

2007 OVYM Children's Epistle

Eleven children between the ages of one and ten met at the 187th annual session of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Earlham College in Richmond Indiana from July 25-29, 2007, to consider the theme of "Growing Our Faith to Transform the World."

We understand that growing our faith is like tending a garden. First the soil has to be cleared of rocks, sticks and weeds. A seed is planted and must have water and sunlight to have any hope of growing. There are tools we can learn to use, such as choosing what is best for us, saying "I don't like it when you do that," encouraging, helping others and sharing our gifts with others. These tools help us transform the world with our family, friends and ourselves.

Finally after much waiting and working this garden we see blossoms, the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Taking action to make a change is possible. We expressed these fruits through writing a song to share, giving gifts and singing for the seniors at Lauramore Home and raising money for the Heiffer Project by selling crafts. To quote our song,

Day by day,
week by week,
Transforming our world is what we need to do.
Sharing, caring, helping each along.
Taking care of earth so she's here when we are gone.
Day by day,
week by week.

2007 OVYM Middle Youth Epistle

This year the Middle Youth of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting tried to create a little community inside of a larger Quaker community. We got to know each other through activities. This included community service at a local animal shelter where we walked and washed dogs and played with cats. While we were working at the animal shelter there was a good feeling that we have a lot to give to the community. We went kayaking and during the lunch break we learned about worship sharing. Some of us really enjoyed the experience. We also felt that the kayaking trip helped us build this small community because it required teamwork to finish the eight miles. Working together made the trip more enjoyable. Then we biked to Quaker Hill where we ate lunch, played soccer and worked on our skit for the talent show. We tried to connect our skit to what Alisha McBride taught us about lobbying. In our skit we wanted to get the point across that since we are older we wanted to be treated with respect. In preparing our skit we became more of a community. When we performed it we felt like we had become closer to the larger community and earned more respect.

Some of the most valuable things that we thought we learned this year were from Shannon Isaacs about Conscientious Objectors. We found that it's harder than we expected to be completely non-violent. We don't know exactly what we would say if the Draft Board asked us such hard questions. We realized that being in the Quaker community may come as a challenge to some of us, but it's worth it.

2007 OVYM Teens' Epistle

Dear Friends, thirteen teens between the ages of fourteen and eighteen met at the 187th session of the Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting in Richmond, Indiana from July 25th through 29th 2007 to explore the theme "Growing Our Faith to Transform the World". Through worship, discussion and community we have learned that it takes the whole community from the smallest to the largest to accomplish transformation.

We began Thursday morning with the idea that our annual canoe trip would be another normal event of floating lazily down the river eating bagged meals but much to our great dismay we actually *learned* something. We got to spend good ole quality time with our much-missed Friend the wonderful wilderness that used to inhabit the places we now live. On the river we felt led to latch together our canoes and float sloppily down the river as one. We braved rapids, large streams and a giant whale-shaped stone, all as a group.

On Friday we immersed our hearts and minds in the workshops of the afternoon. The teens all went their separate ways and chose what interested them most. One of the workshops attended was Paul Buckley's "Be Ye Transformed" which left us with answers and questions alike. We enjoyed hearing others insights on scripture and it challenged us to explore our minds, and sit still. Other young Friends went to Richard Mitchell's "Health Care for all" and were reminded that these are pressing issues that will be knocking on our doors in a short 45 years and maybe sooner.

Although not a Yearly Meeting sponsored activity we find it important to mention our journey to the Ichthys House. The Spirit came down on us like water and much was realized about ourselves, our lives, our faith, and each other. Amidst all the books and comfy well-seasoned furniture, it felt like venturing to that small, warm, secret corner of your heart where the passion for great books and a deep love for your fellow creatures of Earth is sealed away. After worship, much to the amusement of Clyde Johnson we formed a pile of Quaker bonding on his squishy, green couch (no you did not mis-read/hear, seven of us literally stacked up on his couch).

This years' Plenary and workshop speakers seemed to unofficially be themed with the tough question, "Is this God's will and part of the bigger plan or my will and part of my plan?" At any point during our spiritual journeys this is a question that is very important. In your teen years you feel like you are at the beginning of an actual sized version of the board game *Life* "choose college or career," spiritual callings are something we need to pay very close attention to at this turning point. We realized that you just have to open up to God and be willing to give up everything for His plan, to trust that He knows where your life is going, and although you may not see it the Light is everywhere waiting not to just be heard but to be understood, not just to be seen, but perceived.

A few of us, we won't name any names, have realized that our singing voices are not up to par. In fact, while singing alone we actually sound like dying animals. This yearly meeting bellowing together during the hymn singing sessions to our great surprise we made a joyful noise while trying to achieve a semi-harmonious state. Really, isn't that what being a Friend and changing the world for the better is like? Alone we may not be able to accomplish much, but together through fellowship and improving our faith in each other we can transform the world!

2007 Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Epistle

To Friends everywhere,

Greetings to Friends around the world, from Friends meeting for the 187th annual session of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting, July 25th to 29th 2007 at Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana, USA.

The theme of our Yearly Meeting has been "Growing our Faith to Transform the World," words that in a variety of ways have inspired us in the time we have spent together. We opened our Yearly Meeting sessions reminded of the words of George Fox "Do all that you can in peace and love and in the fear of God, condescending one to another, in the simplicity and innocency of truth, and in the wisdom of God, that this may be everyone's crown, that nothing may be done in strife to occasion words; for you are called to peace and holiness in which the kingdom stands and to serve one another in love."

Our worship-sharing groups focused intensively on this year's theme, and gave us the welcome opportunity to meditate and discern together our role in transforming the world at all levels from the local to the global. We considered the central role our faith plays: how can we nourish our faith to transform our impact on the world?

We pray that our small daily tasks of caring for the earth and for one another may serve as seeds of God's transforming love.

We are still in the lengthy process of revising our *Book of Discipline*, and are grateful for the engagement and participation of the entire Yearly Meeting. It was with a sense of accomplishment that we were able to take the first concrete step in giving voice to our faith as we found unity to give final approval to the Introduction of our *Book of Discipline* which sets forth the ways in which we experience our Quaker faith.

We see a welcome chance to 'grow our faith' in the sense of spreading our Quaker values as we move closer to clearness on adoption of the Earth Charter, a process that is still being seasoned.

We continue to discern our way forward in the development of a spirit-led 'covenanting' process for meetings to determine their share of the Yearly Meeting's budget.

We have vigorous programs for children and youth. We appreciated their participation in the business sessions as they shared their own epistles and queries. The youth programs included opportunities for centering worship and Quaker business practice. We lifted up the important role of youth in the life of our yearly meeting, and recommitted ourselves to nurturing and learning from our children and youth. Opportunities for intergenerational sharing included having adults serving as worship mentors to the middle youth and 'simply speaking' discussions between teens and adults.

We have held a number of workshops, among them alternatives to violence, internalizing the Quaker message through songs and chants, religious education for children, and one called "Be ye transformed," which used passages from scripture that contained stories of transformation, and asked Friends to share how these stories spoke to them. In the workshop on transforming our relationships with food and the land, we considered that change needs to come from deep moral and spiritual roots. We shared the joy and hope found in living closer to the land, and in creating community through sharing locally grown food.

Each year we hold a session called 'Living Witness' where an experienced Friend is given the opportunity to recount a life in Quaker faith. This year featured Bob Vetter, currently a member of the Board of Trustees of Right Sharing of World Resources, who told us of his spiritual journey which involved, among others, joining Ohio Yearly Meeting Conservative in his teens, and later spending time in prison for non-compliance with the military draft.

It is with a sense of eager anticipation that we look forward to hosting the FWCC Annual Meeting in April 2008. At this session we have taken steps toward preparing our resources to meet the numerous challenges this event will bring, as we anticipate being able to welcome Friends from the entire Americas region.

We were pleased to welcome into our sessions a small group of Friends from another Yearly Meeting who were exploring avenues toward the healing power of a different Friends' faith community.

We were inspired by the wise words of our two Plenary speakers, Margaret Fraser of FWCC and Paul Buckley of OYVM. Margaret provided a strong voice in addressing several themes, beginning with the assurance that transforming the world is indeed possible even in a time when we have largely lost confidence in the inevitability of progress. Only a radical trust in God's hand will enable us to address the many problems of transforming the world. We are often called a 'peace church', she also reminded us, but we cannot talk peace unless we practice it totally among ourselves. She moved into helping us prepare ourselves for the hosting of the FWCC Annual Meeting next year, reminding us of the rapidly increasing dominance of the southern hemisphere in the world of Friends. We are no longer the 'mainstream' Friends, and we need to take leave of any traces of ethnocentricity. We cannot even claim to be guardians of Quakerism (for instance saying "Friends believe ...") in matters of religious practice. But giving up this dominance does not mean giving up our values.

Paul Buckley asked us to join him in a meditation on the passage from Romans 12:2 KJV "And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and

acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Friends were reminded that, although conforming to the world may often be the route that works, we are called to a much higher standard. Whatever we do must come out of love. We are not called to be effective, we are called to be faithful. We were given some examples of how the world may be transformed by patient obedience to the will of God. Even our daily choices for simplicity may make us feel good, but we still like to be in charge. The real purpose of discernment is trusting God to transform lives. Are we willing to give up all to discern the will of God, to be tools in God’s hands rather than individual agents of change? This is how the world is transformed.

We call on Friends everywhere to discern their own ways of growing their faith to transform the world.