

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Epistle

Eighth Month 4, 2013

Greetings to Friends Everywhere:

On the 31st day of 7th month 2013, unprogrammed Friends from Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio convened the 193rd annual sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting. We gathered on the campus of Wilmington College, a Quaker College in Wilmington, Ohio. The theme of our sessions was “Living as Friends: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.” A statue on the Wilmington College campus served as a starting point for our reflections. It commemorates an 1862 trip to Washington by vision-inspired Quaker farmers Isaac and Sarah Harvey. Upon arrival in Washington, they shared their witness against slavery with Abraham Lincoln. The Harveys are but one example of how faithful Quakers of the past lived out their leadings.

In worship sharing during each of the next four mornings, we considered ways in which earlier Friends inspire us and how their witness affects what we want to carry forward into the future. Leadings of the Spirit are central to us. We recognize our obligation to test leadings that arise among us, but we also asked ourselves how we can better support and nourish those who have leadings.

At our Living Witness session Christine and Gene Snyder shared fascinating and inspiring stories and reflections from their lives and life together. Their life journey is a rich example of following one’s leadings. Christine pointed out how many times she took a new direction in her life, not knowing where it would lead, only to find each time that she was being prepared or positioned for a new endeavor and challenge.

Our plenary speakers helped us to explore ways to become more sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit. Stephen Potthoff in his presentation, “Dreaming, the Natural World, and Lives of Early Friends,” provided examples of early Friends who experienced dreams and visions as a call to radical faithfulness.

Plenary speaker Maurine Pyle urged us “to listen deeply to what is hidden.” In her presentation “Opening and Hearing Our Stories,” she shared parts of her research into the vocabulary Friends use when telling their stories. Through interviews with Quakers who identified themselves as liberal Christian, neo-pagan, non-theist, Conservative, Orthodox, and Evangelical, she discovered common themes that suggest these Friends share significant common ground that can be the basis for reconciliation. Maurine urged us to open our minds and hearts when we face language that might initially seem off-putting. She invited us to ask the question “I wonder what you mean by that,” and to listen deeply to the answer.

This spirit carried into our business sessions as we received reports of the work of Friends and Friends’ organizations. We were repeatedly urged to support these labors not only with our budgets and time, but also to take their work into our hearts as Friends work to heal this broken, suffering world. During our sessions we approved our budget, threshed a section on peace for our revised *Book of Faith & Practice*, and approved a statement that urges the abolition of nuclear weapons. It is a joy to report that a sense of loving unity prevailed – we were able to hear the loving concern that lay behind our varying opinions and ideas.

In general, we are optimistic about the prospects for our communities and for the Religious Society of Friends. As we look to our future, there is also apprehension. On the large scale,

many of us are concerned about impending global climate change, increased economic inequality in our nation and worldwide, and about the roles our nation and the “American empire” play in both of the preceding. Nearer to home, we live in states where too many workers, particularly minorities and the young, are unemployed or under employed and where budget cuts are unraveling the social safety net for the poor.

Although our Yearly Meeting is graying, we have begun to attract and involve younger members. Our Young Adult Friends Working Group has submitted a proposal to become a committee of our Yearly Meeting. The challenge for older adult Friends is to be ready to mentor and to assist, but first need to step back so that younger Friends have more frequent opportunities to lead.

Our overwhelming impression of the 2013 Sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting is that of joy. Many older Friends sense and the youth themselves report that the love they share for one another has grown and blossomed. In spite to the state of the world in which they are about to enter our teens (in particular) are optimistic and committed. These are good reasons to be optimistic about the future of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

In the Light,
Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends Epistle

Hey OVYM!

Momentum is increasing for the Young Adult Friends Group here at this yearly meeting, as our meeting for worship with attention for business produced many forward looking results with minimal bloodshed and teeth gnashing. From a spiritually nurturing space, we examined what we need from ourselves and our community.

We began the meeting by introducing ourselves and our favorite body part. After much laughter at the word “phalanges” we then affirmed our presentation for OVYM, drafted earlier by an ad hoc committee consisting of Shannon Isaacs, Howie Baker, Julia Thompson, Nathan Coppock, Silas Brunner, and Adam Togami.

We then tackled the question of who we are and what we need; the following list was the result of the following short, yet intense brainstorm.

Who we are:

A loving community of a wide variation of ages, a shelter from the outside world for collective healing and ministry. We are individuals who can provide mentorship and guidance for the Teen and Middle Youth groups, and help to create a new paradigm for the yearly meeting at large.

What we need:

Resources to develop leadership skills and enhance outreach for the purpose of enriching our community to be a place of healing and self discovery. We also need mentors and elders for our struggling seekers, and spiritual support from the community at large.

We then created an email contact list and assigned the aforementioned ad hoc committee to plan the program for the upcoming joint quarterly meeting at happy hollow.

Overall, we are confident that our community has the strength and talents to enrich our community as we learn to heal, educate, and lead. We are optimistic, we are ready, we are the young adult friends.

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Teen Epistle

Greeting friends, This year seventeen teens enjoyed the hundred-ninety third annual session of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Wilmington College from The last day of the seventh month to the fourth day of the eighth month. This is the first time in eight years that OVYM sessions were at Wilmington. Over the course of the weekend the teens grew to appreciate the campus, but are excited to return to Earlham next year.

Teens had numerous activities including leading the community wide get-to-know-you program and having an intergenerational service project with the Wilmington organization Grow Food, Grow Hope, where we built benches with recycled wood and installed the framework for future hoop-houses in several garden beds. We extended an invitation to Young Adult Friends and adults for the continuing tradition of a canoe trip. This year we traveled ten miles along the Little Miami. Activities on the river included meditation, turtle seeking, connecting canoes, swimming, and the occasional capsizing. Teens organized an intergeneration games night with Middle Youth and created sand-art and played volleyball well into the night.

Teens also engaged in a tie-dying session that was incredibly successful. Along with displaying their creativity, excess shirts and socks will be sold as a fundraiser for our service trip coming up next summer.

During our business meeting, we decided on next years service trip's location to Philadelphia on the last week of the Sixth Month. This is partly in order to encourage increased attendance at next years FGC Gathering. Other points of business were the establishment of a year long Nurture Committee and the appointment of new clerks. Dylan Cahalan and Lucy Grace, as clerks, have been invaluable aids to our group. We would like to extend an official thank you, and as they move onto the Young Adult Friends, we welcome Rachel Logan-Wood and Hanae Togami as new clerks. Andrew Hardy will replace Rachel as recording clerk. We would also like to thank Nikki Coffey Tousley for her service on the Teen Committee as clerk, and are excited for Peter Hardy to continue as Committee Clerk.

Both plenary sessions were incredibly moving, and the teen group would like to thank both Stephen Pothoff and Maurine Pyle. The process for deciding plenary speakers is a difficult task, and we appreciate the work of the Planning Committee.

We continued leading Simply Speaking, sparking thoughtful discussions on a wide degree of topics. This year's question related to parenting and Quaker Process. There has been discussion about passing over leadership of Simply Speaking to the Young Adult Friends. As always, we encourage more adults to attend the event.

One of the highlights of Yearly Meeting has always been Worship Sharing. This year this continued with small groups sharing thoughts on Quakerism in regular life. The theme of Quakers past, present, and future was prevalent in our activities during the weekend where we drew from the past by rejoining Wilmington College, danced in the present and dreamed of the future.

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Middle Youth Epistle

Greetings from the Middle Youth who attended the 193rd session of the Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting held at Wilmington College in Wilmington, Ohio from the 31st day of the Seventh Month to the 4th day of the Eighth Month 2013. Five Middle Youth Friends from Bloomington Dayton, North Meadow, Yellow Springs, and Lafayette monthly meetings were present.

We enjoyed doing many things in and around the Wilmington campus. Our first stop was a visit to Christine Snyder's historic Quaker Farm where we saw real Quaker simple dress from the 1800s. On Thursday morning we visited Quaker Knoll camp where we saw giant lily pads, a blue heron, and monarch butterflies. We also learned how to play Frisbee golf.

Upon our return, we met with Stephen Pothoff for a session on dreams and mandalas. He showed us examples of circles found throughout nature such as fossilized plants and animals, bird nests, shells, and pine cones. We learned how dreams can tell us things about ourselves that we may not already know. Then we participated in a guided dream exercise where we created our own dream mandalas.

Another meaningful experience was our visit to the campus peace resource center. We watched a video about Sadako and her thousand paper cranes. We learned about the terrible consequences of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This helped us to better understand the importance of the Quaker Peace Testimony.

Next, was the annual and infamous Middle Youth canoe trip. We canoed six miles on the Little Miami River and counted a hundred and eight turtles. It was more turtles than any of us had ever seen in our entire lives! Competition was fierce as the three canoes each tried to be the first one to land. Although we had fun racing and splash fighting, we decided to wait up for the last canoe so that it could be a three way tie.

We want to thank all of our Middle Youth Program visitors Bill, Maureen, Susan, Stephen, Eric, and Elaine. Overall, we had a busy but meaningful week. We are looking forward to a larger Middle Youth Group next OVYM.

Middle Youth of the Eighth Month, 2013

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Children's Epistle

Ten school age Young Friends met at the 193rd annual sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Wilmington College in Wilmington, Ohio from July 31 – August 4, 2013 to consider the theme of "Living as Friends: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow." The peaceful campus of a historic Quaker college was the background for a time of fellowship and deep spiritual sharing and learning about Quakerism, ourselves and each other.

Children and adults experienced the strength of community in their activities and the power of their imagination to explore and express Quaker values of past, present and future. They learned how to give joy through sharing music with elderly adults in a nursing home. Children had feelings of happiness and sadness as they reflected about injustices in the world in the past, and present. Inspired by strong Quaker figures and events they have hope for making changes in their lives and communities by being living examples of love and equality.