorating affirmation rocks that we left around the campus for people to discover and take with them. And we shared affirmations of each other at our 8th grade circle.

A spiritual highlight was our time spent together in small groups. In a safe and private environment, we checked in on each other spiritually and answered questions about topics like getting out of one’s comfort zone and how we can face problems still present in our world today. We reflected on questions such as: What is something that you love to do and are willing to work hard at? What does radical faithfulness mean to you? And do you have a spiritual
center that helps you feel calmer and more peaceful? Small groups made us feel comfortable enough to say what we need to say. We learned that no question or answer is stupid and began to learn how to respect each other.

Our time together at NEYM Sessions reminded us of what is special about our JHYM community. One of our strengths is how much we are like a family. Our community is intergenerational and inclusive of young people and the adults who staff retreats and Yearly Meeting Sessions. We are welcoming to new people and accepting of our differences in ways that allow us to be ourselves in a loving community. We continue to work at this and talked about our use of language to describe ourselves and others. We are learning to recognize and respect how people choose to express their gender identity and talked about the use of pronouns and how one can choose these pronouns for themselves. Our language is part of how we make a welcoming and inclusive community and see each other as people first.

To us Junior Highers, being the hands of God means using our gifts to solve the problems of our world and do as we are led. Being the hands of God is a big responsibility and we each have a role to play. Though it was a tiring week, all of us can say that there was lots of fun and plenty of things to remember.

With love and peace to all,

Junior High Yearly Meeting (JHYM), New England Yearly Meeting
August 11, 2016
Epistle of the Fifth and Sixth Graders of the New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 2016

Fifteen fifth- and sixth-graders met at Castleton University in Castleton, Vermont, USA from August 6–11, 2016. Our theme this year was “Being the Hands of God” and we explored this in a mindful clay activity and by recognizing that everyone has a part of God in them. We enjoyed finding God in each other.

We played a lot of games this week, including parachute games, kickball, JYM ball, telephone, silent ball and beanie babies. We set a new record in beanie babies by keeping 9 objects moving at once. We were safe during most of our games, but two of us sustained injuries when we played kickball, and one of us had to go to the emergency room. We were happy when our injured friend came back to us.

We played with people from all age groups in the Yearly Meeting and took part in intergenerational worship. We also sang and worshiped with other Junior Yearly Meeting groups every day. We enjoyed a project turning ugly art into beautiful masterpieces.

During free time we went swimming, rode bikes, skateboards and scooters, ate, slept and went to afternoon choices. At the beginning of the week, we got to see a parade.

Visitors from Cuba Yearly Meeting taught us a song and a dance and helped us tune in to moving with the music. Friends from Kenya sang for us and taught us a song in Kiswahili. We made ice cream, did yoga and made a mandala from seeds.

We got to see Friends we don’t see often and continue long-lasting friendships. Overall, it was an exciting, awesome, and amazing time.

In love and light,

Your Friends from the Junior Yearly Meeting of New England Yearly Meeting, 5th and 6th grade group.
2016 Epistle from JYM Grades 2, 3 and 4

We started our week by writing three queries from Young Friends on the board in our classroom:

1. How do we need to be the hands of God?
2. How would God want us to use our hands?
3. What can we do when our visions of faithfulness differ?

We created hands of God by painting our hands and making a mural of all our handprints. We used our hands to make clay pots and ice cream, to touch crickets and frogs, and to throw and hit balls in JYM ball, four square, and kickball. We learned to use our hands, feet, and hips from our Kenyan and Cuban visitors who sang and danced with us. We learned to bring our visions of community together by creating group works of art like our mini-continent out of recycled materials and a mandala from different-colored beans. We also shared books, met old friends, and made new ones. During our free time outside of program we had fun swimming (one of us did a flip off the diving board!), playing Capture the Flag, exploring the pond, riding bikes and scooters, doing afternoon choices, and going to the Coffee Shed.

JYM Grades 2, 3 and 4
New England Yearly Meeting of Friends
August 11, 2016
We are the Kindergarten–Grade 1 group and our numbers kept growing to a healthy 15. We had lots of indoor and outdoor fun this week. One of us saw a bunny, another saw a deer and her babies, and one went on a hike to waterfalls. Some of us went swimming in the pool. As a group, we played with friends, played with stuffed animals, listened to stories, played JYM Ball, attended morning worship, learned how to finger knit, listened to our Kenyan visitors sing, drew self-portraits, and participated in the Coffee Shed. Also, we went on a scavenger hunt called the Campus Crawl to learn about the campus, and to find Avery’s bike!

We all look forward to getting together next year at Yearly Meeting at Castleton College.
2016 Epistle from New England Yearly Meeting Childcare

To our big Friends,

We gathered at the Childcare house with a certain amount of trepidation and even a few tears as our parents walked away. But we became a group that looked forward each day to our play time with big blocks and railroad tracks. We especially liked making snails (and other amazing creations) out of play dough; pouring oobleck into balloons that squished and squashed in our hands; and playing ping-pong with a broken ball. We had several visitors, including the local cat and a friend who came with his guitar and played songs at our morning gathering.

We talked about being God’s hands in the world and our hands made butterflies, built towers, clapped, shook colorful scarfs, and helped to carry snacks, to clean up messes, and even to pick up all the little beans when a rainstick broke. (Sometimes when things break you can look inside and see how they work.)

Some of our best times were spent quietly reading books and taking naps (which we encourage our older Friends to do more of). We worked very hard at figuring out how to respond to someone who wanted a toy that we were already playing with (which we encourage our older Friends to do more of).

We enjoyed playing with cousins and siblings. We made new friends, with whom we had good times and shared apples, bananas, and crackers. We want to do this again. Thank you for creating a place for us.

Sincerely,

The Children of Childcare
New England Yearly Meeting
August 11, 2016