

Southeastern Yearly Meeting 2017 Epistle

Loving Greetings to Friends Everywhere:

Southeastern Yearly Meeting gathered in Fruitland Park, Florida, USA, Fourth Month 12-16, 2017 with 162 Friends in attendance, including 21 children. There were many first-time attenders at our sessions, as well as Friends who we had not seen in recent years. Visitors from Quaker organizations and other Yearly Meetings enriched our gathering and reminded us of the bonds of love that bind us to Friends the world over.

The beauty of the Life Enrichment Center, situated on the shore of Lake Griffin made us appreciate how fortunate we are to meet here. Early morning worship was in the natural cathedral formed by the towering live oaks. Every morning the ministry of the breeze in the trees and the singing of the birds brought the closeness of God to the remembrance of our souls.

Our Friends community held our beloved ProNica in the Light as they struggled with complex issues within their organization. After worship sharing with a concern for ProNica, Friends continue holding ProNica in the Light and are available to offer spiritual support and guidance.

Story-teller, Bible scholar, performance artist Peterson Toscano delivered the annual Walton Lecture titled "Discerning our collective calling: love, hope, & climate justice." This unique three-act lecture/performance brought to us an understanding that climate change is not only a reason for despair. Rather than being paralyzed with fear, we can see ourselves as honored to be living in this time and being a part of the movement for climate justice. Climate change effects people of color, women, and people lower on the economic ladder more severely than white people, men, and those whose economic situation is better. Addressing climate change is not only a matter of technology, it is a matter of justice.

In the workshops led by Peterson, "Beyond Lightbulbs and Polar Bears. Overcoming Shame and Fear: Leading in a Time of Climate Change" and "You Already Have Skin in the Game—Justice, Pets, and Coffee Beans", SEYM Friends heard stories from several of Peterson's characters to bring us out of guilt and shame about climate change to a place of hope. We formed pods (small groups) and explored our stories and how we might reach others to open the sometimes difficult dialog about climate change.

Friends were excited to receive the first report from our Field Secretary for Earthcare. Beverly's first six months in this new position have been very active. We look forward to moving forward together in discerned action for the care of our planet and each other.

Friends described powerful worship sharing sessions. It is one of the things that many of us love most about our gathering. Queries and quotes about our earth and our personal relationship to it were inspiring.

We are deeply grateful for the many Friends who shared their gifts and leadings through a variety of informative and inspiring workshops. The breadth and depth of the spiritual gifts of SEYM Friends and Friends who travelled to be with us are a blessing to our community. A great difficulty for many Friends attending Yearly Meeting is having to choose between workshops being held at the same time.

SEYM Friends feel renewed in our call to be faithful. Guided by Spirit we can look forward to walking cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone, sharing what we have learned and being a blessing to all.

In the Light,

Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Phoebe B. Andersen". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Phoebe B. Andersen, Clerk

SEYM Young Adult Quaker Epistle 2017

The Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends Young Adult Quakers Program began with us arriving Wednesday night to catch Peterson Toscano's first retreat session. After this first session, it seemed quite evident that it would be a great week. Thursday began with us joining various workshops such as Quakerism 101 and Journey of the Universe. We then led our own successful workshop on the Friends Committee on National Legislation and how citizens can be advocates to their local Congressional offices. After an enlightening Meeting for Business, we joined others for refreshments.

Friday began with worship sharing, Business Meeting, and the second retreat session. We attended such workshops as Finding God in Difficult People, Managing Meeting Finances, and Laughter Yoga. The annual intergenerational dance was fun as always with Gary Arthur's expertise in square dancing and the Faith and no Practice Band's music. The night ended with deep discussion and singing at a campfire.

Saturday began once again with worship sharing, Business Meeting, and continued onto capture the flag with its annual controversial ending, canoeing, and workshops like is Conscientious Objection for You, and Extremism vs True Islam. We then listened to the Walton Lecture by Peterson Toscano. His brilliant insight on Biblical scripture, his witty characters like Tony Defuzio, and his views on advocacy and the effects of climate change on human rights were awe inspiring. Some of us YAQs joined by the campfire to reflect on Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday may bring, as well as deep reflections on forgiveness and worship sharing.

Once again, the Southeastern Yearly Meeting Gathering was an enlightening, encouraging, and generally fun experience. Thank you Southeastern Yearly Meeting for having us, and we hope to be back again next year!

SEYM Teen Epistle 2017

To Friends Everywhere,

The teen group (grades 8-12) of Southeastern Yearly Meeting met at the Methodist Life Enrichment Center in Leesburg, Florida, from April 12-16, 2017. In addition to participating in worship sharing, retreat sessions, and other activities as part of the wider SEYM community, we also spent time together for learning, fun and business. We joined with several worship sharing groups to have new and different experiences outside of our own meetings. We used this opportunity to listen to different people and change and adapt our own ideas. In addition, we joined the other youth groups on the low ropes course in teamwork exercises where we learned communication skills. On Friday, we went to the intergenerational dance where we relaxed and had fun with other Quakers of all ages.

Though we may have not been here for the past year, we have definitely noticed a significant change...there was a growth in the mosquito population! Though these little critters may be happy about our endless supply of food and nice weather, we aren't happy about being the food! The weather is perfect for mosquitoes, but it's much too hot for most of the animals. Unfortunately, this warmer weather is becoming more widespread and affecting everything. Now the polar bears will become food for the mosquitoes as well! Fortunately, there is still hope. We can fight against the mosquito empire and win, to protect other animals from becoming the mosquitoes' dinner. Were it not for Peterson Toscano's teachings, we would be running around in circles, panicking about the end of the world.

When one or a group yearns for calm and silence in the outdoors, there are numerous places to sojourn. One could walk the paths of the forest, pondering and thinking to oneself. Deeper into the trails, lie paths of silence with exquisite views of the lake and forest. If anyone feels the need to pace and ask deep questions of themselves, the hedge maze will serve this purpose. The grassy fields and shady areas that lie under oaks and palms, games are played and children run about. Near the lakeside, beaches await for friends to gaze out at the water and life on the lake. Out upon the lake those that wish, may canoe their way across the water and further immerse yourself into nature.

The SEYM Teens discerned that the topic for the 2017-18 year will be Florida water quality. Furthermore, we agreed to start a better relationship with the Earthcare Field Secretary. Each teen will facilitate discussion about the Field Secretary at their local meetinghouse. We approved two new co-clerks – Brendan and Vincent – and are excited to face the next year with this passionate team.

Friends expressed gratitude to the SEYM for their unity and kindness that the teens enjoyed throughout the gathering.

Teens of Southeastern Yearly Meeting, April 16, 2017

--Sara, Ryan, Vincent, Ezra, Kiran, Martina, Elijah, Brendan

SEYM Junior & Young Friends Epistle

Dear Friends Everywhere,

We are the Young and Junior Friends of Southeastern Yearly Meeting and this week we focused on animals and climate change.

As we arrived at the meeting, we started with crafts. There was a fierce battle over the golden and silver duct tape. Eventually, Leo reigned victorious.

After that, we did Worship Sharing, where we discussed how to create a welcoming community for all in the SEYM youth program. We asked ourselves:

1. How do we show up and treat others when we are seeing that of God within them?
2. What do I need to thrive in my community, school, and home?

As other children began to arrive, we went to the parachute where Kiran and Ezra refused to compromise their manliness by engaging in parachute play. Kiran did, however, step into the big yellow cheerio. Ezra watched from afar, silently judging.

While the younger children painted stick puppets for the epistle mural, the Junior and Teen Friends played a very Quakerly game of Mafia, where we silently murdered each other.

On Friday, we visited an extremely low, no ropes course, where we used teamwork and logs to succeed.

And, of course, we all enjoyed an evening of dancing with Gary Arthur (caller) and the wonderful Faith and No Practice Band.

On Saturday, we saw Gary Arthur again for a fantabulous session on animal yoga.

Then we were joined by Peter Toscano for an interesting and hilarious talk on climate change.

We played two games of intergenerational Capture the Flag, won by Daniel and Lena, who bested us all with their incredible Capture the Flag skills!

We are now finished with the epistle and are eagerly awaiting the egg hunt.

Thank you,

Priya, Bronwyn, Leo, Audrey, Hoyt, Magdalena, Cassandra, Daniel, Julia, Sadie, and Nathan