

## **REPORTED TO ANNUAL SESSION AT FREDERICK, MARYLAND 8TH MONTH 7TH DAY, 2016**

To Friends Everywhere,

At a time when the greater world finds itself in upheaval, over 400 Friends (with approximately fifteen percent of the body being first time attenders) gathered in Frederick, Maryland, for the 345th Annual Session of Baltimore Yearly Meeting. During the week, in plenaries, workshops, individual conversations, and Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, we considered the many ways in which we are called not only to respond but to plan for action. This sense of change was enhanced by being at Hood College for the first time where we savored the shifts and transformations in the air.

The opening retreat, led by Nancy Bieber of Lancaster Meeting, called our attention to willingness, attentiveness, and responsiveness, three strands of spiritual discernment which braided their way through the week's deliberations, workshops and activities, with each taking precedence at varying turns.

A sense of movement further permeated our time together. In Business Meeting, we worked to discern our future by: furthering the Growing Diverse Leadership initiative; welcoming a new General Secretary, Ned Stowe; continuing to raise the issues of our impact on the environment by asking Friends to calculate their own and their Meeting's carbon footprints; and, hearing the Healthy Organization and Purposeful Evolution (HOPE) Committee's recommendations for organizational structure change and definition which would support and nurture the work of our committees, staff, and local Meetings. We adopted a budget which supports our values of care of the environment and transformation of our youth into adults unafraid to express their Quaker values in action, and took on rethinking the apportionment formula, or the Methodists to determine financial contributions by Meetings to the Yearly Meeting, as a challenge for the coming year.

Our first plenary speaker, Christina Repoley, told us that young people need something deeper than values: they need an attachment to something greater to live in this world. Quaker tradition tells us this is possible. We need to be prepared and pay attention when moments of clarity happen. The ad hoc Growing Diverse Leadership Committee (GDLC) reminded us of the need to be intentional in growing our inclusiveness, which includes looking at ourselves and our practices that present roadblocks which many of us do not easily recognize. Although the opportunities are sometimes uncomfortable, we are guided by the GDLC to be courageous as we examine our Monthly and Yearly Meetings.

We were deeply saddened by the racist behavior of local police enforcement that was encountered by Friends of Color at the Friends General Conference Gathering. It heightened our awareness of how much work there is to do in removing obstacles to inclusion in our Yearly Meeting.

We were further emboldened to experience and express courage during our Carey Lecture. Our speaker, George Lakey, emphasized the importance of rising to the occasion when opportunities outside of our comfort zone present themselves, and

challenged us to turn fear into excitement. He stressed the importance of community and fostered our natural instinct to reach out our hands to those around us in times of chaos and uncertainty through stories of his past.

Throughout the week, our time was enriched by the presence of visitors from Britain Yearly Meeting and Indiana Yearly Meeting as well as representatives from Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, Friends Committee on National Legislation, and the American Friends Service Committee. Visitors from several other Yearly Meetings and organizations also deepened our connections to other Friends.

Suggested change to our Vision Statement was brought forward by the Working Group on Racism report, in which a proposed paragraph on our aspirations to become a more diverse Meeting was added. Friends grappled with the connotations that certain words hold and, therefore, which ones would be best suited to accurately convey the sense of the body regarding diversity. Discernment on the matter led to strong feelings by various members of the community though an undercurrent of excitement could be felt by the body for the minute and the work done by the Working Group on Racism. Ultimately, the proposed addition was approved by the Yearly Meeting as, from it, a clear need to express class as an issue going forward was recognized.

We celebrated the richness of the programming for our children and youth and shared in their joy at being together at Annual Session, though we noted the dwindling number of the youngest children with concern. We give thanks to both the adults who have contributed their time and talents to our young people and to the young people who, in turn, have shared their time and their talents with us. Friends of all ages were invited to explore “the Light within us” through deep discussion and spirited singing in an intergenerational Plenary led by Jen Cort and Lauren Brownlee.

At this year’s Annual Session we have both begun and continued a number of changes in the Yearly Meeting. One Friend shared the conviction that faith does not ask us to pass through a place where it will not guide us. We were challenged to have the courage to step into the future, which assures that there will be still more change to come. We go forth with an open heart and the confidence that we can carry our part of the “joyful burden of love”.

In the Light,  
Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

## **EPISTLE OF YOUNG ADULT FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 7TH DAY, 2016**

Dear Friends,

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends (YAFs) first came together in 2016 the initial weekend in January to celebrate the wedding of Erik Hansen and Windy Cooler, both beloved members of Adelphi Monthly Meeting and its greater Yearly Meeting. After much dancing and merriment, we traveled onward to the William Penn House for the second half of the weekend to gather as a community and discuss how to

effectively communicate our Quaker faith to those around us. Way Open was provided in the form of a workshop led by Josh Wilson, Patapsco Monthly Meeting, and consisted of three parts.

The first was an activity in which we sat in two circles, the inner facing the outer, and talked about an aspect of our spirituality with the person across from us. After five minutes, one of these circles would rotate and we would discuss a new aspect with a new partner. The second part of the workshop allowed for small group discussion, where Friends reflected over a series of quotes relating to the various Quaker testimonies before discussing the ones that spoke to us on an individual level as so moved. Finally, groups came back together as one to share with each other the words found within the previously smaller setting.

Aside from this workshop, Young Adult Friends engaged in a variety of activities, one such being a morning spent in the Eastern Market in DC where we both window-shopped and participated in a rousing community-oriented game. As is tradition, we also gathered for a meal out, bearing the reward of local cuisine and lively philosophical discussion on the nature of our interpersonal relationships through the use of hypothetical situations that might affect them. Wrapping up our conference, Friends caravanned to the nearby Friends Meeting of Washington to join their Meeting for Worship before departing on their separate ways Sunday morning.

Regrettably, due to both unforeseen circumstances and confused dialogue, the Young Adult Friends community did not hold a summer conference this year. We hope that other Young Adult Friends communities around the world will take a lesson from our mistakes as needed and recognize the value of creating clear channels of communication within their community as we continue to establish ones within ours.

Another lesson in planning that can be learned from our mistakes is one in properly finding appropriate gathering spaces as seen when YAF joined together again in early August at Hood College for Baltimore Yearly Meeting Annual Session 2016. As this was a new location for all, we struggled to adapt and find new common spaces that would allow us to further foster a deeper sense of community. Still, despite these difficulties and the countless responsibilities shared among us (the few, but mighty), Young Adult Friends found a way to come together for business meetings, meals, a meet and greet with FCNL, and other activities. Dialogue between YF and YAF on redefining our relationship between the two communities was also begun to reflect the evolution and growth of both.

Highlights of the week included the discovery of Pretzel Pizza Creation (a well-liked replacement for our late night pizza ordering), intergenerational events such as All-Age Celebration and Produce Department, and plenty of ice cream. Knowing no limits to our creativity, one member of the community proposed the idea of creating a text-based game inspired by Annual Session which should be online by Annual Session 2017.

Despite the many challenges we were faced with this year, Young Adult Friends continues to be a close-knit body of big "F," little "f" Friends. Though our lives remain ever busy both in and outside of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, we continue to prioritize offering support and encouragement for one another along our separate yet connected

journeys. As always, we are grateful for the continued advice and support of the Yearly Meeting, and for one another.

We hope you will further follow us through our photo documented adventures on instagram via @bmyoungadultfriends or <https://www.instagram.com/bmyoungadultfriends/>

In Love and in Light,  
Baltimore Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends

## **EPISTLE OF YOUNG FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 7TH DAY, 2016**

Dear Friends,

BYM Young Friends have drawn yet another year filled with caring, trust and love to a close.

In YF tradition, high school age Friends of BYM gathered for five conferences throughout the year, in addition to holding three Nuts and Bolts Committee (NBC) conferences, and then gathered again for the week of Annual Session.

To start off the 2015-16 year, members of the Nuts and Bolts Committee gathered at Annapolis Friends Meeting the second weekend of September. Our new Youth Programs Manager, Jossie Dowling, continued an impressive transition into her new role, holding an enriching training on clearness committees for members of NBC.

The Young Friends welcomed many new faces into our community during our September conference, held at Adelphi Friends Meeting, including our incoming freshmen. A Friendly Adult Presence, Jamie DeMarco, shared his light and expertise with us in the form of a workshop on climate activism. Committees met with their usual gusto, with the addition of three committees new to Young Friends conferences. These included an ad-hoc Songbook Committee, a Homework committee, and F.I.G.H.T. Committee—a play off of the pop culture classic “Fight Club” and a safe space for Friends to engage in active games. We closed our second night with a Coffee House, overflowing with Young Friends’ talent.

The Young Friends happily returned to Homewood Friends Meeting in November for our annual Thanksgiving Conference. The theme of this conference, planned by two sets of twins, was “Twinsgiving,” and we were each paired with a “twin” of our own. In these pairs we held a Twin Olympics. The tone of the conference was also set by a lovely workshop on positive touch, lead by Steph Bean.

In January, the Nuts and Bolts Committee gathered again, this time at the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Office. This ideal space provided NBC with a place to share their joys and concerns as they revisited Young Friends policies and met with the Youth Programs Committee.

Our February conference, fondly dubbed “Love Con,” this year bore a further title: “Pirates of the Connabean.” We were welcomed onto the campus of Sandy Spring Friends School, which was excited to strengthen their relationship with BYM by hosting us. Our workshop on love was lead by a former Young Friends clerk, Micah Whitney, and many Friends shared personal stories in this safe space. The conference was characterized both by silly pirate themed games and by a serious discussion on our Sex Minute, as we revisited the values of our community.

Our spring “Work Con” was held once again at the Clearing, a property in the care of Richmond Friends meeting. Friends raked leaves, cut logs and cleared trails, with the guidance of Ted Heck, a member of Richmond Friends. In meeting for business we discussed a potential Food Ethics Committee, which would help Young Friends allow Quaker values to inform our purchases. We had a joyful weekend full of easter egg hunts, stories, games and hard work. The conference’s crowning achievement was quite possibly the April Fools prank we played on our Youth Programs Manager, Jossie Dowling.

Friends gathered once again for Grad Con (more like Rad Con) at Hopewell Centre Friends meeting, to say goodbye to our beloved seniors. Our fun clay workshop, lead by Chip Trail, was made possible by an extremely generous donation of clay by Sam Austell. The Hydration Nation Committee, formed earlier this year, made its active debut by holding many fun water games to encourage hydration and to cool off. After a heartfelt and tearful graduation ceremony, we gathered around a beautiful bonfire to send off our seniors with love.

NBC’s Steering Wheel conference is a time for the Young Friends Nuts and Bolts Committee of the coming year to gather, learn their new positions, and begin to work as a group. Although it was hot, Friends’ hearts were warmed further by many productive hours of business.

The following week, Friends gathered at Hood College for BYM’s Annual Session. We welcomed many new faces, lead and participated in intergenerational activities, and attended three enriching Plenary Sessions. We held workshops on Reaching out to Muslim Americans, Climate Change (lead by representatives of the Friends in Unity With Nature Committee), and Ballroom Dancing. We closed out the week by holding an exciting Coffee House for the BYM community and bearing witness to the talent and light deposited so widely across our Yearly Meeting.

We look forward to continuing this witness and living another year in the Light.

Love and Light,  
Young Friends of Baltimore Yearly Meeting

## **EPISTLE OF JUNIOR YOUNG FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 7TH DAY, 2016**

To Friends Everywhere,

This year in Junior Young Friends (JYF) we enjoyed many fun activities at Annual Session. We explored the new campus while playing our game of Pokemon GO Live! and going on a scavenger hunt. We walked to the Frederick meetinghouse, where we helped pull the morning glories that were trying to strangle some of the flower beds - and then to a local park, where we had fun together and cooled off in the shade on the merry-go-round. For All Age, we did a lot of chalk art and constructed a butterfly shaped labyrinth - our most ambitious one yet - with a little help from former members of JYF. And we rounded out the week by collaborating on getting each other really wet, having even more fun in the process of filling water balloons than we did throwing them.

We also conducted our Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, at which we planned our overnight and the All Age Celebration. A recurring topic of discussion - both in and outside of Business Meeting - was how or where to release the kraken, getting into the logistics of the scenario, including feeding, housing and raising it. And throughout the week, we asked people a lot of questions, both by interviewing people outside of JYF, and posing them to each other during our fishbowl.

We would like to thank all the YAFs and adults who make the overnight—and the program—possible. Last, but not least, we would like to extend a huge thank you to Kat Darnell for making this whole week a lot of fun - and for making the JYF program at Baltimore Yearly Meeting Annual Session what it is.

Junior Young Friends of Baltimore Yearly Meeting

## **EPISTLE OF JUNIOR YEARLY MEETING ACCEPTED EIGHTH MONTH 7TH DAY, 2016**

The Elementary Grades  
Hood College Frederick, MD

In our elementary grades group, ages 5-10, we did many activities together at Annual Session. We set up our new space with stations for arts and crafts, board games, a village, books, lego and other activities. Many kids played in Friendship Village, which became murder village when we had a fight, and then it became Friendship Palace when we made a big fort around it. In the morning classes, each group had a morning meeting before activities where we practiced discernment for our action. On Wednesday, we taught each other parachute games and practiced discerning action. Together, we learned a song for Meeting for Business. For the All-Age Celebration on Thursday, the kids in the classes had ideas and were getting ready for special tables. Then we took turns running the stations on the night of the All-Age Celebration. On Friday and Saturday, we learned about the Quaker testimonies through books quotations and stories. We made up our own skits together and we presented them

for our class. In our free play time we played board games, made pop up cards, made dream catchers, painted, danced, had snack and had lots of table fellowship. Junior Yearly Meeting was a great time for the kids to meet new friends and play with their friends.

## **EPISTLE OF WOMEN'S RETREAT APPROVED JANUARY 31, 2016**

January 31, 2016

Dear Friends Everywhere,

Nearly 200 Quaker women (including about 10 non-Friends) gathered on the weekend of January 29-31, 2016 at Pearlstone Jewish retreat center in Northern Maryland for the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Annual Women's retreat. We gathered to consider the theme of "Lighten up! Sharing Love, Light, and Laughter." As we gathered Friday evening after sharing a kosher meal together, we were sung into the gathering, joining in chants and rounds, harmonizing together. Songs of ancient origin and tradition helped us experience the timelessness of that which is holy and filled with Light.

As a Jewish Retreat Center Pearlstone's plenary room displayed sacred text (written in Hebrew, and in translation on the walls) which resonated deeply with us:

"Blessed are you in the city, blessed are you in the field: blessed are you when you come, blessed are you when you leave. I will make a covenant with them on that day, with the animals of the field, the birds of the sky, and the creepers of the earth: and I will banish bow, sword, and war from the land so that all may safely rest."

We are a community that comes together once a year, during some of the most difficult months. The area that comprises BYM was hit by a record-breaking blizzard the previous weekend, so we were grateful that we were able to arrive at this spiritually safe place. At this retreat each year we find communion with women who also seek ways to deepen their spiritual connections with each other. An immediate trust was developed Friday night in our intimate worship sharing groups where we addressed queries together throughout the weekend.

Our plenary speaker on Saturday morning, Erin Rooney Doland, spoke to us of "The Practice of Lightening up". As a professional organizer, and also a Quaker woman, she spoke of how she helps people de-clutter their lives of the physical stuff accumulated over years. She shared with a tone of light and loving humor, her own recognition of how ridding her life of stuff also lightened her spirit. She spoke of how in order to put off her de-cluttering task, she researched the issue and found that this holding on to stuff and possessions is something that humans from around the world have been dealing with over the ages, and she shared some of that wisdom with us. She spoke of how distracting the clutter can be, keeping us from attending to matters of Spirit.

By listening to each other deeply we built connections with each other that we will carry back to our meetings, and into our personal lives. We gathered in workshops where we explored and experienced political, personal, and spiritual topics. Our circles of conversations nourish each other's spirits; by listening and laughing, singing and chanting, dancing and crying, we developed and renewed connections, which strengthen ourselves, our Monthly Meetings and ultimately our Yearly Meeting.

As we made our way through the weekend we examined challenges before us personally, locally and globally. How does this play of light and shadow work in our lives? How do we build and sustain a community which nourishes Spirit? We found some answers, but also more questions. We reveled in the various playful and serious performances in the coffeehouse (our talent show) on Saturday night and ended with worship sharing, and Meeting for Worship on Sunday, leaving a bit lighter than when we came. Over so many years we women of Baltimore Yearly Meeting have found that when our work in the world is held up by a strong circle of connections with each other and with Spirit, our load will be lightened. When we are deeply centered, when we simplify our physical, intellectual, emotional, and Spiritual places then the Light is able to illuminate the path ahead. We wish that wherever in the world you may reside, that you too may find ways to join with others to deepen in Spirit and in doing so, lighten the burdens you and others may bear.

In the Light,

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women's Retreat