



NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS QUAKERS

To Friends Everywhere,

Loving greetings from the 365th annual Sessions of the New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. From August 1 to 6, 2025, we gathered for the first time on the campus of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, as well as over Zoom, and we humbly recognize that the lands on which we met are the unceded homelands of the Pocumtuc Nation. 420 adult Friends as well as 69 children and youth gathered here in the valley of the Long River (the Connecticut), with 116 Friends joining us over Zoom. We were especially glad to welcome 67 newcomers to our annual Sessions!

Our theme this year was “Streams in the Desert” (Isaiah 43:19). This theme has felt deeply relevant to us and has been woven through our worship and conversations. With the sorrow and concern that we carry, many Friends feel that we are living in a desert. Yet Friends feel called to stand against injustice and sense a readiness for our community to take action. And we need to find those streams that will replenish our souls.

Kirenia Criado Pérez of our sister yearly meeting in Cuba joined us as our Bible Half Hour speaker. Kirenia serves as pastor of the Friends church in La Habana and as a professor at Matanzas Theological Seminary. Kirenia spoke powerfully to us on our theme as she invited us to join her on a journey through the desert, reminding us that God’s map seldom takes the easy route. And she noted that, when God brought the Hebrew people out of Egypt, they also had to remove Egypt from their hearts, reminding us that while most colonial empires have ended today, we continue to struggle to remove empire from our own hearts.

Our plenary speaker was Gretchen Baker-Smith of Westport Friends Meeting. Gretchen has worked for many years nurturing youth and adults throughout New England Yearly Meeting and beyond, and is beloved as a bastion of the youth programs that have long been such an important part of NEYM. She spoke to us of the grief that many of us are feeling today but reminded us to hold on to what remains constant and what grounds us. We are called to be faithful, not perfect, successful, or even effective. Hope, she said, is how we balance the awfulness, pain, suffering, and grief, with the Love and Joy. Our challenge is to be present to the awfulness, but not forgetting where the watering holes are that we need. She offered us some words to keep in our toolbox: “What do you need?” “What can I do to help?” “Thank you for being here!”

Our musical plenary was provided by Kim Moberg, from the Tlingit people of Alaska, who shared with us her suite of songs called “The Seven Fires Prophecy: Suite

for Humanity,” which is based on a legend of the Anishanaabe peoples. She closed with her belief that all races and peoples of Turtle Island will learn to live together because “we are one,” and “our superpower is love.”

We came together with spirits again heavy with the loss of life in Gaza, and we are also burdened this year by the harm to cherished friends, neighbors, and community members by unjust policies of the current administration of our nation regarding immigrants and transgender and other LGBTQIA+ people. We heard a call to act to help at-risk people in our communities. Through a number of gatherings for Worship Sharing we have voiced our despair over the genocide occurring in Gaza as its people are being displaced, starved, and killed, struggling simply to survive the continuing attacks on their land and communities. We also heard a powerful message from Rania Maayeh of Ramallah Friends School describing the resilience of the students and teachers in facing incredibly difficult conditions under military occupation. We look for hope and ways that we as a community and as individuals can act to help alleviate the suffering and recognize the human dignity of the Palestinian people.

Both here and in many other countries we see these and other deep challenges to Friends' Testimonies. As we gathered together as a body of New England Friends, we have sought directions for our community to address these challenges, sharing ways to move beyond our despair through individual acts and group efforts in love and service. We have been reminded of Friends' long history of standing with those experiencing great losses to help alleviate their suffering and despair, and we have asked what we are called to today.

Our Quaker Indigenous Boarding School Research Group has completed the painful research that they were tasked with in 2022, and the group has now been laid down. Now it is time for the Yearly Meeting, monthly meetings, and individual Quakers to use what we have learned as we move forward with the work of retrospective, reparative justice and of building right relationships with our Indigenous neighbors. As we embark on this next phase of the work with our Indigenous neighbors, we are also reminded of the unfinished reparative work NEYM still has before us with African Americans and other marginalized peoples. We will endeavor to do this with humility and a consciousness of past mistakes.

Throughout our time together we have been reminded that our work in the world as Quakers must be motivated by careful attentiveness to the will of the Divine, not by human fear and anger. We know that we must move from a foundation of faith and love, and find hope and joy in the presence of Spirit. The Living Water is a stream which sustains and guides us. Through it we hope to be the hands of God and become

streams in the desert ourselves, bearing waters of hope and comfort to others who need them.

Let us recall the words of Isaiah (43:19 NIV) from which our theme this year was drawn:

See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

Kirenia explained that God is advising us, here, not to get stuck in grieving for the past, but to learn to live in the desert and to build, with hope, a better future. We *can* do this, as Kim Moberg said, because “Our Superpower is Love!”

Yours In Peace, Love, and Light,

New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Rebecca Leuchak". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rebecca Leuchak, Presiding Clerk

NEYM YF Epistle - 2025

Wednesday, 7th August 2024

Dear Friends everywhere,

This year six to ten Young Friends gathered at the annual sessions of New England Yearly Meeting in UMass Amherst from August 1–6, 2025, with the sessions theme, “Streams in the Desert.”

UMass Amherst was a big change from Castleton State University! We enjoyed exploring our air-conditioned dorms, trying new foods, and getting lost around campus (secret tunnels).

Although our group was smaller this year, we still were able to make memorable memories. Some of our favorites include ice skating with JYM and JHYM, capture the flag, the lake trip with JHYM, and having a hair-braiding session before bed.

We ate dinner with Kirenia Criado Pérez, pastor of Havana Friends Meeting and Bible Half-Hour speaker, who told us about the camp programs that Cuba Yearly Meeting runs. She invited us to travel to Cuba to attend in person, and we are very excited about the chance to go!

This year was Collee's last year as Young Friends coordinator. Collee has been our coordinator for the past 18 months and we are saddened to see them go, but excited to welcome our new coordinator Xinef. We're extremely grateful for the hard work and dedication you've put into the Young Friends program. Best of luck on your next adventure, Young Friends will be behind you all the way!



With love,
The Young Friends of New England Yearly Meeting

New England Yearly Meeting Junior High Yearly Meeting 2025

Hello Friends,

We are greeting you from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts. It was difficult this year because we had New England Yearly Meeting at a new location. A lot of us got lost and confused, not being able to find our way, especially on the first day.

That first day we spent the whole afternoon decorating our room which we called the Oasis. It is called the Oasis because the theme for Yearly Meeting this year is Streams in the Desert. Afterwards we had an ice cream social. We also made collages that represented things we were passionate about or cared about. Later we assembled the collages into a “quilt.”

When we started on Saturday we had 23 in attendance, including 8 adult staff. Then, our beloved Coordinator, Amy, tested positive for COVID-19 and had to go home, along with two others from our group. It was hard to have to wear masks inside. But we moved most of our activities outside and fortunately the weather was good. Throughout the week some new JHYM-ers came and others left. In all, there were about 25 in our community this year, including six who were moving on to Young Friends.

Many of us attended the Yearly Meeting plenary where Gretchen Baker-Smith spoke about the state of our world in darkness and how to find hope.

Throughout the week we did many different activities, including tie dye, ice skating, decorating oatmeal boxes for the 8th graders, playing Capture the Flag, Beach Day, and playing Mafia and One Night Ultimate Werewolf.

Overall, most of the week was a blast! We hope everyone will find Light in dark times.

In the Light,

The Junior High Yearly Meeting of the New England Yearly Meeting

The JHYM Epistle was presented by Nation Bhardwaj (Concord Monthly Meeting) and Arthur Eller Fitze (Portland Monthly Meeting).

Dear Friends everywhere,

We are 35 children in grades K-6 from all over New England. We enjoyed spending time with new and old friends. We had a very fun and busy week in a new location, UMass Amherst. We had conversations about being kind and welcoming each other in our new and building community.

We were grateful for the sunshine that lasted all week! This good weather meant that we could do many of our activities outside surrounded by nature. We started our week by tie-dying t-shirts, and we waited all week to see how they would look when the dye was rinsed out and the shirts unraveled. On Sunday we had All-Ages Worship, where we tied ribbons together with new people we found connections with to make a stream to represent our theme Streams in the Desert. We also read a story and sang with the whole Yearly Meeting. Later on Sunday we walked around the pond and made nature bracelets by sticking items from nature that we liked and putting them on the tape around our wrists. That afternoon, many of us played capture the flag with the older groups, Junior High and Young Friends. While some Friends played capture the flag, others sat in the field and explored how beans and lentils could be used to create a mandala. There were many new and special opportunities that being at UMass Amherst had to offer, like the ice-skating party and our walk to the conservatory, which had a koi pond and many beautiful plants!

We also had many special visitors this week! These visitors included Cuban Friends coming to visit and teach us a song in Spanish, Megan from Right World Sharing coming to teach us resource sharing games, Rachel, who is a mom of two JYMers, came to teach us about refugee children in the world, and Gretchen Baker Smith, our plenary speaker, who came to make candle holders with us and talk about our inner light. All of these visitors helped us to understand some of the different ways that children like us live across the world, and how each of us has a unique story or gift to share with others. Some of the children that we learned about this week had stories that made us feel sad, like the children in Gaza and Palestine, who had to leave their homes behind. With stories like these, we worked together to create artworks and messages of hope, and Rachel is going to help us share and send them to help encourage them to not feel alone. With all of our visitors, we shared our ideas and learned new things!

Other activities that we did this week were water play, singing with all of the youth groups, and building with Lego and K'Nex! This is how our first ever giant JYM tower came to be! Standing at over 7 feet tall, our staff are still not quite sure how we got this tower to reach so high!

This was a week well spent, learning from our visitors and from each other too, enjoying our friends old and new, and of course, piling our soft-serve [ice cream] high at every meal. We are excited to meet again.

- JYM K-6 2025

Rainer Humphries
Carol Baker
Peter Colby
Lynn Taber
Abigail Adams
Paula Rossvall
Sadie Greene-Sims
Brooke Burkett
Alison Levie
Erica Bowden
Tracy Booth
June Goodband

Dear Children Everywhere,

Nine Friends under the age of 5 met at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst from August 1st to 6th, 2025. We had extraordinary weather that allowed us to play outside with scooters, balls, sidewalk chalk, and bowling pins, as well as watch the construction workers for as long as they would allow. We developed new friendships over the week with both each other and our staff volunteers, and like the streams in the desert we were nourished from being together. We enjoyed being on a new campus and spending time in community, and we look forward to Sessions in the future!

The Under-5 Program at New England Yearly Meeting