

Epistle from South Central Yearly Meeting Annual Session
held 4/18-21/2019 at Greene Family Camp near Bruceville, Texas

To Friends everywhere,

We began our gathering on Easter weekend by honoring the original inhabitants of the land: this was Waco territory, with Tawakoni people to the east and Naishan Dene (Plains Apache) to the west. The glorious fields of bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush, green rolling hills, chilly lake, and wide open setting of Greene Family Camp was an inspiring location for our time together.

The voices, faces, handshakes and embraces among Friends at South Central Yearly Meeting evidenced a sense of sincere and spontaneous delight in one another's presence. In meetings for business, workshops and worship/sharing home groups, in songs and solving jigsaw puzzles, and in conversations with old friends and new acquaintances, we found the deep joy that arises when human souls resonate to the fundamental vibration of the divine.

Our theme – *Knowing, Being, Doing* – was manifest as we heard comprehensive reports presented by representatives to, and visitors from, a range of local, national, and international Quaker organizations and interfaith groups. These showed how thoroughly South Central Friends are woven into the broader fabric of Quaker life and service. The Yearly Meeting's annual budget revealed that 68% goes to direct support or delegate travel for advocacy and action in this wider world of Friends.

Our keynote speaker – Joyce Aljouny, General Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee – brought us words of uplift, challenge, and encouragement. She offered her personal experiences which characterized why activism is not merely a choice – oppression must be resisted. She went on to describe the work of AFSC as it enters its second century. A new global strategic plan is in progress, addressing climate justice, migration, conflict, and the rise of authoritarianism.

Our Peace and Justice Committee brought several issues into focus. Without hesitation, South Central Yearly Meeting endorsed a minute on immigration from Santa Fe, New Mexico Monthly Meeting, committing us to affirm the rights of immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers in our communities, to provide aid, companionship, friendship and safety, and to advocate for humane immigration policies and legal reform. At the urging of Bayou Quarter, we recognized a need to acknowledge and support our ongoing work challenging racism and xenophobia. The Yearly Meeting will collect information about each monthly meeting's specific efforts to confront these immoralities. We will share these examples through the Friends General Conference website. We also committed to create an actionable, multifaceted proposal to address climate change.

Our annual Quaker Variety Hour was the occasion of some serious fun, with Friends across the age spectrum sharing their talents for the entertainment of all. They performed feats of skill and daring, imagination, magic, music, and belly dancing.

On a sobering note, we received fifteen memorial minutes for Friends who departed this life in the past year. In a more hopeful vein, we celebrated the largest number of youth and children at yearly meeting in many years.

When a question arose during business meeting about how the AFSC and FCNL cooperate in their work, we heard the metaphor of making a rice cake: how one applies heat from above, and the other applies heat from below. We also recognize the need to generate light from within.

On the first day of our meeting, a tousle-headed three-year old walking along a path caught up with a bent-backed white haired Friend, reached up and took his hand. They continued up the path.