

Epistles from the 73rd Annual Session of
Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
2019

Epistle from the Overall Gathering

To dear Friends everywhere,

Receive warm greetings from the annual session of Pacific Yearly Meeting, held this year at Walker Creek Ranch, near Petaluma, California from 12-17 July, 2019. Our circle of Friends gathered from many places (from Kenya and Finland, Hawaii and Australia, Mexico and El Salvador, District of Columbia, Nevada and California) to join together in reflection and worship, amid trees, grassy hills, and valleys, wild animals and birds. Out of 289 attenders this year, 25 were children and 24 members of Junior Yearly Meeting. (And we note that among our numbers were 58 vegetarians and 21 vegans.) This year's theme--"Dwelling in Truth and Trusting Divine Spirit"--echoed throughout our thoughts and conversations. The world is changing, and our Yearly Meeting is changing, and these transformations will demand courage, love, and trust from all of us.

Sky Road Webb, of the Tomales Bay Miwok, welcomed us on Friday afternoon and reminded us that the place where we gather has a long history and holds many stories and traditions to celebrate. Joined by young and old friends on stage, he led us in singing a tune he described as a "pressing-on song" (good for hard times!) and in singing--in Miwok, English, and Spanish--our hopes for our children to be protected and nurtured.

The keynote address was delivered by David Johnson, of Queensland Regional Monthly Meeting, in Australia. He spoke to us about the "offices of Christ," showing us that the Spirit of God operates within us in many different roles or "offices." Out of the following silence, it emerged in spoken ministry that each of these offices demands meaningful transformation.

Indeed, the need for transformation was a truth in our hearts and on our minds and in our words all this week. Whether in the Early Quaker Writings group or in Bible Study or in the many worship-sharing groups convened under the tossing branches of shade trees, we all wrestled with the call to change ourselves, our Meetings, Pacific Yearly Meeting, and the broader world around us. Every day, dwelling in truth and trusting Divine Spirit, various groups gathered to look truthfully at the hurdles our Meetings must overcome to undo the harm worked in our hearts by our life-denying culture and our lack of racial justice. We are laboring to build beloved communities enriched by the diversity of the world. With nearly daily workshops on immigration, inequality, and questions of right relationship, Yearly Meeting demonstrated a desire to focus more intently on diversity in our meetings and in becoming a more nurturing space for Friends of Color, who were joined this week by young Friends of color in meeting. Friends recognize the need for active outreach to persons of color within and out of Meeting.

After five years of laboring with the question, careful and loving consideration has led us to a decision to seek affiliation with Friends General Conference. We heard a report on the discernment process underway about the future of the Unity with Nature committee, and we grappled together with how to act in the face of the current environmental crisis.

Ministry and Oversight asked us to consider one of the hardest questions of all: are we dying? Our numbers are half what they were some years ago when we met at Mount Madonna, and in our Monthly Meeting State of the Meeting reports, many Meetings do not say anything about children's programs at all. The speaker from Ministry and Oversight gave us a powerful image of great trees, rotting from the inside in their late years, but still putting out new growth each spring and still nurturing the world around them. We mourned thirty Friends at our Meeting for Memorials, but were reminded that we

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also gained twenty-six new members this year. The hard and yet hopeful truth is that Spirit is moving among us and transforming us.

Our children reminded us all week, in their lively, playful, laughing presence--as they danced down the road with shovels to the community gardens or sang songs at the campfire program or delighted in catching sight of the local doe and her fawn--that even if we are a very old tree, we are still living and growing, and that is cause for joy.

This Yearly Meeting was also marked by some lovely instances of intergenerational cooperation, and we would love to encourage more such interaction in the future. The middle school children mentored the elementary and preschool children, and members of Junior Yearly Meeting provided mentorship for the middle school students. This year's teachers (in all age categories) brought a wealth of knowledge and skill to their work with our young people and children. Unprogrammed Young Adult Friends remain active and enjoyed hikes, swimming, worship-sharing, and friendly socializing together, making new friends and renewing bonds with old ones. We welcomed Javaughn Fernanders as the new Youth Program Coordinator.

Within this great circle of both human and non-human Friends, we have shared the blessings of the Spirit with one another and worked to open our hearts to hard truths. Dear Friends, now that we have all been blessed by the spiritual gifts brought to us by this place and this community, what are we going to do with them in the world to which we now return?

Sandy Kewman, Clerk

On behalf of Pacific Yearly Meeting, July 12-17, 2019

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Epistle from the Junior Yearly Meeting (Teen Group)

Breaking news: JYM had a week full of activities. Yep, you guessed it: AVP, Respectful Relationships, Worship Sharing, and uh well... no plenary?!

Now we go to an exclusive interview with co-clerk Friend One:

Interviewer: So describe JYM to someone who's never been there.

Friend One: It's like a puff pastry without the custard in the middle. Instead of custard there's community building.

Interviewer: Describe more about this puff pastry.

Friend One: Hmm, I suppose Friend Two can address this concern...

Interviewer: Friend Two, a concern has been brought up that the puff pastries are not only gone, but were never eaten, care to explain?

Friend Two: We wanted to preserve the community by baking with love into a flakey layer of support groups, worship sharing, and a service project.

Interviewer: Hm interesting, interesting. Can you describe what kind of coffee would be paired with this flakey pastry?

Friend Two: I'm gonna pass that one over to Friend Three.

Friend Three: The coffee would be an energizing cup o' joe with a hint of bitterness and sweetness in the form of FRAPs, adult committee members, and cold potato-filled breakfast meetings.

Interviewer: This seems to be quite the puff pastry. Would you say that this pastry holds you in the light?

Friend Three: Heck yea. I could see in the dark with this pastry. In fact, I could even use it as the lighting in the Boogie Barn.

Interviewer: tell me more about the community building custard.

Friend One: well it included egg yolks from the YAF's and fresh milk from the middle school group's snack budget.

Interviewer: this sounds like quite the breakfast spread, how did you feel after consuming it?

All: we felt fulfilled after our meal of friends, support and spiritual exploration.

Friend One: ok that's all the time we have, JYM puff pastries still aren't as good old fashion Quaker oats.

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Epistle from the Middle School Group

On the first day we had a business meeting to plan for the day and week. We decided who would be clerk each day. Some of us made beady animals while others did yoga.

Gaga ball was a big deal. Then we began to fight about the rules. We had a business meeting to settle conflicts about the rules of gaga ball. We shared these rules with everyone in our skit on family night.

Dale braided Ezra's hair. "It was cringy", says Ezra.

We skipped rocks in the creek on the way to the pond. We crossed the creek on the new wobbly bridge. We had to pass a swim test to go swimming without life jackets. At the pond we went canoeing, where we had to wear life jackets.

This year we saw more turtles than last year, at least 3 and maybe 4 or 5. They were about as big as a shoe.

On the second day, we saw foxes in the garden and a deer and her two fawns.

We went on a long hike; some of us said "we saw fairies" but not everyone believes this. On nature walks we learned about plants and animals.

We went to the garden with the little kids. We did a service project in the garden. We harvested weird mutant potatoes and also native plant seeds to plant next year. We pulled out old plants and planted new ones in the "pizza garden," which is a circle divided into slices like a pizza.

For snacks we had watermelon and figs besides the usual chips and gorgonzola crackers.

We sang songs with the little kids and at family night. Nate's song about nudibranchs and anenomes was fun, awesome and educational.

We met with David Johnson, the keynote speaker. We went to the last part of Meeting for Memorials.

We wrote letters in support of Allejendra with JYM. She came seeking asylum but was detained by ICE.

On the last day, we saw a fox run right by our room.

And finally we wrote this epistle.

Written and approved by:

Levi, Zoe, Jesse, Dale, Ezra, Beorn, Charlotte, Gavilan

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Epistle from the Elementary Group

On the first day some of us thought we would be nervous, but we weren't nervous at all. We all helped welcome each other.

One project we did was origami balloons and paper boxes.

We went to the garden and planted native plants. We cleared out the pizza garden and saved seeds for next year.

Every afternoon some of us played with the preschool kids. Or we went on hikes in the afternoon; it was steep like climbing a mountain.

Some of went to the pond. The water was freezing.

We played Frisbee. The Frisbee was really big, "the biggest I've ever seen."

We made sculptures out of cornstarch packing puffs.

Singing was one of the things we liked to do. "All God's Critters" was one of the best songs. We learned the "compost pile" song and brought it to Family Night.

We posted James' reading from Pablo Casals in the Daily Miracle.

We talked about being resilient. This means "I am a bounce back kid."

We made a big poster with our names on it. There were five of us then.

At PYM we had fun and made new friends.

Written and approved by Elvin and James, with help by Rolene, Molly and Eric

Epistle from the Preschool Group

We had fun in our class! Some things we liked were digging in the garden, making new friends, making mud soup, playing with Legos, being princesses, throwing paper airplanes, chasing bubbles, hiking and going to the pond, singing every morning.

We had fun seeing lots of animals – turkey vultures, rabbits, lizards, foxes, deer, fish and bugs!