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# THE EPISTLES OF BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING REPORTED TO ANNUAL SESSION AT FROSTBURG, MD 8TH MONTH 4TH DAY, 2013

To Friends Everywhere:

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Friends gathered in Frostburg, Maryland for our 342<sup>nd</sup> Annual Session during an unusually cool week in August, warmed by the love we feel for each other, and by the Light of God. Our theme for the week was “Growing from Common Roots Toward the Light.”

What are our common roots? How can Universalist Friends and those from a Christian or prophetic tradition find common ground? Can we truly heal the divisions that lie underneath the surface of our Yearly Meeting? An introductory retreat attended by about thirty Friends focused on leadings and witness, spiritual discipline and gospel order. This set the ground for the week where we explored the theme of unity and diversity in business sessions, workshops, worship, Bible study, worship sharing, and plenaries. Perhaps most intensely, we discovered each other’s understandings of our shared faith in individual conversations, as we broke bread or walked together to the next programmed event. As one Friend said: “I came to these meetings prepared to listen, and was moved.”

At our BYM opening session, Presiding Clerk Elizabeth “Betsy” Meyer showed us an Edward Hicks painting of the Peaceable Kingdom, pointing out the long line of Friends in the background, and the little child joyfully presiding among the animals. On Tuesday evening Michael Newheart reflected on the texts and textures of messages offered in Meeting for Worship, based on his experience in his own Meeting. He spoke of “loving to feel the place where words come from,” and reminded us that “power” was even more common in the writings of George Fox than “light.” He urged us to feel the power of God in our minds, hearts and bodies, and to remember that “the power of the Lord is over all.”

On Wednesday afternoon, the Yearly Meeting divided into two groups to focus on a common theme. Friends approximately twelve and older divided into intergenerational discussion circles to explore how we experience privilege or lack of privilege in various aspects of our lives. Those younger than twelve and their families also had a lively exchange about privilege, and what it feels like to be treated fairly or unfairly. We have also embarked on a “one book project”, asking all of our Meetings to read and study *The New Jim Crow: An Examination of Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color-Blindness*. We were deeply moved by the Spiritual State of the Meeting report from the South Mountain Friends Fellowship, a prison worship group under the care of Patapsco Friends Meeting. Prison might be described as “the closest thing to hell on earth,” the prisoners wrote, “but God is there too.”

Throughout the week, worship sharing queries prompted us to think of our Quaker testimonies as springboards for action rather than merely an opportunity for introspection. In Bible

study we reflected on God's intention that we care for the poor and vulnerable and the strangers among us. An enticing menu of afternoon workshops brought us together around common interests, lifted up new concerns, and challenged us to live our faith more fully. We celebrated 30 years of the Spiritual Formation Program of Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

We acknowledge the enormous expectations we place on our beloved staff, and considered how we can ease their burdens. We were also reminded of the urgent financial needs of some of our treasured programs. Our retirement community, Friends House, is facing the need for substantial building renovations. Friends Wilderness Center, in the mountains of West Virginia, is struggling to meet its ongoing expenses. Our beloved Friend Ann Riggs, whose ministry as Principal of Friends Theological College in Kenya has been embraced by the Yearly Meeting, needs substantial funds to cover the remaining year of her tenure. We see right-ordered support for our staff and programs as a matter of integrity. Our Youth Programs Manager spoke of what a blessing it is to be here, sharing this pain and love as we practice the Holy Experiment. The ministry of visitors sponsored by our Intervisitation Program deeply moved us, as they reminded us to faithfully tend the fire that God has lighted in our hearts.

Consideration of a new *Faith and Practice* absorbed much of our attention this year. We are enormously grateful to the committee that has labored over the past dozen years to prepare a draft, and particularly for their dedication in visiting nearly all of our Meetings over eight months to discuss the draft and listen attentively to concerns and suggestions. We engaged deeply with each other as we strove to understand what *Faith and Practice* means and what role it serves. How can a document express our faith? Can we come to unity when our beliefs are so different? We felt that we could not absorb and consider so much new text at once, especially since some Friends still have serious reservations. We agreed to appoint a new committee that will consider what has been written and the concerns that have been raised, and bring sections of a new *Faith and Practice* to us over a period of several years, for deep discernment.

Consideration of the draft has opened up a conversation about what we believe, and what it is that binds us together. This is an awesome gift. We have already begun the work of acknowledging our differences, and embracing the challenge they pose. By talking openly with each other about our own deeply held beliefs and unique individual experiences, we know we can learn to love each other better. One Friend suggested that we are in a chrysalis stage—a messy interim between caterpillar and butterfly. We embrace our state of transition, and move forward in faith. Our Clerk reminded us that forgiveness is a gift that we give ourselves.

Robin Mohr, Executive Secretary, Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas, joined us for the week and presented the Carey Memorial Lecture, "Growing from Common Roots Toward the Light." Robin spoke of convergent Friends: Conservative, Evangelical, and Liberal Friends longing to be radically inclusive. She urged us to become "bilingual" in listening to each other's experiences of faith. She spoke lovingly to the concerns that simmered this week, and gifted us with a hopeful message of what it means to be a people who listen to God. People are hungry for what we as Friends have

tasted. We should stop seeing ourselves as refugees and envision ourselves as immigrants shaping our future, living up to the Light that we have. She described the world of Friends as a forest with many groves, growing toward the Light from common ground.

The spirit of our young people lightened our hearts. On Thursday we enjoyed an “All-Age Celebration” which included activity tables, a candle-lit labyrinth, and ice cream sundaes for all. It was a joy to have the entire Junior Yearly Meeting join us one morning to share a report on their activities and lead us in song. The report on our Camping Program, our largest single Yearly Meeting program, was profoundly moving. The directors of the Teen Adventure Foot Program spoke of how rain on a tin roof drowns out every other sound, even a group of teenagers singing at the top of their lungs. “We thought the rain was going to stop,” they said, “we kept thinking it would stop. But after a while we embraced the reality that we were all going to get wet.” When a continuing deluge delayed a planned canoe trip, the campers turned the wait into a joyful, all-inclusive, muddy game of Ultimate Frisbee. Campers who might have felt merely drenched and miserable were instead bubbling over with stories of their adventures, aware of the power of their own voice and action.

Can we be joyful as our children are? When faced with obstacles and controversy, can we not just endure hard times, but rejoice in them? Times of struggle give us the opportunity to explore alternative ways of experiencing joy, and to understand that the Spirit is ever-present. God has certainly been present with us this week.

## **EPISTLE OF YOUNG ADULT FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 4TH DAY, 2013**

To Friends everywhere:

Young Adults Friends had an introductory paragraph.

In January, Young Adult Friends (YAFs) gathered together at Stony Run Friends Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland. We were joined by Young Dog Friend Chunsu Macfarlane who was joining us as part of her ministry of keeping toes clean. In the evening we hosted a potluck inviting the greater community to join us for a night of singing though a strict moratorium on Christmas carols was imposed. Friends brought bongos, kazoos and a washtub bass for the event and fun and fellowship was had by all present. Later, Friends gathered for frolicking outside in the snow before deciding hot chocolate was the best thing ever.

Young Adult Friends met once again in mid-May for a cozy gathering at Hopewell Centre Monthly Meeting in Clearbrook, Virginia. Friends engaged in a bit of roadside cleanup for the Meeting, bravely forging onward even in the face of an untimely downpour. In need of a hot meal once done, friends came together to create pirogues from scratch, which quickly became a learning experience for all. The conference additionally featured a viewing of the movie I ♥ Huckabees, complete with a lively discussion on existentialism; an abundance of cookies and cake; an extreme scavenger hunt for the meeting room light switch and plenty of quality conversation.

At Annual Session—held at Frostburg State University in Frostburg, Maryland—YAFs live together for a week within a single dorm. Despite this closeness, it often seems that we are farther away from one another than ever. Young Adult Friends hold so many diverse roles within Baltimore Yearly Meeting that scheduling conflicts within the YAF community easily outstrip the number of Skittles on the dorm floor (which is saying something). Young Adult Friends are Friendly Adult Presences, Friends Committee on National Legislation representatives, Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) volunteers, Annual Session Bookstore Managers, Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee members, Assistant Annual Session Bookstore Managers, Annual Session Photographers, Interim Meeting Recording Clerks, American Friends Service Committee members, Youth Program Committee members, Working Group on Racism members, and Program Committee representatives — and that’s before this year’s nominations go through.

But we power through adversity. We gather together to master essential survival skills such as playing overcomplicated board games, coloring in dinosaurs and Hello Kitty, and completing Advanced Level Three-Person Double-Ricochet Food-Tossed-Into-Each-Other’s-Mouths challenges. We hold joint midnight swims with Young Friends (YFs) and play Capture the Flag with YFs and JYM. We brainstorm new methods of outreach and communication for our community and welcome graduating Young Friends into it by introducing them to the primary perk of being over eighteen: we can leave Frostburg State’s campus to buy ice cream anytime we want. On a more serious note, Friend Nony Dutton spent half an hour explaining cricket and we are still in discernment as to what a wicket is. How’s that?

The past year has been both up and down in attendance as Young Adult Friends work their way through life’s current uncertainties, both within and outside of the community. Even so, it is these same uncertainties that help bond us together and allow Friends from ages eighteen to thirty-five a safe haven where we may hold one another up in our struggles and rejoice in our successes.

Sincerely,

The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends

## **EPISTLE OF YOUNG FRIENDS**

**ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 4TH DAY, 2013**

The Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) Young Friends Community has had a wonderful year full of love, conversation, and – sometimes – actual business.

Last year, we approved a new version of our Young Friends Handbook that Handbook Committee had previously spent three years working on. Already, the newest incarnation of Handbook Committee is hard at work reading, discussing, and editing the document in order to accurately reflect the structure of our community.

Food Committee created a spreadsheet to help food planners choose meals that can be made for over a hundred people in some very small kitchens and shop for those meals effectively.

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People met over the year to discuss the *Faith and Practice* and made suggestions for revisions that were accepted by the *Faith and Practice* Revision Committee.

This year, Do Good Deeds Committee pledged to give \$200 to cover extra luggage fees incurred from taking much-needed medical supplies and clothing to indigenous Peruvian communities. They led a effort during our February Conference to make lasagna and casseroles for a local food pantry near Stony Run Meeting and led a workshop, about physical, mental, and emotional abuse.

Executive Committee has been having an ongoing discussion with the larger community over concerns related to exclusion. We have been working on inclusion throughout all of Young Friends, as we have grown immensely in numbers in the past few years, and it can be difficult for new members to feel welcome. To accomplish this, we follow several policies. Exec meetings, with a few exceptions, are open to anyone who wishes to join, and we have been making an effort to encourage Young Friends to attend. Open door and “croissants not doughnuts” (leaving spaces to sit when people are gathered) policies are in effect at all Young Friends Conferences, to avoid breaking community. When introducing themselves, Young Friends are encouraged to share both their names and their preferred pronouns, so that no one accidentally gets misgendered. Finally, in order to make Young Friends feel safe and comfortable in a community so full of love and surprise hugs, we have been encouraging a policy of asking before contact, and receiving a very clear “yes” before actually initiating, which we call ENTHUSIASTIC CONSENT!

Young Friends have five Conferences over the year, in addition to Annual Session. This year, our September Conference was held at Sandy Spring, where we played capture the flag and listened to a presentation by one of our Young Friends about the Quaker Youth Pilgrimage he participated in. November Con was at Langley Hill, where Campbell Plowden led an Alternatives to Violence Project style workshop on community building and gave a presentation on conservation issues in the Amazon. The February Conference, called “Love Con” was at Stony Run with two workshops: one from the Friends Committee on National Legislation and one from the Do Good Deeds Committee. There was also an epic dance party. In March, the Young Friends piled onto buses and traveled down to Maury River, where they did service at Common Ground, where one of BYM’s camps is hosted. Our final conference, in May, was held at Hopewell, where we had a massage workshop and said goodbye to twenty seven seniors in a loving and tear-filled night.

This past week at Annual Session, Young Friends have participated in many activities – Meetings for Business; midnight swimming and capture the flag with the Young Adult Friends; the All Age Celebration; watching the Phantom Regiment; and workshops on a variety of subjects including Quaker testimonies and history, privilege in North American society, the Peruvian Amazon, Right Sharing of resources, and Chuck Kleymeyer’s book, *Yeshu*.

It’s been a productive and enjoyable year, and we look forward to doing it all over again next year.

Love and Light,  
The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Young Friends

## EPISTLE OF JUNIOR YOUNG FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 4TH DAY, 2013

JYF Summarizationification (Epistle) 2013

Hello, we are the JYF's of the 2013 BYM Annual Session. Over this past week we have learned about our roots, and how they affect us and our community. Our teachers, Melanie, Bill, Debbie, Dave, Ann, Gobind, Michael, Joanna, and Linda have taught us so much about how to treat each other and how to participate in our community. They have also told us many times how we have taught them as well. We have chosen Starling Wolfrum as clerk and William Finegar as assistant clerk. Then, we approved Thomas Finegar as recording clerk and Tadek Kosmal as co-recording clerk.

So many people have come to our JYF room to teach us and tell us about things that they are doing or cool activities. One of these activities included the doodle-ography journals that we had a bunch of fun drawing in during business meeting and long lectures. Melanie shared with us that while doodling we could retain more information than if we were just listening. Secondly, we had Joanna teach us about chalk art. With the chalk we each drew something about ourselves then passed it on to the next person and so on to create two long portraits of what represents us. Joanna also had us cut out parts of a magazine to represent something to do with us and then we drew a picture combining them, there was one that represented us, one that we liked, one that we didn't like and one that didn't represent us. Another activity that we did was making roots poems in an acrostic form. An acrostic poem is made up of phrases in which the starting letters make up one word, in this case, roots. Later, Dave gave a seminar on the question, "How do you deal with someone who has a fear that you don't share about your situation?" that was followed by a discussion. This discussion was inspired by our interaction with a *lovely* member of the campus police. Chuck Kleymeyer came and shared about his new book, *Yeshu*, which was a more relatable telling of the New Testament. We went to an intergenerational plenary about privilege and what it's like to have, or not have a privilege. We were positioned in circles to discuss about the groups which we were part of that gave us privilege and groups we were part did not give us privilege. Finally, we played a game of capture the flag with the YF's and the RYF's in teams of X's and O's and we had a lot of fun. The game ended in a quite original Quaker Tie. The last and most important thing that we did was that we practiced approving things... over... and over... and over again.

Overall, the JYF's 2013 would like to recognize the support of the Yearly Meeting and we hope you rest in the light this coming year.

Sincerely,

Will, Tadek, John Mark, Silas, Hannah, Lily, Kyle, Anna W., Anna A., Starling, Miranda, Andrew, Sophia, Noah, Thomas, The Doctor, Amy Pond, River Song and Captain Jack.