

Epistles from Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting's 197th Annual Sessions

Greetings to Friends Everywhere!

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting met for its 197th Annual Sessions at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana from June 14 -18, 2017. Our theme was "Moving Together with the Spirit." With great joy we reconnected with familiar Friends and welcomed many who were attending for the first time. As one person put it, each year we reconstitute the Body! Or as another Friend exclaimed, "We have a love fest!" The date for annual sessions was a month earlier this year in hopes of accommodating the schedules of more families, and we did see an increase in the number of children attending.

As we gather here this year, we discover Spirit in all the usual places. Worship sharing groups going deep, workshops providing tools for nurturing relationships, children laughing, exchanged smiles and reacquainting hugs, little pods of people engaged in conversations, sharing meals in the cafeteria, early morning walks and worship, singing together, catching up with old Friends and learning about the lives of new Friends. The annual Variety Show united us in laughter, music, and celebration. These usual finding places are important to us as we reaffirm that we are moving together in Spirit.

In our business sessions we were challenged to create openings for the Spirit to move throughout the Yearly Meeting. We approved a proposal developed in response to a leading that came to us last year to create a program of intervisitation among monthly meetings to bring life and nourishment to all parts of our body. We committed as individuals to visit other meetings in the Yearly Meeting, and as meetings to plan shared events or activities with other meetings. Older friends were challenged to listen to younger voices, and to reconsider some traditional practices. In our discernment about which wider Quaker organizations to support financially, we heard the concerns and enthusiasm of young Friends to support the work of newer organizations where life of the Spirit is breaking through, and we were challenged to make such changes at a faster pace. We approved several additions and revisions to our Faith and Practice in the more expedited approval process, with the goal of completing the revision by 2018. The revisions included a set of greatly simplified queries, which prompted considerable discernment about the approval process.

Lynn Newsom presented a powerful plenary session on the work of Quaker House, work that bridges the divide between the largest military base on the planet and a little house in Fayetteville, North Carolina. This work includes support for veterans with PTSD and moral injury, support for conscientious objectors, and raising awareness about torture, sexual abuse, suicide, and domestic violence in the military. It is remarkable that Quaker House is now welcomed onto the military base at Fort Bragg, and accepted by the local community as a faith-based organization advocating for the needs of veterans. Lynn reminded us that veterans are children of God who have been injured and who need compassion and a place to go for support.

Benigno Sánchez-Eppler of the Friends World Committee for Consultation shared with us his ministry of crossing languages, cultures and theologies. He urged us to resist the separating spirit and to mend separations among Friends. We learned about the longing and frustration of wanting to be part of what others are experiencing through singing a hymn that only some of us knew. He compared being separated from a home language, culture, or spiritual practice, or even forgetting

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or devaluing what we used to know and love, to losing a great treasure. He reminded us that we are a body with a womb that can be filled with a quickening of the Spirit. What is the new life that is eager to be born? We were reminded that some Friends experience a walking away from the treasure box of Christian language, by forgetting a language that used to be our own. We were admonished that Friends might need to do some inner work to reclaim this treasure. Losing the language of Early Friends, do we not lose some of their wisdom? We were urged to cross borders, recreate relationships, and heal the injuries that caused our separations.

In our worship sharing groups we shared personal experiences of the movement of the Spirit, and listened compassionately to one another about times of conflict in our meetings. We found it healing to reach deeply into the sacred center of our lives and move together with the Spirit in these small groups.

As we have moved together this week, we continue to find new and awakening manifestations of the Spirit. We want Friends to know that the living Spirit deeply binds us together. We are learning to live as the body of Christ. "Our differences will want us to fight for them, but our love will make no room for the violence!" Spirit blows us together, it loves us together, and we move with its breath and instruction as we turn ourselves inward to hear the Teacher and Guide.

From the Teens/Middle Youth:

For the hundred ninety seventh yearly meeting sessions, we had a total of eleven youth between the ages of twelve to seventeen attend. On the 14th through the 18th day of the sixth month in the year 2017, we engaged in a variety of activities that informed our ideas of Quakerism.

Lynn Newsom met with us to speak about Quaker House and conscientious objection. We wrote letters in support of incarcerated veterans. Despite the inclement weather, an impromptu trip to Whitewater Lake gave us the opportunity to swim, paddle-boat and canoe around.

We enjoyed watching movies with friends. Cooperative games taught us how to interact with one another and the larger Quaker community. We enjoyed the improved quality of food and the community that we formed around meals. This increased community led to a well-organized and coherent skit this year. At business meeting we helped to plan this skit and brainstormed ways to encourage youth participation throughout the year. In particular we discussed the need for attendance at Quarterly Meeting to build our community.

Along with the programming, our downtime was just as important to us. Whether it was playing sports outside, or taking naps on couches, we were able to bring the Quaker Spirit into our everyday activities. We appreciate any opportunity we have for increased independence and autonomy.

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Every year the Youth of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting include a request for increased participation of youth at Annual Sessions. This year, we would like to extend our request for Monthly Meetings to make concerted efforts to encourage their youth to attend both the Annual Sessions and Quarterly Meeting so that we can continue to develop deeper concepts of Quakerism and community. Thank you for your continual support.

Signed by,

Maryam Tonne, Elana Branson, Cecilia Branson, Toby Dean, Charlotte Dean, Reid Pfaltzgraff-Carlson, and Bing Pfaltzgraff-Carlson,

From the Children:

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The children ages 1 to 10 of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting met at Earlham College from June 14th to 18th. We shared a lot of experiences and concerns. We had many revelations and teachings with the spirit-led speakers who visited us.

We learned to feel the spirit with movement of yoga and the movement of kites. We felt the spirit in our water play in the pool and the sprinkler and the water slide. We experienced the spirit when we made bead bracelets and necklaces and chokers.

We went to the animal shelter and moved with excitement along with the cats and kittens as we played with the yarn toys and feather toys we made. We are very concerned about the animals in the shelter and plan to donate some of our earnings to them so they can continue to provide a home for animals and a place for people to come and choose an animal for their pet.

We learned about the lack of the healthcare for veterans and we are concerned about the veterans. We hope veterans can receive better healthcare and get better treatment.

We made new f(F)riends at yearly meeting and enjoyed a lot of good times playing soccer, dodgeball, flying kites, swimming, blowing bubbles, jumping rope, singing, and painting. We all agree that OVYM was an endless amount of fun that we wish would never end.

Thank you from the children of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting