

Epistles of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting 2011

191st Session at Richmond Indiana

Yearly Meeting Epistle

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting 191st Sessions
Richmond, Indiana

Greetings to Friends Everywhere,

As Friends gathered for the Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting's 191st Annual Sessions, the weather was bright and sunny, the 27th day of 7th month, in the year of our Lord 2011. The temperature was about 90 degrees, and Friends had been warned to "bring a sweater: Earlham College kept its buildings cool." In reality, though, the climate within the Landrum Bolling Center was very comfortable.

To get Friends warmed up for the Yearly Meeting, in the morning the Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Teens had invited adults to join them in a service project. The work for Habitat for Humanity was strenuous, including the hanging of drywall. Once back at Earlham, a get-acquainted activity hosted by the Teens took place in Stout Meetinghouse.

This year is known as the Year of the Bible, as many of the world's Christians celebrate the 400th Anniversary of the King James translation of the Bible. And this year, Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting chose Micah 6:8, "What does the Lord Ask of Us?" as its theme.

Our two plenary speakers, Noah Baker Merrill and Margery Post-Abbott spoke to the full text of this scripture:

"He has showed thee, O mortal, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." They both worked together to galvanize Friends with stories of their separate faith journeys, challenging each of us to live out our own faith with passion and integrity. Both speakers were gracious and generous with their time, offering workshops, visiting the youth, and communing with us during the entire Yearly Meeting.

The Yearly Meeting theme was also prayerfully addressed by queries prepared for worship-sharing each morning of the gathering. Among these queries were: What do you understand by "ministry?" What is the relationship between prayer and doing justice? How have your inward leadings inspired your outward actions of service?

One of the first orders of business was the report by Peace and Social Concerns, which followed up on last year's minute regarding the Gaza occupation. The committee made available a DVD, *Life in Occupied Palestine*, and a list of questions on Israeli/Palestinian relations to all monthly Meetings.

On the second day of the Yearly Meeting, 7th month 28, the President of Earlham College, David Dawson, welcomed Friends to this lovely campus. He also lifted up the names of two Earlham College students who had lost their lives in a car accident the day before.

During the report from Quaker Heights Care Community, Friends were deeply concerned to learn that the state of Ohio cuts to Medicaid payments have hit hard and painfully close to home, costing the care facility's budget over \$ 200,000.

The next item of business on the agenda was the laying down of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting's Property Corporation, giving rise to a suggestion to contribute the Corporation's approximately \$ 1,400 as a one-time gift to Quaker Heights. Friends approved this measure.

A friendly greeting in the form of a letter was sent to Friends United Meeting, as the Triennial was gathering in our geographical region at Wilmington, Ohio concurrently with these Annual Sessions.

The concern for same-sex marriages brought by North Meadow Circle of Friends some twenty years ago was considered anew at this time. Brought forward by Whitewater Quarter, this minute was well received and approved by the Yearly Meeting.

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Friends have been led by the Light of the Living Christ to understand that God's love extends with equality to all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The understanding that Christ has given us as Quakers today leads us to three conclusions: We affirm the full humanity of Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender persons. We are committed to their equal status within the Religious Society of Friends and the wider world. We celebrate their covenant relationships, including marriages under the care of our constituent meetings, as just as sacred, just as valid, and the cause for just as much joy as those of any other persons.

On 7th Month 29, the business sessions started with the formal recognition by the Yearly Meeting of Earth Care as a full committee. Earth Care had been a subcommittee of Peace and Social Concerns for more than six years. Its emphasis this year will be food, Ecological design, and water, which often is hard to get a firm hand on.

Subsequently, the Yearly Meeting was led to consider merging the Religious Education and Advancement and Nurture committees. The two committees will meet to discuss this possibility.

On Seventh Month, 30, reports from Quaker Earth Care Witness, Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Teen and Middle Youth Committees were passionate, and challenged Friends to join in the work that needs to be done.

Other opportunities for attenders of the Yearly Meeting included a Memorial Meeting, Simply Speaking, and Living Witnesses.

A summary of the results of a visioning survey recently conducted by Advancement and Nurture were presented. The visioning project is ongoing, and full results of the survey may be found at the Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting website: <http://ovym.quaker.org/>.

The evening ended with laughter and fun, as the Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Variety Show once again graced the stage of Wilkerson Theater.

First Day, 7th month 31, brings an end to these annual sessions. The final item of business on the agenda will be the meeting of committees, hopefully to plan next year's activities. Many other actions and events took place during this time, but, as John wrote in the closing of his gospel, "If everyone of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25)

Faithfully submitted,
Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Children's Epistle

Greetings to Friends everywhere,

Thirteen children ages three to ten met at the 191st annual sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana from July 27 to July 31, 2011, to consider theme of "What Does the Lord Ask of Us: Our Everyday Ministry of Love and Service." We learned that service is being ourselves and knowing our gifts. We saw that others felt joy when we were joyful at the nursing home as we sang and shared gifts. We also learned that service is listening to each other deeply and helping those in need.

We practiced listening to stories of Quaker testimonies, being true to our gifts, and used music to express being present to each other. We used our hands to create crafts for sale, knowing the money would be used to help those in need. We felt like a closer community from activities like swimming and singing and performing in the talent show. Our hope is that we all find our own best ways to give love to others in the coming year.

The Children's Program
Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting.

Middle Youth Epistle

Dear Friends,

During the 191st gathering of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting friends, seven Middle youth from five monthly meetings attended from seventh month 27 through 31, 2011.

We attempted to assist in an intergenerational building of a Habitat for Humanity house, but were unsuccessful due to age restrictions.

We continued our ever-important tradition of speaking with members of our monthly meetings about worship and spirituality, otherwise known as Worship Mentors. Some experienced a much deeper experience than ever before.

We were honored to receive several guests who led us in discussions. We were visited by both Plenary speakers. First, Noah Merrill helped us to begin to untie the human knot through an activity. Next Marge Abbott helped us to understand how we were viewed by ourselves, others, and God or Spirit.

We were also visited by Kirsten Bohl of Olney Friends School who helped us to learn about the school and watersheds. Lastly, Erin Polley talked about ACLU and the one trillion dollars wasted in Middle East involvement.

We engaged in multiple outdoor activities ranging from canoeing to a hiking and biking trip. These activities helped us to strengthen bonds of friendship and community.

Lastly, we would like to take this time to thank the Middle Youth Planning Committee, staff and each other for having a successful weekend.

The Middle Youth Program
Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting

Teen Epistle

July 31, 2011

Greetings Friends,

This year the OVYM teen groups experienced strong guided inward motivation. We followed our calling towards a more meaningful service in our trip to Oklahoma, attended by twenty-two teens. This high level of participation continued when seventeen teens came together to create our community this year at our yearly meeting sessions. The teens built an intentional community with a nurture/nutritional committee overseeing and holding our group in the Light. We had intention to hold intergenerational activities and pursued an intergenerational work project. With support from the yearly meeting the work project happened on the first day of annual sessions. The teens were disappointed that Habitat for Humanity only allows friends over the age of fourteen in Indiana to participate in Habitat for Humanity, as well as the inconvenience of timing for many friends which led to low attendance. The teens returned to the tradition of the canoe trip, inviting Young Adult Friends to join and had an overall ambrosial time.

We would like to share with friends a song that we created for the variety show to the tune of “My Favorite Things” from the movie *The Sound of Music*.

My Quaker Beliefs

(To the melody of *My Favorite Things*)

By: Rachel and Hanae

Forming committees to solve all our issues,
Worship and Nurture providing the tissues,
Hugging some trees and then smelling their leaves,
These are a few of my Quaker Beliefs,

Going to Whole Foods for organic eatings,
Finding your light with the help of God’s Leadings,
We’re so nice to everyone even the thieves,
These are a few of my Quaker Beliefs,

Business meetings, last for hours, and it makes me mad!
But I simply remember my Quaker beliefs,
And then I don’t feel, so bad!

The OVYM teens extend warm greetings to friends around to the world reading this epistle. We wish you all a year of growth and joy.

The Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Teens

Young Adult Friends Epistle

July 31, 2011

Greetings to All Friends everywhere,

We the Young Adult Friends of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting met with our elders and youngers at this 191st session of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting. There were eleven of us in attendance, including three first time attenders, and one of this session's plenary speakers, the F/friendly Noah Baker Merrill. As in previous years, our numbers were split between those who ministered to younger generations and those who participated in wider Yearly Meeting activities. All of us found our time here enriching, a nourishing break from the worries and travails of mundane life. Due to our small size and scattered schedules, Young Adult Friend specific programming remains elusive. We find support in spiritual conversations with our elders. Recently graduated Young Adult Friends continue to feel a strong connection to the teen group.

We feel this is a time of discernment for us. Those of us at sessions have been inspired to search out and uncover Young Adult Friends across our Yearly Meeting. Some of us plan to visit other monthly meetings in pairs to meet with Young Adult Friends there and discern their condition. We will also weigh the matter of establishing a formal Yearly Meeting-level Young Adult Friend Committee. Thus far we have been reluctant to engage in committees at the yearly meeting level. Benefits to establishing a committee include eldership support, budgeted funds, and input from nominated members from the wider yearly meeting body.

Many of us feel a notion towards visiting Friends in other yearly meetings. Look for us! And if you're ever in the area, feel free to stop by!

Yours in the Light,

Young Adult Friends of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting