

The Epistle

Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association

June 13-16, 2019

Warren Wilson College, Swannanoa, NC

Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association (SAYMA) gathered for our yearly meeting at Warren Wilson College for a weekend of worship, business, socializing, and relaxation. The theme of yearly meeting was, “Seek the Light-Act Boldly.” Since we are struggling with many changes, both Light and boldness are much needed.

Thursday evening, Friend “Brother John” Adams related the story of his life as a native person of color in Tuskegee, Alabama. Friends were inspired as he explained the impact of his adoptive parents and the community’s struggle against white supremacy. We were intrigued at the twists and turns of the story as he searched for his birth parents and connected with his Lakota heritage. He also shared how his path led to his involvement in the Atlanta Friends Meeting, SAYMA, and wider Quaker organizations.

Thursday and Friday afternoons provided 21 workshops on various topics of current interest and included some intergenerational events. Presentations came from visitors as well as SAYMA folks. In response to suggestions from last year’s evaluations, Friday afternoon included a “Play Boldly, Rest Boldly” period, with various activities offered for those who were interested.

On Friday, we were delighted by a panel discussion by past and present fellows, founder, nurturers, and other adult supporters of Quaker Voluntary Service. QVS is a home-grown ministry through which young adults, across the country, are given opportunities for self-exploration and development through community service. The maturity and wisdom that these young people displayed gave us confidence that Quaker values and faith are being passed on and embodied in vibrant useful lives.

Much time, of course, was spent on business. Important aspects of this labor were updates in operational processes. We heard about a new system of reports from the treasurer and finance committee that were comprehensive and very understandable. These reports confirmed we are in good shape financially. A thoughtful process for allocation of funds for Wider Quaker Organizations (WQO’s) was adopted.

We heard reports from SAYMA’s committees and WQO’s. One especially compelling report was from Right Sharing of World Resources, which reported that in the past year, one thousand women were involved in 39 projects worldwide.

Guests included Angela Hopkins, Director, Friends Center for Racial Justice, Ithaca (NY), New York Yearly Meeting,; Anyango Reggy, Associate Regional Director, South Region, American Friends Service Committee, Atlanta, GA; Lori Sinitzky, Friends General Conference, Philadelphia, PA.; Sarah Freeman-Woolpert, Friends Committee on National Legislation; Hilary

Burgin, Quaker Voluntary Service; Quaker House. We noted with gratitude that the 50th anniversary of Quaker House will be celebrated in the fall.

At the end of yearly meeting, we enthusiastically accepted reports from Young Adult Friends (YAF) and Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM). Younger children had their own yearly meeting, and spent time in educational activities, constructive play, and other activities.

Friends participated in worship at the start of meetings for business, in groups early and late, for men and for women, and in worship sharing.

Community building included activities throughout the weekend such as conversations at Chat and Chew, intergenerational games, intergenerational talent show, and folk dancing. In the fishbowl, teens and adults exchanged and responded to questions. In worship sharing led by young adult friends, YAFs and adults sought Light on a deep-delving query: “How do you balance boldness and sensitivity in dealing with sensitive issues?” What a needed query for our moment!

The clerk offered a set of guides for our business sessions, which reminded us to use our better practices of listening and self-care. These reminders were very useful throughout the weekend, as we were aware of tension and uncertainty around questions of leadership and function of the SAYMA-URJ (Uplifting Racial Justice) committee. Over the past 3 years, this committee has been in a developmental phase. Questions of leadership have been difficult to resolve. SAYMA as well as URJ are in a steep learning curve as we address our understanding about our own racism and find way forward to develop leadership in URJ and racial awareness among all of SAYMA. While we are deeply invested in support for becoming anti-racist in our practices, we are aware how far we have to go, and how much we want to continue to integrate what we learn together in our regular practice and community life.