

REPORTED TO ANNUAL SESSION AT FROSTBURG, MARYLAND 8TH MONTH 9TH DAY, 2015

To Friends Everywhere,

As we gathered to work with our theme of Living into Right Relationship, our condition already reflected years of faithful progress in relationship with the creation, each other, and that Spirit that flows in and among us. Attention and labor have been abundantly given to healing relationships distorted by racism, overconsumption and exploitation of the earth and its inhabitants. We gathered in faith that we would discern together how to carry our work forward with new insight.

We were blessed with reminders of the opportunities we have to seek and be open to guidance from Spirit, which calls us into relationship. Our opening retreat raised up connectedness as the essence of relationship. We each bear responsibility for staying connected. The retreat sent us onward with the musical blessing, "Go Thou in Peace." One of our plenary speakers described worship as communion, wherein we experience the presence of God and discover afresh our kinship with everything. Another speaker described ours as a "difficult and painful time," requiring us to act now for the future. We acknowledge that suffering exists in the present. Right relationship lets us see that some have been sacrificed for the benefit of others. Those who suffer need justice rather than charity. Our speaker reminded us that in a troubled present and an uncertain future, "it always seems impossible until it is done." Our power comes from our relationships.

In Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business, reports and agenda items revealed our Yearly Meeting's work toward righting relationships distorted by racism. We acknowledge that we need to live in a way that honors and nourishes the created world. We acknowledge the rights of all species to their part in creation.

During our week together, we seasoned the issues before us. Our new clerk reminded us that Spirit will find the voice it needs for Truth that needs to be shared. Visiting Friends connected us to other Yearly Meetings and their work in the world.

The work before us now is not new. Friends are aware that we live in a society that hurts and exploits others. We see the need to match our actions with our declarations, as John Woolman urged. Our final plenary speaker called us to catalyze social change on a large scale. He urged Friends to see ourselves as members rather than masters of creation, and to work to maintain its complexity, which requires harmony and balance.

In some ways our present work is entirely new. Our actions will affect the future in ways that cannot be undone. Discerning way forward is the task before us.

In the Light,

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

EPISTLE OF YOUNG ADULT FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 9TH DAY, 2015

The year began at the end with a post-Holiday winter conference, mere days before the end of 2014, at Patapsco Friends Meeting for a weekend of exploration arranged by our lovely treasurer, Jenny Vekert. A food-themed conference, it challenged all to try expanding their pallet with new and exciting foods and uncharted pairings thereof such as the marriage of bread and pudding and giant bowls of build-your-own Pho several times over. Fortified by this success with such an eclectic food combination, a trip to Lotte, the local Korean supermarket, was swiftly arranged. Once there, YAFs embarked upon the dual missions of eating a lunch consisting only of products they'd never tried before, and picking out even more unknown food to bring back and share with each other later on. With Light and proper Buddy System techniques, no one was lost in the store, although YAFs did leave with more than with they arrived. Later on, Ruth Fitz and other members of Patapsco joined the community for an enthusiastic round of singing, continuing a YAF tradition of winter singing without carols and rounding out the weekend with food for the soul.

In the middle of the year, YAFs gathered at Friends' Wilderness Center in West Virginia. Whereas the previous conference was rich with food, this conference was rich in nature and much time was spent appreciating not only each other's company but the great outdoors as well. Amongst the many activities one could engage in over the weekend were a trip to the dedication of the new geodesic dome house, a hike up to the Appalachian Trail and back, and even an expedition to the local fair. YAFs had a wonderful dinner Saturday night with Ken Stockbridge, BYM's presiding Clerk, who joined in a discussion about spiritual formation within the YAF community as well as the singing that followed it. The YAF community would like to thank Sheila Bach and the Friends Meeting of Washington for helping to make our spring conference a success.

Annual Session was both annual and a session. Despite being plagued by new and inconvenient delivery hours at the YAF community's favorite pizza place, and being fraught with distraught at the cruel twist of fate that parted us from our Dearest Wayne, YAFs rallied together and drew new strength over the week from each other and from the larger community. In between running between committee meetings, JYM events and Frodo-ing for still more commitments, many a happy hour was spent coloring, sharing tea and Polish candies, and catching up with the year's events. A new mentoring activity for Young Friends was brought into existence where YAFs answer questions submitted to them about life, school, adulting, and other scary stuff. We also stole all of their couches. Having once looked up to the strong and positive presence the Young Adult Friends community offered them when we were Young Friends, YAF perpetually strives to continue and live up to this legacy. YAFs additionally opened up this casual forum to the Greater BYM community with a Q&A wall in the Bookstore for the greater community to ask their most pressing questions as well. Continuing our educational outreach, we assisted Advancement and Outreach in a workshop on internet outreach.

So that was the year and as awesome as it was, YAF wouldn't be much of a community without the awesome support they receive from the greater BYM community. While there are many people to thank, Young Adult Friends would like to extend their special

gratitude to Ken Stockbridge. Ken has been a cheerful presence in our lives for many years, on intervisitation trips and singing retreats and always making time to listen. To honor him, we would like to present him with a plaque which reads, "Dear Ken. Thank you for all of your love and support. Sincerely, Young Adult Friends." We hope you will treasure it always, as we will always treasure you.

As always, with Love and Light,
The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends

EPISTLE OF YOUNG FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 9TH DAY, 2015

Dear Friends,

This past year the Young Friends met several times in various locations to share our Love and Light. This year was filled with transitions of the community, including a very large influx of new members and the departures of many beloved ones. Our year was filled to the brim with dancing, worship, queries, singing, and new friendships formed, all while old friendships were strengthened.

The first Nuts and Bolts Committee retreat of the year was held at Gunpowder Friends Meeting where we learned how to properly facilitate a clearness committee. We also used it in practice by holding a clearness committee for an incoming Young Friend. In business meeting we developed a new way to integrate new attendees, called "Con 101" run by our members at large.

The whole Young Friends community began our year in late September at the lovely Langley Hill Meeting House by greeting Friends new and old. Our September conference was filled with bubbles, capture the flag, a one man rendition of Les Mis, our first coffee house of the year, and speed dating to integrate the incoming Friends to the community. There was plenty of love and light to go around which was carried in our hearts throughout the year.

Our annual Thanksgiving conference is special in many ways, one because it is the time that our alumni return to us to share again their joy and laughter. This year we also had a merfolk themed conference, spearheaded by our mermittee (i.e. merfolk is a gender neutral word for mermaid), a committee for the merfolk by the merfolk. The workshop on fracking, led by our own Friendly Adult Presence Polly Heningger, opened our minds and hearts to the environmental issues prevalent in our society. We used the wondrous kitchen in the Adelphi Meeting House to make delicious pizza and sweet potato biscuits (that's what I said), which kept us fuelled for some fun-filled paper bag skits.

The second Nuts and Bolts Committee retreat was held in January at Herndon Friends Meeting where we discussed the year so far, held peer evaluations, and met with the Youth Programs Committee to discuss the budget. We also played capture the flag, soccer, and ultimate Frisbee in a nearby park.

Although all our conferences are filled with love and light, our February conference is one of the most attended and love filled cons. The ambiance of this conference was set by the quiet snowfall around the light filled Homewood Meeting House, and the laughter of Friends frolicking in the snow. Our workshop focused on sex and sex education, providing a safe environment for us to come to comprehend this serious topic. We also had worship sharing, played ultimate Frisbee, and received the melancholy announcement that our former Youth Programs Manager Alison was to make her departure. It may have to do with the fact that it's held over Valentine's Day weekend, or that we have so many hearts to share it with, but we love the special spirit that always seems to surround our marvelous love con.

In April we boarded a bus and headed out to Richmond Friends Meeting's campsite, known as "The Clearing," for our annual work con. As service we cleared trails, chopped wood and made signs. One order of business that came up early in the weekend was the creation of a communal social networking account (instagram). Named after a beloved Friendly Adult Presence, known as "Erikbrokemyheart," run by the Young Friends as a way to keep in touch in-between conferences. We also proposed a query on the importance of this community and our self-governance because Friends felt there was a lack of initiative taken by members. Since this conference is the least attended of the year, due to both distance and timing, we held a discussion on the status of work con; why people do not attend, and if we should continue it in future. We decided to continue this conversation at our final conference of the year, to let those who don't attend work con have a say.

Our final con of the year, also known as grad con, was held at Hopewell Centre Friends Meeting, providing us plenty of space to frolic outdoors. We finished the tabled discussion, and decided to continue holding work/bus cons because the service we do is important to the wider community, and we are able to reach out to Friends further away. We had another workshop led by a Friendly Adult Presence, Amrit Moore, where we made personalized, screen printed tee-shirts. Throughout the weekend there were many haircuts and head-shavings, most of them were decided then and there. We ended this con as we always do, with a tear and tissue filled graduation ceremony, but this time the ceremony was not only our seniors. We said our final goodbyes to our Youth Programs Manager of the past six years, Alison Duncan. We thanked her for her time, and wished her well with her next adventure.

At steering wheel, our last Nuts and Bolts Committee retreat of the year, we said hello to our new Youth Programs Manager of the year, Jossie Dowling. This retreat was held at Fredrick Friends Meeting, and is designed for job training. We slid into our new roles without a hitch, and then we headed to Annual Session.

Annual Session began with a new role in the BYM community for Young Friends; starting Tuesday we began our roles as reading clerks. That evening we held our first Meeting for Business where we started off by introducing ourselves. The more we attended the wider community's Meeting for Business, the more we applied their practices to our own Meetings, strengthening our spiritual community. We held four workshops throughout the week; screen-printing, conscientious objecting, gender-right relationships and equity, and experimenting with light. Our committees, including Handbook, Produce Department, Coffee House, Epistle, Mermitee, Prank, Friends In Giant Heated Tantrums (a.k.a. FIGHT), Do Good Deeds, Nuts and Bolts, and Dance

Party Playlist, met every day to discuss their business, and many produced results that were shared with this whole community. Intergenerational activities included the All Age Celebration, Produce Dept., and Capture the Flag, and were shared with lots of laughs. After a year of both losses and gains, we posed the query “How may we channel our love for people and things that have departed, towards embracing the new?” and heard impactful responses which helped many through their transitions. As previously mentioned, we held an ad-hoc Prank Committee to prank the Young Adult Friends before our open house with them. Many post-it notes were shed and furniture was left upside-down, to the confusion of the YAFs.

We are looking forward to the upcoming year, and can't wait for the community to continue to grow and flourish.

Love and light,
Young Friends of Baltimore Yearly Meeting

EPISTLE OF JUNIOR YOUNG FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 9TH DAY, 2015

To Friends Everywhere:

This year Junior Young Friends enjoyed many fun activities at Annual Session. We started our week with the people that were here making tie-dye t-shirts. We held our own business meeting, where we decided on our clerk and recording clerk, plus things to do at the overnight and the All Age Celebration. One issue we addressed was the time needed to make the labyrinth - and to fix this problem, some JYFs volunteered to trace it while the rest of the group played capture the flag. However, because of the rain, they had to retrace an entirely new one the day of the All Age Celebration, in an entirely new spot.

The rain also affected the annual swimming trip, so some of us had the fun experience of swimming in the rain at the community pool (while having the pool entirely to ourselves!). In the JYF class, we enjoyed two field trips, as well. One was to a farm that provides vegetables to the university dining hall, Frostburg Grows, where we moved trees, learned about compost, and helped prune and pick tomatoes. The second one was to the planetarium, where we learned many cool facts about telescopes and found out that Pluto had recently been reinstated as a planet!

We had a scavenger hunt that led all over campus - and, after tallying creativity and success points, had a 'Quaker tie' as the end result. Throughout the week, we folded many, many paper cranes, as part of the Yearly Meeting's effort to mark the 70th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima by folding 1,000. We learned about creation stories from around the world, in one of which, when God created man and buffalo, buffalo killed and ate man - and in many of them we noticed similarities. Lastly, we ended our great week of JYF with our overnight, where we played manhunt and sardines, and some joined the YFs for capture the flag. In the morning, we got to enjoy watermelon for breakfast because Dylan was able to cut one open with a plastic knife.

EPISTLE OF WOMEN'S RETREAT

January 25, 2015

Dear Friends Everywhere:

One hundred and sixty nine women journeyed to Skycroft Retreat Center nestled on an Appalachian mountaintop in Middletown, Maryland to gather for the 21st annual Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women's Retreat for the weekend of January 23-25, 2015. The vitality of our strong community was enhanced with the presence of more than 50 women, young and old, attending the retreat for the first time. We explored the theme of Connections: To Ourselves, To Each Other, and to the Spirit. As we gathered Friday night, winter weather swirled around us, enveloping us in a snowy freezing fog. We journeyed, knowing that the skies—and our hearts--would open to manifest the Light.

As we gathered for the opening, we took roll call by Monthly Meeting and generations. We are not a body that gathers to make decisions, but a body that gathers in fellowship to renew our spirits during some of the darkest days of the year. Our singing, chanting, and sacred circle dancing reflect the unity of Spirit, as we connect and blend tenderness and vulnerability, with strength and clarity. Laughter and tears envelop us, like the weather outside awes us with its power to make us measure every step, or make us stop and cherish the beauty of God's Creation.

Small worship-sharing groups focused our time together, at the beginning middle and end of the weekend. Friends from Adelphi Monthly Meeting lovingly organized the gathering, planning workshops, worship sharing, and interest groups for us to consider the theme. Many of us find this retreat to be a safe place to try new things and to test our leadings, by offering a workshop or an interest group, or sharing a story or song at our Coffeehouse. In workshops, we explored Connections through art, writing, bodywork, meditation, and learned about Quaker history and social justice. Artists and craftswomen brought their works to share, and the brilliant displays of pottery, jewelry, handspun and dyed wool and wool works, as well as photography garnished the edges of our main gathering space, brightened our spirits.

At our Plenary session on Saturday morning, we were blessed to have performance artist Kim Hanley speak to us as Lucretia Mott, early Quaker abolitionist and advocate of women's rights. We were reminded of her power—and the power of other early Friends—who spoke from a conviction of Spirit with authority and love, with gentleness and strength, and a certitude of faith that was the cornerstone of early Friends' meetings. Though many of us had read or heard of Lucretia Mott, having her in our midst was powerful, reminding us that Quaker women's authority came not from men or sects, but directly from the Light of God. Friend Lucretia led by example, inspiring us to speak up and speak out, working and witnessing for equality.

We understand the power of listening to each other's experiences, the experiences of our foremothers, and the experiences of Friends around the world. We honor the women who have spoken Truth to Power through the centuries and who continue to do so around the world—some in our own midst, some across the globe.

The fog and snow lifted, mirroring our soaring spirits. The ice sparkled on the branches silhouetted against the blue sky, reminding us of the cleansing and healing in being

close to Nature. It is in this faith community that we can gather, center, connect, and then move back into our meetings and the world, able to reflect the Spirit more vibrantly.

Even though we may not know you, we sense that the connection we have in Spirit is a connection to explore, celebrate, and cherish. The Truth that Lucretia Mott spoke of is available to us all, and when we gather in community, we are nourished and strengthened by the Vitality of the Spirit. We hope that you find a restorative healing power when you gather in your Quaker community, as we are blessed to have here on this mountaintop in Maryland.

With love in The Light,

The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women's Retreat

Betty Ansin Smallwood, Langley Hill

Barbara Platt, Sandy Spring

Helen Tasker, Fredrick