

2016 OVYM Epistle

Greetings to Friends Everywhere!

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends met for our 196th Annual Sessions on the campus of Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana from July 27 to July 31, 2016. We considered the theme, "One in Spirit: Becoming a More Inclusive Religious Society." As we gathered, we joyfully celebrated the harmony we find in lifting our voices together. However, we also listened to hear which voices might be missing in our yearning to create a more inclusive community.

In our business sessions, we considered some challenges we are facing, including difficulty with staffing several committees, and lack of participation by some of our monthly meetings in Yearly Meeting activities this year. Another serious concern laid before us is that Quaker Heights Care Community, the largest ministry of our Yearly Meeting, is operating at a deficit, which may result in the need to affiliate with another faith based organization.

However, there were also many reminders that the Spirit is prospering among us. We were encouraged and joyful to learn that the Yearly Meeting has hired a new Youth Secretary, with expanded responsibility for leading activities and events for both teens and middle youth throughout the year. We were also encouraged to see the faces of many young adult Friends among us this year. A clear leading came to plan for a program of intervisitation to reach out to monthly meetings that are not active in the Yearly Meeting, to build connections and increase engagement. In considering our budget priorities for the future, we entered a worship sharing process out of which came suggestions for ways to strengthen bonds and nurture our youth, and also a prophetic call that we are being made anew and transformed by the Holy Spirit.

We approved a number of new and revised sections of our *Book of Faith & Practice* in a more streamlined procedure, including sections on our testimonies of Integrity, Simplicity, Community, and Equality and a section on Listening to the Spirit. We worked faithfully together on the draft of the section on Equality in light of the inward work we are still undertaking to become more sensitive to racial injustice, and we felt divinely led in this process. Our goal is to complete the *Faith & Practice* revision process by 2018.

One of our Plenary Speakers, Michael Birkel, shared his experience of Religious Hospitality as a guest among Muslims, following a leading to learn about Islam. He shared some meaningful texts from the Qur'an such as "Wherever you turn, you shall see the face of God," and "Common kindness is a sacred duty." We learned that in Islam, as in Quakerism, prayer, meditation, and reflection are believed to open us up to a sense of beauty and sensitivity to injustice. We were encouraged to talk with our neighbors about their religion, because encountering other religious communities can change and enrich our lives.

Niyonu Spann spoke to us on "Trusting the Broken Heart" as a path of transformation to find our way to wholeness and healing. We learned that we must see beyond the illusion of the existing structures of oppression that separate us in order to truly acknowledge and appreciate one another. Through an exercise of speaking and listening in small groups, we were given a safe opportunity to be very honest about the pain we experience from the violence and division in our present world. Niyonu asked us to consider that to be truly inclusive and whole, we must open our arms wider, even when our hearts are breaking. When we lean on a deeper promise: God will assist us in being transformed and healed.

Our time together gave us many opportunities to reconnect over shared meals, singing, workshops and interest groups. In worship sharing sessions we had the opportunity to share more deeply and personally in small groups about our own interfaith experiences and ways to become a more inclusive community. At a memorial meeting we remembered and celebrated the lives of Friends we lost in the past year. At our annual Variety Show, we shared poetry, music, lively skits, laughter and tears.

We now return to our daily lives with opened hearts and outstretched arms, to live into a deeper understanding of loving inclusion. We have heard the call that we are being made anew, that God is transforming us. We know that the same deep mystery beckons and connects us all. We are called into holy encounters, the giving and receiving of hospitality, and listening with the heart past the illusions and boundaries that divide us. We are invited to heal, to reconnect, to share the hidden treasures that are desiring to be known, and to recognize and remember that we are whole.

2016 OVYM Teen Epistle

On Thursday night, Ian Murray and Caleb Murray joined up with Isaac Snediker-Morscheck, who had arrived the previous day. Isaac had joined the Middle Youth program until the Murray brothers rescued him from those mere Quaker pupae (lovely young Friends). The three of us formed the teen group. On Thursday night, we all listened to Michael Birkel's plenary speech on "Hospitality Among Religious Communities". We all found Michael to be an intelligent and funny speaker, and Ian got to ask him a question. On Friday morning we embarked on the rafting trip, and began downriver at about 10:00. We battled a group of frog monsters with our inner light, before flying off into space riding on our rafts. **What actually happened** was that we made it about 8 miles down river, returning at around 3:00. That night, we listened to Niyonu Spann give a plenary speech on "Trusting the Broken Heart", which was inspiring and made many good points. Later that night, Isaac went on a family trip to Maine, reducing us down to two teens. The next morning, we went to the athletic center for swimming and basketball, with the Middle Youth. That afternoon, a group of Puritans returned to try us for heresy, but we narrowly escaped and avoided hanging due to our quick wits and inner light. **What actually happened:** We went to the workshops, with Caleb and Ian both going to the "Quaker Social Change Ministry" workshop, at the Wilkinson Theater stage. After dinner, we returned to the Wilkinson for the variety show, which had many highlights, including French Jabberwocky, the Togami sisters singing, and of course, Steve Angell as Beyonce. We participated in the Middle Youth skit, which was a Quaker take on the classic Romeo and Juliet narrative. We went to bed shortly thereafter, and wrote this epistle at 9:30 this morning. This is a message from the OVYM Teens with passion for what you do and love for one another.

2016 OVYM Middle Youth Epistle

To Friends Everywhere,

We are the middle youth at the 2016 Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting annual sessions. Nine young Friends attended.

We spent five days together. We went to an animal center, rafting, made ice cream, and did a skit for the variety show. Michael Birkel talked to us about Islam and how to make words beautiful with calligraphy. Alice Robrish told us about ceramics and helped us make penguins.

We met God on the rafting trip and we felt love for each other. We had a business meeting to decide how to live with each other as a community. And we felt connected to the whole meeting at the variety show.

We encourage more youth to come to next year's yearly meeting and spend time together.

Andy Hardy Charlotte Dean Cecelia Branson Elana Branson
 Gillian Murray

Toby Dean Adam Snediker-Morscheck Ivy Clarkson Maryam Elel Theo Swank

2016 OVYM Children's Epistle

Greetings to young friends everywhere,

The Children at Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting met in July at Earlham College. We focused on the theme of One in Spirit; Becoming a More Inclusive Religious Society. We discussed how to include each other when we play. We discussed Bayard Rustin and how he made himself included during a time when many people were excluded from activities. The children could see the racism in the behavior of the people in the story. We learned that being included means appreciating the differences in each other. We discovered the many gifts that each person in our group owns.

We shared our concerns. We are concerned about the upcoming election. We also want to help the homeless animals. We thought a lot about how we treat each other and we realized that when another person is putting you down it might be because they don't feel good about themselves.

We welcomed the adults who shared their talents of craft and music. We were able to meditate and find our safe place. We sang and moved and became connected through music. We talked about what happens and what you can do during meeting for worship. We opened up to others through our clay designs and puppets.

Our message to you is "Love for all, Hate for none."

Love from the children (ages 7-10) of OVYM July 2016