

South Central Yearly Meeting

*of the Religious Society of Friends in
Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, & Texas*



Greetings to Friends Everywhere,

“Sing and rejoice ye children of the day and the light; for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt: and the Truth doth flourish as the rose, and lilies do grow among the thorns and the plants atop the hills, and upon them the lambs doth skip and play.”

— George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*

South Central Yearly Meeting gathered at Greene Family Camp in Bruceville, TX for the 56th year from March 29 to April 1, 2018 to embrace this year’s theme “Lift Hearts and Spirits to the Light”.

As we individuals and groups drove in, many of us gave consideration to the delightful Spring hues that plot the trails from which we have voyaged. Like blood coursing through veins and water through roots, we encountered numerous winding roads before finally reaching our destination.

For many of us there were welcomes from old Friends; for others there were warming welcomes from new Friends. Take a moment and imagine being caught in the midst of an elemental storm of good versus good. A storm where nothing but kind hearts and love are fighting to embrace you and build up your spirit in community. That is the sense of this Yearly Meeting.

We began this year’s gathering with Meeting for Worship. In spite of the room being somewhat void of physical bodies, it was swarmed with otherworldly hush. We amassed peacefully as individual flames of Light enlightened by the nearness of God. We each enabled ourselves to be defenseless against this experience as we silently shared our secrets, sorrows, leadings, and prayers in the Light.

Light—a lighter tone in meeting for Business.

A lighter touch in workshops, fun and games instead of another task.

A hug, a smile to light our way to spirit in these dark times. Light of the warm sun in gentle breezes, lightening bugs at dusk.

Joy in silence, joy in song. Art and clay, balloons and play, lighten our burdens as we witness to the world.

Light has signified many experiences at the 2018 Yearly Meeting. It has been the light of revelation as we learn together in committee meetings, workshops, home groups and forums, expanding what we previously believed to be our spiritual, intellectual, and emotional limits. It has also been an easing of the yoke as promised by Jesus of Nazareth, a lightness that makes our faithful journeys easier to travel and our burdens easier to sustain.

Even the camp cat, lithe with a gray and white coat, personifies the lightness of our meeting. She approaches each new friend, tangling herself between people's legs, eager to be stroked and petted, as open to the possibility of human connection as any of the yearly meeting participants. In her gentle vulnerability and scrappy self-assuredness, she teaches us a way to interact with the world. Her journey across the campus, from friend to friend, models for us a mode of being that multiplies joy with every encounter and connects us to the light of the living world.

We approached the decision on hosting the 2019 FGC Gathering at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa with openness and a desire to be informed. An evening session laid to rest fears of being overwhelmed that carried over to the next day's decision to embrace this opportunity.

Many of our Friends both old and young inspired us with joyous music. In lieu of a traditional keynote speaker, we enjoyed a sing along concert by Annie Patterson and Peter Blood. Later in the evening, all ages joined in the fun and creativity during our traditional Quaker Variety Hour. It would be safe to say many of us here at SCYM will be going away with our spiritual appetites satisfied. We felt moved by the Spirit to sing and rejoice not just as sole performers but also as a performing community. This method of inclusion within the Religious Society of Friends captures a Quaker ideal that "no Friend is left behind."

Friends, you could be forgiven for thinking that those of us in attendance at this year's SCYM merely escaped for a few days to breathe in the clean air under a broad Texas sky, to relax, and aimlessly play, and forget, however briefly, the troubled world outside these campgrounds. But that wouldn't be the Quaker way. As friends, we know that to act in the world, we must rest in the Light. It is in the hour of darkness that we experience our deepest need for the joy of knowing God in community with one another.

As we go out from this gathering into a world of inequity, violence and suffering, we take with us a Light within rekindled by friendship, fueled by the joy of living, set ablaze by a passion for creation. In every solitary walk among the trees, in every new (or newly deepened) relationship, in every shared meal and spoken epistle, in the twist of every balloon animal, in each stroke of the pen on a sketch pad, and in the great mystery of profound silence that has permeated this place and time, there we have known an inexhaustible Light, which will guide us, sustain us, connect us, and inspire us to change the world, until we meet again.

Psalm 100:1-2 (KJV) Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before [God's] presence with singing.