

Dear Friends, everywhere,

We the Young Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting gathered together at The College of New Jersey located in Ewing, New Jersey from Wednesday, July 24<sup>th</sup>, through Sunday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, focusing on this year's theme; "How do we center ourselves in trust and love?"

Throughout the week, the Young Friends were able to build a more unified and trusting group through a variety of activities. We started our week with a multi-generational gathering where we were able to connect with Friends on a more spiritual level through storytelling. In this activity, we had community members tell a spiritual story, that all Friends present appreciated. Following this, the Young Friends came together to discuss guidelines for this gathering that promoted a safe and loving environment for all Friends.

On Thursday, we enjoyed a program by Pushed Learning, a hip-hop activism group who gave us a personal perspective on being queer and a person of color in our modern society. Later in the day, Young Friends came together as a community to create a presentation about enthusiastic consent which we later shared with the wider body. Our day was filled with getting to know all members of our Quaker Community. During late night, a time where friends can choose to stay up an additional two hours, some of the members of Young Friends discussed theology. Everyone who participated commented on its deep spiritual meaning.

At various points throughout the gathering, Young Friends assembled themselves for a variety of affinity groups. Some of these were: Mantis shrimp (LGBTQIA+), board games, swimming, and nap time. Friends appreciated the diversity of choices within affinity groups, as it was accommodating to all. The Friends who participated in Mantis Shrimp wanted to emphasize how this group served as a vehicle for trust within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Committees played an essential role in this year's annual sessions. We met on several occasions to discuss a variety of issues and current events that are facing our community. To begin with, our Outreach Committee continued our work on connecting with Baltimore Yearly Meeting, composing an email to propose a combined gathering, and writing another email expressing our hope for a pen pal system between BYM and PYM Young Friends. Furthermore, Outreach Committee is also in the process of creating an official Young Friends Instagram page to form new connections with the Quaker body online. The Program committee focused on creating themes and topics for our winter and Christmas gatherings. Additionally, the Nurture Committee played a huge role, not just within the Young Friends community, but across the wider body as well, writing worship sharing questions for everybody in attendance at sessions.

The Native Justice committee spent their time preparing for Peace Fair, where we hope to talk to the Lenape representative about our land acknowledgements. After years of research, The Native Justice committee would like to convey that we as Young Friends will no longer be following the tradition of the sweat lodge; as it is cultural appropriation, we encourage Friends everywhere to consider the damage that our participation creates and inflicts on the Native American community. We implore you to evoke change within your own body.

On Friday we were able to experience a workshop led by Eric Anthony Berdis, the Artist in Residence for PYM. In this workshop, Eric provided a safe and trusting space for all Young Friends to enjoy. With this foundation, we as the Young Friends community were able to experience trust falls. This activity brought our community even closer together. It was interesting to observe the way Friends were more reserved in the beginning, but as time and trust developed the Young Friends were able to become more comfortable in each other's presence.

We started our "sleep in Saturday" by doing just that, sleeping in. We traversed many miles to a nearby park, where we spent a good portion of the morning hiking and enjoying nature's beauty. After enjoying the park, we dispersed into our Worship sharing groups where we reflected on trust and the light within. In the afternoon, we watched a beautiful film by our lovely clerk, Julia Carrigan. Following our film viewing, we visited the local Starbucks. Where we as a group trusted one another by talking about the upcoming presidential election. It was so wonderful to see the openness that each individual expressed throughout the gathering. In the evening, we listened to the keynote speaker, Valerie Brown. It was so refreshing to hear her wisdom and perspective that she was able to share with the whole body.

This morning, we had a business meeting discussing this epistle, packed our bags, and evaluated the gathering. And now we are here reading this to you in hopes that you appreciate both our inner light, and your own as well. Finally, The Young Friends would like to thank the Yearly Meeting for receiving our epistle and giving us this opportunity to come together. Overall, Young Friends had an exhausting yet rewarding week. Friends appreciate this beautiful campus, and our gracious hosts, The College of New Jersey. Young Friends are so thankful for all of the wonderful adults in this community who helped us during this gathering. We look forward to our gathering next month, and next year's annual sessions.

With Love,

Young Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting