

Epistle of Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association 2015

To Friends Everywhere, from Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association meeting at Warren Wilson College, Swannanoa, North Carolina, June 11 -14, 2015.

Our theme of “What Is Mine To Do,” echoing the life and example of John Woolman, was woven into our plenary sessions, workshops, business sessions, and worship sharing. Our first plenary session, presented by Michael Birkel of Earlham College, challenged us through explication of three sentences from Woolman’s journal to distill or purify our experience of the inward spirit, so that we might become more aware of the condition of others.

We were tested in the steadfastness of concern for the condition of others when budget matters and a proposed minute on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict came to the floor. We labored mightily on these issues, taking into account leadings and concerns from many perspectives. In other business, we minuted our appreciation of the tender care provided to the state of our finances and to our website by the Treasurer and Web Site Manager, respectively.

Our second Plenary session featured four SAYMA members who have graduated from the School of the Spirit, and in doing so have given a great gift to SAYMA and their monthly meetings. The rise of mysticism in modern-day Quakers was highlighted in a very well-attended workshop by Michael Birkel on writings of Rufus Jones. These writings touched on how an awareness of, and relationship with, that which is beyond direct knowing, that which we commonly call Spirit, leads us to concern and action for others. A workshop on the writings and life of Lucretia Mott, as well as special work taken with the issue of continuing racism embedded in the structure of society, deepened our understanding of work that remains.

Friends noted the vibrancy and poignancy of the offered workshops, as well as the abundance of worship opportunities. Other delights were the first-ever appearance of triplets at Yearly Meeting, as well as the first-ever golf-cart driver wearing chain mail.

We were blessed by the presence of representatives from Wider Quaker Organization members from Friends General Conference, American Friends Service Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Quaker Voluntary Service, Earlham School of Religion, Friends Peace Teams, and Quaker House. The Drone Quilt project from Quaker House drew appreciation and participation.

Our Saturday afternoon Talent show and the Saturday evening folk/contra dance, as well as the daily after-dinner singing on the Gladfelter patio, flowed with spirit-driven community. This abundance of the visible expression of Spirit amongst us included a remarkable depth of sharing during Worship Sharing, framed by queries derived from Woolman’s writings.

Young Adult Friends Epistle

This year, we had an unusually low number of Young Adult Friends present. The official YAF clerk was unable to make it to SAYMA this year due to business reasons and the official acting clerk turned out, at the last minute, to be unable to come as well, so I, the most senior YAF present, was placed in charge. Of the two business meetings that were scheduled, only one of them took place. With the small group, we were able to quickly move through the few items we had to discuss.

- First, we decided on a query for the YAF-led worship sharing that took place Saturday evening after dinner. We ultimately decided on the question, “How do you know when something is or is not yours to do, and how do you spiritually nourish yourself in either Attachment K: Epistles 95 case?” When the worship sharing itself occurred, there was a relatively small number of people in attendance, but it was still a spiritually rewarding one nonetheless.
- The last item that we discussed was the graduation of SAYFers into the community of Young Adult Friends. For the first time in recent memory, the entire event was handled by just one YAF, Autumn Traynham. It was a small and relaxed welcome, where we enjoyed some snacks under the stars and discussed life. Despite the one-woman welcome committee, the graduates appeared to enjoy their welcome into YAFdom.
- Last but not least, during dinner on Saturday, I, Autumn Traynham, volunteered to be the YAF representative to the Yearly Meeting Planning Committee.

This concludes the YAF epistle. Thank you Friends.

Submitted by Autumn Traynham