

**Epistle from the 199th Session of the Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of
Friends held at Earlham College, Richmond Indiana** **June 19-23, 2019**

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting lovingly greets Friends everywhere from its 2019 sessions.

Our theme this year has been “Navigating the depths through our sacred connections.” We were enriched by fine plenary speakers, workshops, and worship sharing centered especially on themes of deep healing for us as a yearly meeting, for our monthly meetings, and for our personal relationships and our inner selves.

Serious business for this annual session began when our statistician brought our attention to our ten percent drop in Yearly Meeting membership for the second year in a row, and one monthly meeting withdrew from the Yearly Meeting. We discussed possible responses to this situation and were unable to find a strong response. It was felt that each monthly meeting needs to address this problem.

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting has been engaged in a process of revising our Book of Faith and Practice for nearly twenty years. Although there are more efficient and rapid ways of doing this the Yearly Meeting has benefited from this deliberate pace. By taking on relatively small amounts of text for revision each year, we have allowed our monthly meetings to engage in close consideration of what it means and who we are as members of this particular Yearly Meeting in the 21st Century. This year monthly meetings were asked to consider revised sections on Meeting for Worship and Civic Responsibilities. We spent considerably more time in our business sessions than expected in consideration of the profound and essential differences between communal Quaker worship and individual meditation.

At last year’s annual sessions we began a serious discussion on how we as Friends should respond to sexual misconduct. Over the course of the last year we’ve had a task force charged with considering how the Yearly Meeting should respond to these kinds of situations. The Task Force has developed drafts of two documents that were brought to Meeting for Business this year: a policy for investigating allegations of sexual misconduct and a set of guidelines for educating ourselves about sexual misconduct.

The task force recognizes that the policy they presented is incomplete and will continue working on it in the coming year. They have asked our constituent monthly meetings to set aside time to look over the current materials and send their comments. We were impressed by the quality of their work and are thankful for their diligence.

As always, yearly meeting was peppered with fun. We sang and worshipped together each day, played intergenerational games together, and had an astoundingly delightful variety show. We greatly enjoyed the presence of our young people and urge you to read the epistles that they have written and are attached.

Middle Youth/Teen 2019 Epistle

This year at the 199th annual sessions, there were 10 Middle Youth/teens in attendance, Reid Pfaltzgraff-Carlson, Bing Pfaltzgraff-Carlson , Bryan Rivera Garcia, Cece Branson, Elana Branson, Elise Snarr, Toby Dean, Max Dean, Theo Swank, and Chhya.

On Wednesday, June 19th, (the first day) most of us arrived, we did an icebreaker to learn everyone's name and pronouns, we made a stress ball craft with flower and rice, and participated in an intergenerational welcoming activity.

On Thursday, June 20th, more youth arrived, we did the first half of a peace and non-violence activity, we did a session of our youth business meeting, and attended a panel of spiritual healers. A CERTAIN INDIVIDUAL SLEPT THE ENTIRE TIME IN THE NONVIOLENCE WORKSHOP!

On Friday, June 21st, even more youth arrived, and we were supposed to go on a river rafting trip. However, the river was too high, so we instead volunteered at a farm. While we were at the farm, the same individual, who will remain anonymous, said "All of us together are worth one actual worker." Teens got a lot of work done, and we believe the crew was pleasantly surprised. After we were done, we went to the local pool, and completed the second half of our peace and non-violence workshop. We also went to a plenary speech about restorative justice circles. In the evening we made soft pretzels to eat during a movie, that we did not end up having time for since every teen wanted to sleep. We decided to watch it the next day for lunch.

On Saturday, June 22nd, we did a peace circles workshop with the plenary speaker Arica Barton and heard a presentation about FCNL lobbying from Elise Snarr. After Elise's presentation, we went to lunch, which was a simple meal. During lunch and dinner, we watched Spiderman Into the Spiderverse. After lunch, we chose workshops to attend with the rest of the adults in the yearly meeting. During the morning and the afternoon, we worked on our improvised variety show puppet skit, featuring Porky the porcupine. We then had great fun performing and watching the variety show, where Porky & Co. drew a few laughs. That evening the anonymous individual left.

On Sunday, we wrote this epistle I am reading now, and we hope it is approved... so approve it, please. Thank you.

Greetings to Young Friends everywhere. The Children's Program of OVYM met June 19-23, 2019 at Earlham College in Richmond Indiana.

We focused on the theme of Navigating the Depths Through Our Sacred Connections. We learned how we are connected to all creatures, all living things and people. We talked about deep connections with God and the animals in the garden and our family and friends and ourself. We read books about mindfulness and kindness.

We shared our concerns about not being heard and how to speak up in a kind way so people will listen. We realized we need to know our feelings and our needs so we can speak up about them.

We send a message to all to go out into the world to sit in a quiet, calm place and listen to the children of the world.

In Peace and Light,
The Children of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting