

# Summary of Evaluations of Pacific Yearly Meeting's Annual Session 2016

*Prepared by Sally Kingsland and Kylin Navarro  
PYM Ministry and Oversight (M&O) Co-Clerks*

## Introduction

We hope that this summary will be useful to the broader Yearly Meeting in providing an overview of how people felt about Annual Session (AS) last year (2016). The summary is based on information gathered from 164 evaluations filled out by AS participants, including Young Adult Friends (total AS attendance was 308), 15 Junior Yearly Meeting evaluations (12 youth, 3 Friendly Responsible Adult Presences) and an additional 100 evaluations that focused only on Worship Sharing. The evaluations touched on many topics, and it is not our intention to reflect on all of them here. We do note in a few places where issues are under consideration for change next year.

## Overview of the responses

Overall, the overwhelming majority surveyed were very positive about their experience of AS 2016. Many F/friends reported feeling a sense of renewal and many went away wanting to bring more F/friends next year. Almost all reported being glad they attended and wanting to return again next year. Many found the focus on respectful relationships to be very helpful and reported an increased sense of inclusivity. The greater inclusion of children and youth in the program was appreciated.

Friends are clearly seeking more time for contemplative activities including worship, music, singing, hiking and fellowship. Some are also frustrated with our business processes, feeling individual wills are impeding the guidance of Spirit. M&O is working to support all Friends in finding a safe and respectful place in our community.

The style of our new Presiding Clerk, Diego Navarro, including his effort to remind Friends of our processes, was valued and praised by many people, though a few expressed frustration. The keynote speakers, Darcy Stanley and Carl Magruder, were greatly appreciated, as was the way that the theme of the AS, *Lifting of the Veil*, permeated our gathering. Worship Sharing was overwhelmingly a positive experience for those who participated. The queries were particularly appreciated this year. Bible Study and Early Quaker Writings were also very well attended and appreciated. The Plenaries for Listening and for Discernment were appreciated in their intention but there were clearly problems with how they were held and even their names. These plenaries were designed to be times during the second half of annual session to gather and reflect on how Spirit is working among us and collectively discern where Spirit is calling us to focus our attention and potential action. The name and form of these plenaries are being reconsidered for next year.

An ongoing area of concern is one of communications. Areas that people commented on included the reports for AS not being made available sufficiently early. There is room for improvement in both PYM committees and officers making information available well in advance of AS **and** in F/friends being sure to fully avail themselves of what information is available prior to AS. Having registration in the main tent and (re)creating an information desk were both big hits with participants.

We are aware that the timing in mid-June was difficult for many people and this year's AS (2017) will return to mid-July. Holding the gathering over a weekend has benefited many people and this experiment will continue to be evaluated by PYM M&O. The impact on Young Adult Friends (YAF) of the weekend timing needs to be taken into consideration as the pre-AS YAF gathering was very small this year, most likely because it had to be held mid-week.

Junior Yearly Meeting was a time of building strong community. A clear highlight was the Alternatives to Violence Project training that the teens did and the service project was also fun. There is a clear desire within the group to allow mixed sleeping arrangements to make their group more welcoming of gender-diverse F/friends. The teens appreciate the Friendly Responsible Adult Presences who support them during the week and were actively engaged in negotiating the agreements by which the program runs.

### Interesting facts

- Almost all the people who experienced the Children's, Junior Yearly Meeting or YAF programs **and** filled out an evaluation survey said that it was a positive experience!
- Around 90% of F/friends who answered the following questions said they:
  - Liked the way the plenaries were structured (how the Annual Session program was organized)
  - Felt Spirit to be alive amongst us
  - Felt worship to be deep at AS 2016
  - Found interest groups interesting and well presented
  - Enjoyed family night
- The dance was not widely attended by those who filled out evaluations (mostly older adults). Around 80% of those who attended said they enjoyed it. The JYM program reports that they would like it to go longer so we are confident this is a valuable activity.

### How will this information be used?

Various PYM officers, staff and committees, including M&O and the Presiding Clerk, will be using the information gathered through the evaluations to support the design and improvement of the PYM AS 2017.

### Further information

Further information about PYM and Annual Sessions, including the 2016 epistle, 2016 minutes and information about next year's gathering are available at the PYM website: <https://www.pacificyearlymeeting.org/annual-session-minutes-reports/2016-annual-session-reports-and-minutes/>