

Epistles of the 2008 OVYM

Greetings to all Friends everywhere,

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting met for its 188th annual sessions on the campus of Earlham College, July 30-August 3, 2008 using the theme “Delve deeply, walk lightly, dwell in harmony” to shape our time together. Early in our sessions we saw how the strains of our theme were echoed in epistles from Friends around the world as they expressed common concerns for deepening the spiritual experience, caring for the earth, and fostering understanding among us. A sense of connectedness and an appreciation for the richness of the fabric of the Society of Friends provided the backdrop for our sessions.

The different strains of our theme were pulled together by Jens Braun of New York Yearly Meeting as he drew from his experiences working in Costa Rica and the Gaza Strip and from his later leading to participate in an intentional community in New York. While working to walk lightly on the earth, he realized that sustainability is not enough. We want much more than the stasis implied by that word, as we delve more deeply into the values that sustain us and allow those values to guide us in our efforts to dwell in harmony. He challenged us to break away from the societal architecture that shapes our situations and step into a world where wealth consists of wellbeing and wholeness rather than tradable goods.

Doug Gwynn of Indiana Yearly Meeting took us from the divergent beliefs of present-day Quakers back to the set of tenets that defined the early Seekers in 17th Century England. Doug led us in an examination of the historical context that shaped the Society of Friends in the 1640s, and helped us to understand the societal influences that fed the fervor of early Friends. We were left to ponder how we might recreate that sense of urgency and longing for a reawakening to Christ’s message.

A set of queries helped us delve deeply into our understanding of God and to share our experiences of the Spirit in worship sharing sessions. Considering questions such as how we have experienced the leading of the Spirit, how we share our faith with others, and what convictions sustain our commitment to service or witness, we challenged ourselves to find the spiritual center we all share. Workshops, too, helped us explore how we can find commonalities and dwell in harmony as we considered topics ranging from discovering Convergent Friends to finding paths to peace between Israel and Palestine.

Business sessions continued our discussions of the revision of our book of discipline and of the equitable division of responsibility for our financial needs among the monthly meetings. We struggled to find common ground on definitions of membership in the Society of Friends and what it means to be a member. We searched for ways to be sensitive to the burden of our financial expectations on struggling meetings. While the process can at times be uncomfortable, we also see the Spirit moving among us as we work to resolve these issues.

We rejoiced in the participation of a vibrant community of teens and young people, and welcomed a growing group of young adult Friends. They challenged us with queries, contributed to workshops, and joined with us in plenary sessions while conducting their own business sessions, working on service projects, and enjoying their leisure time together. In their hands, we’re confident of a bright future for the Society of Friends.

Our time together in these sessions has been rich and full. We have challenged ourselves to delve deeply. We have explored our commitment to walk lightly. We have searched for ways to dwell in harmony. We take away from this place the sense of renewal necessary to continue the process, and we share with all Friends everywhere the desire for God’s loving presence in our lives.

Young Adult Friends:

Epistle to the Yearly Meeting from the Young Adult Friends

Dear Friends,

The Young Adults of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting met Friday evening to discuss our experience thus far, our current status within the Yearly Meeting and our ideas, hopes, and needs for the future of the group.

In the process of checking in with each other, we discovered that many of us feel isolated and not adequately nurtured and supported within our home communities and within the Yearly Meeting. For many of us the meeting on Friday was the first experience we had since teen group where a gray head was not to be found. While we appreciate the mentoring and relationships we have with our older Friends there is a shared need for a stronger community with each other.

This is a difficult time for us. The scattering influences of changing environments, relationships, and communities, combined with the sheer distance between small groups of young adults makes it hard for a strong network and program of nurture to develop. Support from the yearly meeting is needed to enable these

relationships to grow and enable us to rise to the challenge we feel is often placed on us by our elders, that though we are the future, we are also the present of the yearly meeting.

We considered the following ideas for future developments of our program; already several of us have joined committees, however due to the transitional nature of our lifestyles, this is not always possible. The development of a Young Adult semi-program which would interact with teens, adults, and each other, would help bridge the gap between these groups and provide us with time for reflection and worship. This semi-program, along with an institutional counterpart of interested adults and young adults, would also provide a point of growth for other developments. We don't feel a whole committee or block of programming is necessary, however it may be useful to have a mentor, elder, pointperson, or some combination of those to brainstorm activities and network support. We also feel strongly that a young plenary speaker would be refreshing and empowering both for the young adults and for the yearly meeting.

Outside of the yearly meeting, connections with FGC's Youth Ministries, FWCC's support, Young Adults in other Yearly Meetings and other religious groups such as house churches, should be encouraged to foster religious conversation between OVYM Young Adults, and to enable us to take roles in larger religious developments. To some extent this can only happen organically, but a method of developing these connections has been missing up to this point.

Within our monthly meetings it may be helpful for members to keep track of the young adults, and not let graduating teens slip through the cracks of communication. It also may be useful for there to be some mechanism of maintaining purpose for young adults so that there is not a shock of emerging from a program into the bewildering world of business meetings.

Already there has been some realization of our goals. We've had a great time this session reconnecting and enjoying each others company. We hope that the young adults continue to meet, maintain and build upon our community within the larger Yearly Meeting. We look forward to working along with adults and teens as we negotiate this transitional time. We appreciate the support that we have been given so far and anticipate an easier facilitation and self-recognition of our needs, abilities, and gifts.

Third day, eighth month, 2008

Teens:

The Teen epistle was read by Chie Togami and Shannon Isaacs

Greetings, Dear Friends around the world,

This yearly meeting began, as always, with the joyful reunion of close friends and the excitement of meeting new people as they slowly trickled into Richmond, IN. We began our first meeting by playing a few games and introducing the shining new faces to our collective body.

On Thursday, we set out on our annual canoe trip. We spent the day in the sun, swimming, swinging from ropes, sitting on mud-encrusted wooden canoe-seats, and of course, smashing spiders. There were also some invaluable opportunities for thinking and great conversation. Some of us even felt the need to transport ourselves back to the age of pirates. Overall, the canoe trip was quite fun, and in parts exciting, tiring, invigorating, exasperating, thought-provoking, and (occasionally) sublimely spiritual.

That same evening, after returning from our day excursion, the Quaker teens had the pleasure of attending a plenary session with Jens Braun. We also had our own time for worship sharing during which we explored the query, "what message can we as Quaker youth share to better the world?" We came to the conclusion that this world needs everyone to treat each other with greater love, dignity, respect, and acceptance. We decided that one way to start is to simply treat one another better on a normal day-to-day basis. Later on we were introduced to the metaphoric imagery of throwing rocks into a clear pond as a way to understand worship sharing.

Another experience that had a great effect on the Quaker teens was our involvement with the Eyes Wide Open exhibit. On Friday morning we aided with setting up the display of hundreds of boots to represent the lives of soldiers lost in the Iraq war. It was a truly poignant and moving experience. Another important aspect of the exhibit was that it commemorated the lives of Iraqi civilians that have died in the war. Most of us agree that the atmosphere was something not experienced every day.

On Saturday, the teens had the opportunity to hear the story of a living witness, Hank Swain. His disarming humor and stories of powerful ministry effortlessly bridged the generation gap. Later that day, we created another opportunity to intermingle with older Quakers by opening communication regarding the controversial issue of teen drinking and privacy. By breaking into small discussion groups we intentionally set up an environment where people could feel comfortable enough to truly speak from the heart. We would like to share with others what we learned from this experience: frank discussion and humor are powerful tools for creating intergenerational dialogue.

With Love,
The Teens of OVYM

Middle Youth:

Dear Friends,

We're the Middle Youth group, and our theme this year was to see how we could Tread Lightly and Delve Deeper in our lives. We did lots of stuff like canoeing, biking, swimming, ping-pong, the variety show, and most importantly, spending time together as a community. We learned new things, such as bike safety and lots of new games like Mao! These were important because it helped us learn to work together and really helped us become closer and be a true community. It makes us sad when we realize that we only get to see each other and spend time like this once a year, but that just makes us really enjoy and cherish every moment we have together. Connecting with each other really helped us find that place within our selves to Dwell in Harmony.

Sincerely,
The Middle Youth

Children:

Fifteen school age children met at the 188th annual sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana from July 30 to August 3, 2008 to consider the theme "Delve Deeply, Walk Lightly, Dwell in Harmony."

We delved deeply in discovering who we are and how we are each similar and yet unique. We discussed the need to walk lightly on the earth and take care of her. We dwelled in to harmony of our music and songs. Through stories we learned how people changed when they were know more deeply.

Our speakers and leaders shared teachings from how to appreciate our name to how to see similarities in others to how to make a violin.

Our activities took us on a treasure hunt where we shared revelations about ourselves and shared the treasures at the end of the hunt. We listened to each other's leadings to construct a skit and song that brought us all together.

Our concerns range from the homeless and hungry to the war. Our hopes for the future include peace and the sharing of world resources.

The query we posed at OVYM 2008:

"How do you contemplate life, the universe and everything, while still being light hearted and easy going?"

Our Song:

Walk lightly little friends
Sing and dance and feel alive
Walk light little friends of mine.

Delve deeply little friends
Think and read and play aloud
Trust your spirituality and live in harmony

Dwell in harmony. Enjoy your family,

Your pappas and your grammys,
Your mommy's and your daddy's and
Dwell in harmony.

Delve deeply little friends
Walk lightly little friends
Laugh / love / play / hugs and
Dwell in harmony.