

REPORTED TO ANNUAL SESSION AT FREDERICK, MARYLAND 8TH MONTH 4TH DAY, 2019

To Friends Everywhere,

As we gathered for Annual Session in Baltimore Yearly Meeting's 348th year to consider the theme, "Quaker Tools for the Journey," we heard many messages that BYM Friends have been laboring in the garden. Previous years included turbulent periods when we did not know what ground lay ahead and we labored to stay in community with one another. It was revealed that this hard work has yielded us fertile soil. We were reminded by Sean Hickey, Opequon Quaker Camp Director, that: "Gardening is doing the work to create conditions for a seed to do what it already knows how to do."

For the last few years the call has been clear: we must grow in order to be whole. We must grow by creating conditions that make our Meetings more inclusive and welcoming to all, by encouraging participation and leadership among all Friends, and by building an anti-racist, multicultural community. Young Adult Friends (YAFs) have been urging this growth by pointing out connections among these concerns. As reported in our 2018 Epistle, they pressed us, saying: "If we [in BYM] want to engage with young people, we must work with them on dismantling the implicit bias in our communities." It is early yet, and gardening can be hard, uncomfortable work. In some places, we have only prepared the ground. In others, some seeds are just going into the ground.

Examples of this fertile soil include that our ad hoc Growing Diverse Leadership (GDL) group has become a standing committee. This new committee has taken the Strengthening Transformative Relationships in Diverse Environments (STRIDE) program under its care and a permanent staff position has been approved to coordinate and support the four local STRIDE groups. Following the strong leading of a Young Adult Friend, we have begun discussions of reparations to African Americans and indigenous native peoples.

The GDL committee proposed to declare BYM an anti-racist faith community. This declaration consolidated statements of our past convictions and offered a series of queries to test our decisions, taken in every setting, to ensure they reflect our intention to be, in fact, an anti-racist faith community. The declaration and its queries will be made available to our local Meetings as an invitation to discern how they can be useful in the life of those communities.

Young Adult Friends led our Wednesday all-age plenary, "YAF Talks about Talking about Racism" to build on their prophetic message. Drawing from the work of Amanda Kemp, they gave us tools to create space for transformation and to plant seeds of new ideas when having uncomfortable discussions.

Some seeds are starting to sprout. We have spent time and attention on increasing attendance at our annual gathering. This year the opening retreat, led by Marcelle Martin, author of *Our Life is Love*, had record participation (over 60), which improved attendance across the week. Quotes from early Friends considered during the retreat were referenced throughout the week to "seed" the soil of Annual Session efforts.

Another consideration germinating under the care of the Program Committee is an alternative model to fund Annual Sessions in order to increase participation from all income levels, ages, and family sizes.

We have been tending to some concerns for many years and the shoots and leaves of growth are visible. Through support groups and travel minutes, our Intervisitation Program currently sustains a variety of individuals who made visits to 30 Quaker communities in six countries. Many are repeat visits that serve to strengthen connections across the Quaker world. This year over 30 visitors joined our Annual Sessions, the most in recent memory. The roots of this program are spreading as other Yearly Meetings look to this model to grow their own programs of intervisitation. In addition, we welcomed members of the Baltimore-based Kenyan Friends Church and celebrated the connections that are growing between us.

Our camping program has been tended for many years, extending roots in all directions and producing bounteous blooms. We basked in the presence of campers who hiked in from nearby Catoctin Quaker Camp. Several expressed their enthusiasm and joy for the camp experience, including a young woman who came to Catoctin through the STRIDE program, is now a counselor, and who convinced her cousins to come to camp, too!

Care of the earth is another mature concern whose flowers result from our tender attention. The Working Group on Right Relationship with Animals has encouraged extending our circle of love to animals and making conscious food choices. We heard moving testimony from Kallen Benson, a teen from Annapolis Meeting who held a 90-day vigil and “fast of words” during the Maryland General Assembly session in support of meaningful action on climate initiatives. A visit from a Bolivian Friend, Emma Condori, brought powerful witness to the disappearance of the Andes mountain snowpack, dry rivers, and whole communities with severely limited access to water, which are swept away by floods when it rains.

Yet, there are untended corners of our garden. More work is needed to nurture and support our meeting communities in addressing hurts that have happened to our own members. In particular, those most directly involved in crisis situations, such as child abuse, family violence, and contentious divorce. As meetings and individuals we need to learn how to provide safe spaces and tender care for those in the midst of crisis or suffering in silence to be heard and supported.

And, in order to fully nurture our cares and concerns, we must draw on another resource: money. This year our aspirations and commitments have been met through apportionment, friendly loans, and donations. Next year the budget will be balanced, thanks to careful, selective pruning and depending on the increased generosity of individual contributions.

At our opening plenary, Patricia Nesbitt enumerated the resources we each have in our spiritual toolbelt to prepare us to work at the edges of our comfort zone. Patti highlighted the value of her Travel Minute from BYM in making connections across the Quaker world and beyond. During our closing Carey Lecture, Quaker author, activist, and teacher, Eileen Flanagan presented us with three challenges to better nurture the seed within: to closely discern true leadings from habitual or wishful pursuits; to build

our “courage muscles” so that we may follow true leadings strongly; and to call out the support we need from our communities. Eileen closed by saying: “There is so much richness in this community. I truly believe that if you follow your leading you will have everything you need.”

The Spiritual State of the Meeting Report reminds us that: “living in a climate of values which deeply challenge our own and facing conflict and discord on a daily basis is still hard for us.” But we are aware that we are richer for it -- richer from our more diverse composition, perspectives, and strengths, and richer from the truth and love we have grown and used in the process. Today, although we know we have prepared fertile soil and we know we have seeds -- and some sprouts -- we don’t know what this garden will grow into or what fruit it will bear. Only with the continued care of the conditions of the land will we see our seedlings germinate, sprout and flower. Gardening takes love and attention: feeding the soil with our open hearts, weeding to discern our innermost voice, both pruning and growing our resources so that our goals will flourish, and making it ready for the application of living water.

EPISTLE OF YOUNG ADULT FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 4TH DAY, 2019

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends are a small but ferocious group. In this past year we had two conferences, an additional training session, and our gathering at Annual Session. Our theme for this year has been the continuation of last year’s leading, where Young Adult Friends have worked to confront our own racism and to bring anti-racism work to the greater Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

Our Winter Conference was held at the home of several Young Adult Friends, a place fondly referred to as House of Couch. We met with the Working Group on Racism in order to begin training activities. Other activities of the conference included a walk around Lake Artemesia, electronic and paper based games, dinner out and community building.

Our Summer Conference was held at the same home, whose inhabitants we express immense gratitude to. At the conference, we continued developing our plenary, hosting a conference call and an in-person session with the Working Group on Racism. We shared similar community time together, and enjoyed a trip to the local thrift store.

At the end of June, Young Adult Friends arranged a workshop with Amanda Kemp in preparation for our upcoming plenary at annual session. YAFs discussed methods to address racism both within and outside of the Yearly Meeting; and discussed ways to bring those methods into the collective knowledge of the Yearly Meeting.

Our Annual Session activities were intensive. We started at full speed to get our plenary completely prepared. Thursday included dinner with all of the Young Adult Friends at the local park, followed by bubble blowing at the All Age Celebration. Friday celebrated rest and recovery as a community, as well as upcoming August birthdays. We also participated in the annual Coffeehouse. Saturday we shared time and joy with Young Friends in a spa session, with time to connect to rising Young Adult Friends.

We are appreciative of the community we have maintained and supported amongst ourselves, and of the time we have spent bringing crucial messages to the greater Yearly Meeting. We look forward to a year of continuing to be in community with each other and with new rising or otherwise incoming Young Adult Friends.

In the light,
Young Adult Friends

EPISTLE OF YOUNG FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 4TH DAY, 2019

Young Friends held our first conference of the year at Homewood Meeting House. Welcoming new members into our community, we used Con 101 to help teach the basics of what our Conferences are. We enjoyed a workshop learning about cartography and got to practice our map making skills. Friends held a game of hide and seek after business meeting. Then, on Saturday, the conference took a trip to the local art museum, which we went through as small groups, to get to know each other better. After that, we went to a park and played large group games, such as Big Wind Blows and Frisbee. Finally, it was time to clean the meeting and hold a Thank-You Circle, where Friends can thank each other and share stories from the conference. Young Friends attended Meeting for Worship with Homewood. The meeting was a great place for our first conference of the year, and we thank the Friends at Homewood for allowing us to use their space.

We next gathered at Langley Hill Friends Meeting, for our November Conference. The workshop for that con was Sexual Education, a very important topic for our age group. Friends played in the playground together and enjoyed a game of ultimate frisbee. The outdoor space was very accommodating to our community and was much enjoyed. On Sunday, Friends cleaned up the space and held a brief Thank-You Circle. After that, we joined Langley Hill in worship, before saying goodbye. Thank you to Langley Hill Friends for welcoming us so warmly into their meeting house.

We held our February Conference at Adelphi Friends Meeting. We hosted our Love-Prom, which is a new tradition that has proved more inclusive to the Young Friends Community and a positive addition. Friends had a workshop on meditation, where we learned to focus our spiritual energy to better ourselves. We made brownies and hors d'oeuvres for our dance party. After a lot of cleaning up, we held our Thank-You Circle and joined Adelphi in worship before leaving once again. We enjoyed this conference very much and thank the meeting for opening their space for our use.

In April, we had our Service Conference at Goose Creek Friends Meeting. Our project was making posters and signs to support HR-763, a bill to combat climate change. This workshop was led by Jamie Demarco, and we thank him for allowing us to help on such an impactful project. Friends went on a walk and played many indoor games. Before leaving, we cleaned the meeting house and then shared worship with Goose Creek Friends. The space was very open and welcoming to our community, and we thank Goose Creek for that.

Young Friends attended Grad Con at Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting. We enjoyed the new building and space, particularly the kitchen. Young Friends held a water balloon fight and played many other outdoor games. We attended a fascinating Yoga Workshop, where Friends learned to stretch ourselves and our spirits. Then, we held our traditional Grad-Circles, where memories and thoughts about the graduating seniors are shared. Bitter-sweet as always, we are glad to support the 2019 class as it moves on in life, but we will miss them in our community. After cleaning the community house, we walked over and had worship with Sandy Spring Friends. Then we said goodbye to our seniors and held one last thank you circle for the year. We thank Sandy Spring Meeting for allowing us to use its wonderful space for our conference.

Annual Session this year has been a great opportunity for Young Friends to come together and begin the process of welcoming new attendees to our regular conferences. We attended a workshop on how climate change has been affecting Bolivia, and Friends were able to help plant a garden bed at Fox Haven. Young Friends joined JYM and JYF for games of Capture the flag and Four-Square. We held a Produce Department, a get-to-know-you activity open to the wider community of BYM at annual session. Friends also had the option to attend the Carey Lecture. Our Coffee House went well and was a great opportunity for every age group to have fun. Young Friends went on a ghost tour through Fredrick, and while sadly no friends saw any ghosts, it was still a fun group activity. On Saturday, Young Friends hit the streets for dinner on the town and had enjoyed our meal. On Sunday, it was time to pack and clean up, and say goodbye. Our community will next meet at September Con for the 2019-2020 school year, on September 27-29th. Anyone of High School Age is welcome to attend.

The Young Friends program is one that brings light to many peoples lives, but it could never function without all the work that goes on behind the scenes. We want to thank our Friendly Adult Presences from this year, all the meetings for allowing us to use their spaces for the weekend, and the parents that allow us to come back again and again. Last but certainly not least, Young Friends want to thank Jossie. Jossie puts so much work into our community (and many weekends) , and we are so grateful for everything. Not only does she make our conferences possible, but she is always such a fun and cheerful presence. For our program to continue, it takes work and support from the whole BYM community. We thank you all for granting that year after year.

Love and Light

Young Friends

EPISTLE OF JUNIOR YOUNG FRIENDS ACCEPTED 8TH MONTH 4TH DAY, 2019

On Tuesday we got to know each other with games like mafia and sardines. It was fun to get to know each other in such an active way. We also silk-screened shirts on that day.

There were many things on Wednesday. First of all, we went to the plenary session. There was Capture the Flag, and some rules to be made. The first rule assessed whose fault it was when someone died in the game, and the rules went on from there.

On Thursday we planned what we were going to do during the All-Age Celebration. In the morning we made things with drills. One of the favorites was a chicken doing push-ups. After lunch, we went swimming and had a lot of fun. That night we made a Labyrinth for the All-Age Celebration. There was lots of sugar involved.

On Friday, we started the day with going to Business Meeting. Then we decide on what to eat during the the sleepover. Some of the top choices were lemons, cherries, veggie straws, and gluten-free pretzels. We still got candy somehow. We planned things for the coffee house in the afternoon. Beckie and Allie did the sheep dance and Ob had Balloon farting. We then had our sleepover. We played capture the flag with the YFs and then watched The Princess Bride and went to sleep.

On Saturday we wrote our epistle, cleaned up, and made thank-you cards for JYF, JYM, and cafeteria staff. The week was a fun experience and we had a lot of fun together.

EPISTLE OF WOMEN'S RETREAT APPROVED JANUARY 27, 2019

Women's Treasure - honoring our time and talents

To Friends everywhere:

In the bleak midwinter, women seeking refuge, rest, reconnection and rejuvenation look forward to the annual Women's Retreat. Over the weekend of January 25-27, 2019, 135 women gathered at Pearlstone Retreat Center in Reisterstown, Maryland to explore the theme of "Women's Treasure - honoring our time and talents."

For the first time, the planning committee was comprised of individuals representing six different Meetings. The committee felt supported by other women who arrived early to help get them set up.

This year, many women felt concern from the 5 weeks of the furlough weighing on them. They were concerned about spouses, loved ones, and strangers who were struggling. We were relieved to hear that the shutdown had ended, and breathed a collective sigh of relief.

The familiarity of the retreat brought peace to those who have attended before. This helped to create a peaceful environment and open space to first time attenders.

Upon arriving, some women found their rooms and put away their belongings, others set up their pop-up shops with handmade wares, and others went to dinner.

Chanting and singing brought us together where we were lovingly reminded to tend to the needs of our own spirit this weekend. We felt hopeful and excited for the weekend's experiences.

Accompanied by the sunrise on our stroll to breakfast, the song rose up: "Yonder... day is breaking; sunlight is rising on my soul."

For mealtimes, we found sustenance from colorful food prepared by the Pearlstone Retreat Center's staff. Their ethic, printed on the dining room wall, states: "It is our honor to nourish our guests in body, mind and soul. Pearlstone Food honors the bounty of our seasons, the traditions of our ancestors, & the integrity of sustainable agriculture. We strive to provide consciously sourced, wholesome, delicious food inspired by crops grown on our farm and prepared with love. We always aim to improve, and we are proud to share our food journey with you. Enjoy!"

This Retreat Center aligns with our heart values of Simplicity and right relationship with the Earth. People, especially those with dietary restrictions, feel appreciated, embraced and cared for. At mealtime, joy and enthusiasm are paused by hand raising, in silent gratitude for the food, the seeds, plants, chickens and goats and also for the people who prepared and serve it.

The morning session began with chanting. "Come now Peace, Fill us with thy spirit..." led us into worshipful silence.

Out of the silence, the delightful theater troupe called "District Community Playback" reflected many of our different experiences. They conveyed emotions and stories of individual women amongst us by using improvisational theater techniques. They played back our stories, accompanied by violin. They used actions, fluid movements, and our own words. They dramatized our stories. They viscerally acted out emotions. It opened us up to seeing our own paths in a new light. Their drama style opened our hearts to our own needs for acknowledgements and affirmations for ourselves.

We realized the almost universal experience so many of us have: feelings and emotions of not feeling seen, feeling prideful, or selfish. Then they gracefully moved into helping us recognize our own strengths and value. We explored our inner light and the importance of recognizing and shining our own light outwards.

The violinist of the group led us in a new version of the song, "This little light of mine," with the words:

This little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine

This big light of ours
It has magic powers

Hide it under a bushel "NO"
Be Fabulous and let it shine

Let it shine
Let it shine
Let it shine!

The plenary session felt: magical, true, weepy, inspirational, refreshing, revelatory, encouraging, funny, awesome, vulnerable, and "gave me courage." The troupe invited all to specifically name each other's treasure.

The workshops offered us the space to reconnect with parts of ourselves we may have forgotten, and provided us paths to follow going forward.

The retreat offered several different modes for healing in our bodies and hearts. There was a healing corner where women gave and received neck and shoulder massages. There were moments for women to find healing while chanting, singing and dancing. Women found refuge in pockets of safety during worship sharing. The fireplace in the main building provided a spot for vibrant and chatty women. Upstairs, women could be found collaging, decoupageing, talking about poetry and sharing quiet laughter.

Saturday evening gave us the opportunity to enjoy the annual coffee house where women share their talents including: music, poetry and prose with a sincerely appreciative audience.

May we all leave this weekend feeling that the light has poured into our hearts; our load lightened, so that we may go out in to the world continuing to honor our treasures and talents. May we walk in the light and share boldly with others who cross our path.

With love,

The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women's Retreat