

OVYM Epistle - 2005

To Friends everywhere,

We gathered at Wilmington College in Wilmington, Ohio between July 26 and July 31, 2005 for the 185th sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting.

Worship under-girded all our activities: workshops and business sessions, plenary sessions and meals, singing and interest groups and everything in between. We interspersed our outward actions with time to turn inward, toward God.

The theme of the Yearly Meeting invited us to move “Beyond Tolerance” and to seek “Common Spiritual Ground.” In our worship/sharing groups, guided by common queries, we discovered some of the joys and challenges of the search. Afternoon workshops focused on particular aspects or skills needed for the search: conflict resolution, biblical and historical study, self-care and empowerment.

We began some business sessions with quotations from the history of Whitewater Monthly Meeting, which was laid down in the winter of 2005. In this way we remembered the faithful Quaker lives of these Friends even while we grieved the passing of an historic Meeting. We were, in other ways, frequently reminded of the precious and precarious nature of life, and of God’s sustaining love in the midst of sadness and trial.

During our business session we heard reports from Quaker organizations near and far. We considered proposed changes in the ways we fund our Yearly Meeting activities, and discussed alternatives to our budget process. We will return to these matters between now and the next Yearly Meeting. Discussion of the revision of our Yearly Meeting Discipline at times presented profound difficulties, and offered us opportunities to apply the practices and ideas generated by our conference theme.

Our first plenary speaker, Cecile Nyiramana of Rwanda Yearly Meeting, shared movingly of the suffering she and her family experienced during the genocide of 1994. Yet in the midst of their suffering she found courage first to encounter and then to forgive her enemies. Slowly, and with the help of Quaker sponsored workshops, her spirit began to heal. With renewed strength, she reached out to other wounded Rwandan women. Together they broke down the boundaries between them, and found common spiritual ground.

In our second plenary Michael Birkel spoke with humor and directness, challenging us to engage in genuine interfaith and intrafaith dialog. He spelled out the steps required, both inner and outer, and urged us to join in this crucial work. When we prize our own distinctive spiritual treasures and listen with open hearts, we will discover deep within the path to common spiritual ground, which is love.

We reveled in the fruits of one of our own ministries, Friends Music Camp. Students and faculty from the camp performed a Concert for Peace and Justice. The beauty and power of their music lifted our hearts, and reminded us that hope can sustain us, even in time of war.

As Yearly Meeting comes to an end we find ourselves refreshed by our time together. We have experienced some of the obstacles to moving beyond tolerance. We have seen that even unimaginable suffering can be transformed into new possibilities for life together. When “love is the first motion” we can find the way forward together.

We say, with Margaret Fell in her Letter to William Osborne, 1657, to Friends everywhere:

“The eternal God of power keep thee faithful, that a pure growing up in the eternal thou may witness, that so an instrument for God’s glory thou may be.”

Children's Epistle, OVYM 2005

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

Ten school-aged Young Friends met at the 185th session of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Wilmington College in Wilmington, Ohio, from July 27th to 31st, 2005 to consider the theme of "Beyond Tolerance: Seeking Spiritual Common Ground."

We heard many concerns. We are concerned that we are losing our popularity. We are concerned that some people eat beans and rice every day. We are concerned that there are not more Quaker vegans, and we are concerned that there are not enough glow-in-the-dark beads.

We shared many hopes for the future. We hope we are not homeless. We hope we can donate money to the poor so they can eat pizza. We hope there is a talent show next year at Yearly Meeting, and we hope we can come back to Yearly Meeting next year.

Sincerely,

The Young Friends of OVYM

Rachel Logan

Dylan Cahalan

Isaac Hines-Willimas

Kirk and Andrew Hardy

Tobias and Charlotte Dean

Cecilia and Elana Branson

Noah Winold

Middle Youth Epistle, OVYM 2005

There were four of us, ages 11 to 13, who met, had fun, engaged in deep discernment, and grew close during the 2005 Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting sessions. We had two great staff, James and Ann, and we thank you!

Cathy Habschmidt met with us, and we talked about the New Testament. We found that Matthew 25:35-36 spoke to us: "When I was hungry, you gave me food, when I was thirsty you gave me drink, when I was a stranger, you took me into your home, when naked you clothed me, when I was ill you came to help me, when in prison you visited me."

For our service project, we canoe and kayaked part of the Little Miami River, picking up trash along the way. Unfortunately, the project was a great success: we found three bags of cans, five bags of trash, a tire, a radio, a piece of siding and lots of fishing line. We paddled past Fort Ancient State Memorial, a place used by Native Americans many years ago.

We wonder why people leave so much behind along the river. Perhaps the reason is that many people seem to think only of themselves and don't think about what their actions do to others or our world. Perhaps people in the United States think the whole world is their trash can. We also wonder if the people who used to live at Fort Ancient shared different values than those we see around us today.

We seem to go through life with our eyes closed so we don't have to see what we're really doing to our world. We only seem to be thinking of ourselves today, rather than thinking of the future.

We spent much time learning about Rwanda and the genocide there. We watched the movie "Hotel Rwanda" and discussed it afterwards. We all went to at least part of Cecile Nyiramana's talk and some of us followed Cecile to the teen dorm to listen to her some more.

We learned from Cecile and the movie “Hotel Rwanda” that one caring person taking the initiative can make a tremendous difference in the world. Good done in a small place can spread out all over the world.

Sometimes we make judgments about people we’ve just met, or have known all our lives, which are very hurtful. We realized after watching “Hotel Rwanda” and talking with Cecile, that these judgments can even result in war or genocide. Then we realized that our earlier judgments about people who leave trash behind on the Little Miami River could actually be part of the reason our own eyes may be closed to what we do in the world.

We urge Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting to open the eyes of the world to the problems in our shared environment and take some initiative in correcting them.

We were so deeply moved by listening to Cecile that we invited her to our dorm to talk with us. She taught us a simple hymn in Kinyarwanda, which we would like to sing for you now. We encourage Friends to rise and participate as they feel moved.

Teen Epistle, OVYM 2005

The teen team arrived the first day with the cool familiarity that was to be expected. We played cards and caught up until night fall, when a hunt was joined by all for ice cream, cookies, various foods as well as a frisbee. High spirits were shared by all, as we returned, clutching our goodies.

The next day we attended an event of great importance: the canoe trip. A journey between two points on the Little Miami River traveled twice, once on a bus and once in a boat. Its purpose was sun, companionship, water, exercise, and rope swings, not to mention the tipping. Hoo Hoo! I know tipping is customary, but that was ridiculous. That evening, we heard Cecile recount her experience of the Rwandan genocide and of her efforts to bring the two alienated groups to an understanding that might not have been reached in any other way. She also spoke with the teen group about the young people of Rwanda and their experiences. We are extremely grateful that she was willing to share so much of herself over an issue of such emotional magnitude. After sunset, we had a game of wink on the lawn and we then realized how bad we had been sunburned that day.

Friday, the teen group was joined by some new recruits, and there was much rejoicing; there was a business meeting in which we discussed a lot of top-secret stuff; we played sports until our meals were writhing in our tummies. Then we learned about Islam and many myths were dispelled surrounding this foreign religion. After this, after teens joined in a fun information workshop on transformation of hatred, we then played more sports and were soon meandering down to the bonfire where all ages convened and had a good time.

Saturday started with a division of the beloved group. Five stunningly awesome teens stayed behind to paint a banner depicting an abstract representation of our last service trip, while the rest of the tremendous troupe displayed a feat of strength, previously unheard of, to clear a trail of undergrowth in time to walk back for lunch. Such hard labor was commended and stamped with the JT seal of approval before the Simply Speaking committee scampered off to prepare for that workshop which happened 2 ½ hours later. I’d tell ya how this went, but that’s not allowed so we will skip to movie night/concert which was approved by all attendees. That night, the epistle committee labored over a hot piece of paper to prepare this jambalaya of events for you to digest and hopefully enjoy. All in all, a consensus of approval from all the teens.