

These two reports from Cathy Walling to PYM and the YPCC are also included in the (forthcoming) supplement to the YPCC Report to PYM Annual Session 2017, all to be posted on the AS 2017 webpage:  
[https://www.pacificyearlymeeting.org/annual-session-minutes-reports/2017-annual-session-reports-and-minutes/#Youth\\_Programs\\_Coordinating\\_Committee\\_YP\\_Coordinator](https://www.pacificyearlymeeting.org/annual-session-minutes-reports/2017-annual-session-reports-and-minutes/#Youth_Programs_Coordinating_Committee_YP_Coordinator)

## Report to PYM from Cathy Walling, May 2017

Dear Pacific Yearly Meeting Friends,

What a gift and blessing it has been to spiritually accompany Alyssa Nelson and Thistle West on their travels in the ministry with Australian Friends in July 2016. My work with Alyssa began over a year prior to our traveling together. Thistle joined our travel planning in April 2016 on the recommendation of the Youth Programs Coordinating Committee (YPCC). An accompanying report to the YPCC committee speaks more to that aspect of the experience.

In May 2015, after receiving the invitation to spiritually accompany Alyssa for a Travel in the Ministry to Australia and discerning the “Rightness and Ripeness” of this invitation with my anchor committee, Alyssa and I began regularly meeting via Skype and phone, and we were also able to meet in person three times when I was in California for other spiritual work.

There is much that could be said about the importance of this preparation phase in assisting the three of us in spiritually yoking in this work, yet I will focus this report on the “on the ground aspects” of our time together at Pacific Yearly Meeting’s (PYM) annual session and immediately before and during our travel to Australia.

### **Attending Pacific Yearly Meeting’s Annual Session**

Attending PYM’s annual session just prior to our departure for Australia proved an integral aspect of my accompanying Alyssa. The fruits of this were multi-faceted:

1. I was the “on the ground” spiritually accompanying Alyssa at PYM’s annual session and getting to support her faithful service as the PYM Youth Programs Coordinator while also supporting her in not “over giving” during annual session to save energy for the upcoming extensive traveling in the Ministry yet to come. Seeing Alyssa’s work and the PYM community first hand prepared me to better accompany Alyssa in travelling beyond her own yearly meeting.
2. Just prior to the PYM annual session, I also accompanied Alyssa to the final overnight of the PYM Young Adult Friends (YAFs) Retreat and then attended the YAFs’ first business meeting at annual session. This opportunity felt particularly precious to me, as I probably wouldn’t have otherwise gotten to be a part of such gatherings and LOVED my opportunities to get to know, support, and receive blessing from various members of the YAF community!
3. I was invited into many sacred spaces and opportunities to uphold Alyssa “doing her job” for the yearly meeting. One big component of this was to get to see many of the more hidden aspects of Alyssa’s work and to name and affirm them for Alyssa: yes, they matter, even if not seen or known publically. (Often, important Spiritual work occurs below the “public awareness level”, yet is vital!)
4. By eldering for Alyssa during PYM, I was also able to spiritually listen for important pieces to bring to Australia Yearly Meeting (AYM), pieces Alyssa might not be aware of, in particular the “more” of what might be called forth. One huge example was eldering for Alyssa’s PYM Interest Group session on the spring camp at Quaker Oaks Farm with Quaker and Wukchumni Youth, a presentation titled “Native+Quaker Spring Youth Service-Learning Camp on the Land” that she had also presented at a professional Geography conference earlier in 2016. It turned out that later, during Australia Yearly Meeting (AYM), Alyssa would also share this ministry in a “share-

n-tell” session as well as in a special program with the Junior Young Friends (JYFs, age group is 12-17). In addition, Alyssa attended an AYM Winter School session on First Nations Concerns to learn and found she could also contribute from her experiences within PYM.

5. I was particularly blessed by the opportunity to Spiritually accompany Alyssa for a forgiveness, healing and reconciliation gathering during the PYM week, and felt and named the sacramental nature of such work in community!
6. I was present for various times when Alyssa was “spiritually accompanying” individual young Friends during PYM annual session, nurturing, affirming and supporting their Spiritual growth and development and specifically their next steps on their own spiritual journey. (The truth is, we all are invited into this work in our spiritual community. That said, having someone specifically named and affirmed into it, and in the case of Pacific Yearly Meeting also financially compensated to do it, further supports these gifts in being exercised and rightly used!)
7. Another particularly sweet and perhaps unexpected moment at PYM was accompanying Alyssa when she worked with the PYM Treasurer in matters of budget, finances, etc. The tending of monetary gifts as a spiritual practice was very evident as these two gathered and shared. What would our world be like if we all tended this resource from a Spiritually grounded place?

### **Travels in Australia with Alyssa and Thistle including attending Australia Yearly Meeting:**

Alyssa and Thistle were able to speak experientially from different vantage points with Australian Friends about Youth Programming, Intergenerational sensibilities and Alyssa’s work as the Youth Programs Coordinator of Pacific Yearly Meeting. Having Thistle present to share and speak experientially from their lived experience of growing up in PYM --and as a current young adult and Friend-- was a huge gift.

One particular highlight for me was eldering the Junior Young Friends (JYF 12-17 age group) session that Alyssa and Thistle co-led. The night before, Alyssa had put together a PowerPoint presentation with Thistle’s consulting assistance. Thistle speaking from lived experience as a Friend close in age to them made a palpable difference! After this graced session, Jenny Turton, the AYM Children and JYFs Coordinator, exclaimed how her hopes and expectations of our visit had already been far exceeded!! In addition to the formal JYF presentation, Alyssa also presented the following at AYM:

1. A Winter School session on “Becoming Adult Allies to Youth”
2. Children’s Education PowerPoint presentation co-led with Thistle, with pictures of PYM and AYM children and intergenerational community that prompted storytelling and questions and answers
3. AYM Children/JYF Child Protection Prep Session (PowerPoint presentation, “Healing & Co-Creating Vibrant Intergenerational Community,” including brief description of PYM youth programs and photos from PYM sessions, emphasizing lessons learned in the evolution of PYM’s approach of having a paid coordinator who works with both youth and adults as a resource person more than a program leader, an involved coordinating/supervisory committee, and both all-ages and age-based activities)
4. The share-n-Tell session “Native+Quaker Spring Youth Service-Learning Camp on the Land” (using the same prepared PowerPoint shared during PYM)
5. Sharing the “Native+Quaker Spring Youth Service-Learning Camp on the Land” presentation with the JYFs.

As the week progressed, more and more Australian Friends noticed the wonderful Spiritual Gifts Alyssa and Thistle could offer, had opportunities to get to know them personally, and called upon them to present and speak on more occasions.

One particularly rich opportunity arose when Alyssa was invited to join a few friends after the JYF-Children’s preparatory session to consider a seeming impasse blocking unity on a proposed new policy,

recognizing she may have gifts to offer. Alyssa ministered privately to the preparatory session clerks; then the next day she met privately with them again and with the person who had struggled during the preparatory session; finally during the formal session Alyssa was called into public ministry, posing a query that reframed the specific controversy as part of a larger question about “How do Friends help Friends through the various transitions of life?” In this case, the gift of the Traveling Minister who is not a member of the local community was called into Rightful service for the gathered community’s benefit.

Each of us participated in various personal “opportunities” with different Friends throughout the week. Specifically, Thistle plugged in with the AYM Young Friends (18-35ish) gatherings in addition to many one-on-ones. Again, having this intergenerational Traveling Ministry contribution to our travels was a total gift to Aussie Friends!

In addition, we observed several Junior Young Friends (JYF) and Children’s Program activities:

- JYF parent orientation meeting
- Children Godly Play offered by Jenny
- Children storytelling session about indigenous place names, the power of words, and the power-implications of who gets to decide official names
- Children’s whole-body mandala making
- Children’s natural building creative effort
- Lunch and informal conversation with JYFs, with topics arising such as current events, voting, politics, and the possibility of a unified stand on abortion

**Ideas we want to bring back from AYM. Please ask Alyssa and Thistle more about these:**

1. “Penn Friends” (formally-organized child and adult pen-pal relationships from different Meetings)
2. The children’s program was all ages together (0-11 years), not separate groups
3. During the formal session on First Nations Peoples’ Concerns, one action item named was to introduce oneself with not only one’s home Meeting but also whose land one lives or meets on... After this invitation, more and more Friends did so the rest of the week.
4. The help desk and the room/space it was in and how it was set up worked well, like a cross roads of a trading route
5. The silent worship ‘Epilogue’ at the end of every evening.
6. The midweek open time for getting out and exploring the surrounding area, including the opportunity to view a film about Friends involved in nonviolent civil disobedience, shown at a local theater and open to the public
7. The clear distinguishing between preparatory and formal sessions.
8. Prep sessions were clearly named for the topic each would tend to
9. The presiding clerk led the welcoming orientation offered for newcomers
10. A “Welcome to Country” was a given by a local indigenous person in the opening session, and “Acknowledgements of Country” were given throughout the week.
11. The named and intentional eldering of all sessions by Friends selected/asked to do so
12. Formal “pastoral carers” as listening presences
13. Closed sessions for elders and pastoral carers
14. The Standing Committee (similar to PYM Representative Committee) gathered to do its final preparatory work in the days just prior to yearly meeting, coming to annual session with “hearts and minds prepared”
15. Formal morning and afternoon tea every day provided important informal connection opportunities during these social times.

Also be sure to ask Alyssa and Thistle about their experiences after AYM, including visiting Silver Wattle Quaker Center and facilitating a “Becoming Adult Allies to Youth” workshop at a Regional Meeting. Alyssa continued on several more weeks after I, then Thistle, returned home, visiting four more Regional Meetings and offering the Adult Allies workshop three more times!

It is very challenging to convey the immense richness I experienced in accompanying Alyssa during PYM, and my three weeks traveling in the ministry with Alyssa and Thistle in Australia. I hope this report captures the Spirit of it and inspires each of you and PYM as a whole to step forward in faith with the ways you are being called into faithful service in our world.

With continuing gratitude and blessing,

Cathy Walling  
Member Chena Ridge Friends Meeting, Alaska Friends Conference

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## Report to YPCC from Cathy Walling, May 2017

**“With the gift of 20/20 hindsight.... What are the available learnings?”**

-- Please read the general report to Pacific Yearly Meeting prior to reading this report.

Dear Friends,

Finally presented with the opportunity to Spiritually reflect upon a report to this committee, I hold a bundle of joy and gratitude for the opportunity to Travel in the Ministry to Australia with Alyssa Nelson and Thistle West in June-July 2016.

While there is much to celebrate from those travels and being rightly used by God/Spirit --which is conveyed in a separate report to Pacific Yearly Meeting (PYM)-- there is also an opportunity to reflect upon an important learning and the need for forgiveness and healing of a tear in the fabric of Spiritual Community. This report to YPCC will focus on the “learning invitation” offered to all of us.

The basic issue was, I didn’t realize that Thistle hadn’t gone through a thorough, intentional process to spiritually discern their “rightness and ripeness” for stepping into the Traveling Ministry experience in the function of an “apprentice elder.” I didn’t learn this until Thistle specifically told me near the end of PYM Annual Session, a couple days before we were to depart for Australia. From my perspective, this lack of explicit and intentional spiritual discernment added stress to our journey in Australia.

Shortly after arriving in Australia, I was saddened and concerned when I heard Thistle say, “I didn’t know what I was saying yes to.” My understanding was that the YPCC had discerned that Thistle possessed gifts of eldering and would be coming in the function of “apprentice elder.” I was further surprised when Thistle later mentioned, “I have no juice for an eldering apprenticeship. Offering ministry has more life for me!”

I knew I did not have capacity to accompany two traveling ministers, and it was challenging to notice Thistle’s anxiety in this situation and not be able to give it the attention it needed. As a result, at times we experienced tension among the three of us. I also felt sad that Thistle didn’t feel supported in their ministry at times. **If there were going to be two friends traveling with Ministry, we needed more eldering accompaniment support.**

I have experienced a similar situation in a previous traveling ministry trip. In similar fashion, I think other Friends noticed big Spiritual gifts in a young adult Friend and, well-meaningly, invited them into an apprentice eldering opportunity without fully engaging the young adult to discern with them whether or not they had “spiritual juice” for this invitation and whether it was “right and ripe” for them to step forward into it. In both cases, these gifted Young Adult Friends didn’t actually have “life” for what the others had thought would be a rich opportunity for them and for the community. Without intentional

Spiritual discernment they ended up feeling unsupported, and a “mismatch” of their Spiritual juice did not align with what they had been asked to do. In cases like this in which other Friends making these decisions are older than the Young Adult Friend, I wonder if there might be a blind spot in the power dynamic?

I do think a brief discernment time with Australia Yearly Meeting’s Children and Junior Young Friends Coordinator, Jenny Turton, was helpful in drawing out a focus of Ministry from Thistle. Jenny offered these Queries for Thistle: “Why have you chosen to be more involved in the Life of your Meeting? Why is it enriching for you? What have been the benefits?” I think Thistle received some good spiritual grounding support from Jenny and some other Australian Friends and did experience many rich opportunities with individuals, both Young Adult Friends and Older Adult Friends, as well as teens and children.

It’s been my hope and prayer all along with this “hard piece” that Thistle, Alyssa, and I are all able to grow in more Spiritual Understanding and wisdom from it all. While hard and painful at times, with the gift of hindsight and maybe more time, I believe Thistle especially will draw much from this experience and be able to speak powerfully from experiential knowing!

In equal measure, it’s my hope and prayer that the Youth Programs Coordinating Committee and Pacific Yearly Meeting as a whole are able to grow in more Spiritual understanding and wisdom around the importance of spiritual discernment of eldering and ministry gifts from it all.

And finally, I pray that any unhealed hurts between Alyssa and Thistle experience forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. (My understanding is Alyssa and Thistle recently had an opportunity to gather together and have experienced a forgiveness and healing opportunity together! Halleluiah!)

This was another HUGE traveling Ministry adventure that PYM supported. It was filled with many wonderful and spiritually powerful times. The discernment issue raised here is a small bump in the road of an otherwise rich and wonderful journey. I pray that the fruits from this Spirit Led service be experienced by PYM and AYM (and Alaska Friends Conference, too) for years to come!

With Love and in Service,

Cathy Walling  
Chena Ridge Friends Meeting, Alaska Friends Conference