

PACIFIC YEARLY MEETING

of the RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

PACIFIC YEARLY MEETING, 2004 EPISTLES

To Friends Everywhere,

The fifty-eighth session of Pacific Yearly Meeting met August 2nd through 7th, 2004, at Mount Madonna Center in California, a mountaintop island of redwoods and oaks surrounded by a sea of coastal fog.

Our week together began with welcomings: to Friends from many parts of the world -- Australia, Burundi, England – and to Bruce Birchard of Friends General Conference. We welcomed a group of young Friends coming from the Shalom Project, a weeklong sojourn at an inner-city meetinghouse, called to explore more deeply their faith and the realities of inner city streets. We welcomed numerous bicyclists to our mountaintop, including an intergenerational group on a 2-day ride from San Francisco Meetinghouse, as we began to look more deeply at our ecological footprint. We also celebrated the recent legal affirmation of the marriages of our members who have been in long-term same-sex relationships. And we minuted our welcome of *Fe y Practica*, a Spanish-language edition of our *Faith and Practice*, brought to us by Friends in our Mexico City Monthly Meeting.

This year, more plenary time was intentionally devoted to greater discernment, to a searching for God's guidance and wisdom.

We used that time to challenge ourselves to go deeper on fundamental issues: the health of our intergenerational connections, the challenges of living our seventeenth-century Peace Testimony in a twenty-first-century world, and the effort to address more directly the long-standing question of creating a Yearly Meeting permanent site. And we were challenged at our meeting for memorials by the loss this year of forty-two of our members, those "living testimonies" who have touched our lives in so many ways.

We undertook our work together from a place of deep spiritual listening, remembering always that the heart of our community is the meeting for worship. A Friend asked that we listen with our hearts and risk being transformed.

And from this place what did we hear ?

We heard questions which were held up to the Light. Is our small size a blessing or a challenge ? Have we lost the process of corporate discernment ? Is it possible to be a "nominal Quaker ?" Must we all dive deeply, or can we value small, steady steps into spiritual waters ?

At this Yearly Meeting, our ears are opened to the cries of the Earth. In one Friend's words, God gave us heaven, and this heaven is called earth. For the first time in the history of our Yearly Meeting, we began to get a more concrete sense of how heavily we tread upon this heaven. Through an ecological footprint questionnaire, we discovered that bringing more than 400 of us together required an extra 42,000 miles of driving, 2500 gallons of gasoline, and 40,000 sheets of paper. However, we shrank our food footprint, as the 60% of us who are meat eaters ate locally produced vegetarian meals.

We labored together on questions raised regarding a permanent site for Yearly Meeting. A group of Friends have been developing a site in the Central Valley of California and have offered it for use by the Yearly Meeting. We heard from those who yearn for home – a home for our memories, our youth, and a place of witness. We heard from others who have concerns about right use of our resources, or whether such expenditures for site or even gatherings are in line with Jesus' call for radical witness in the world. And we heard a common desire to continue our pursuit of greater clarity on this issue.

We listened to our yearnings for this beloved community. A Friend shared a desire for the radical faithfulness and fire of early Friends. A parent yearned for support from other adults in the community to raise our children. Another Friend asked for more joy in our Quaker life, in the sense of "making a joyful noise unto the Lord." And

several voices asked that we find ways to know each other more deeply and that we lovingly hold each other to accountability.

We were particularly opened to hear better the voices of the young among us. A young Friend, sharing his experience of a week in the inner city, asked us, “Have you actually been there, just to be there ?” Another expressed a yearning for dialogue with elders and a desire to hear their stories. We heard that they yearn to feel trusted, to be taken seriously. They eldered us to give them equal recognition when they stand in plenary to speak, and they expressed appreciation for our willingness to be in greater connection with them.

Friends, we have begun a journey of taking a deeper look at who we are called to be as Quakers in this time. We look forward to sharing our progress on this journey. In this work, we recognize that it is the yearnings of the young which will guide our future. We leave you with ministry from one of these young Friends:

I see us all as an orchestra. Some instruments are playing loudly, some not at all, and some have forgotten how to play. We have no conductor; we must conduct ourselves. But we must not be afraid of the music we'll play, who will hear it, or how it will sound to others, because I'm sure if we all play together, it will sound very beautiful.

For PYM Friends,
James Anderson, Clerk

Epistle from Young Friends, PYM 2004

Much like the greater body of Pacific Yearly Meeting, the Young Friends group spent the week searching about what it means to be spiritual, in this community and in the world at large. From day one, when several Young Friends (along with others) biked about ten hours to reach Mt. Madonna without using fossil fuels, to our careful and deeply spiritual process for selecting representatives to the 2005 World Gathering of Young Friends, we showed our concern for expressing Quaker values in our lives.

At a discernment session about PYM and youth, the query was posed, “What do you yearn for, from your spiritual community ?” That question remained in our collective consciousness throughout the gathering. As we questioned our faith, what membership in a Monthly Meeting provides, and acknowledged mistakes made towards and by us in efforts to foster community, many of us began to verbalize how our spirituality moves us and calls us to be bigger than we have seen ourselves to be.

For some Friends, moving up from Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM), the week was a time to get our feet wet. For some, the week was a chance to spend more time connecting with the greater PYM, in discernment, worship sharing, and interest groups. Nor did we forget our younger Friends: some of us braved the weed-infested pond to horse around with the elementary school group. We also “got personal” with JYM, during the “Respectful Relationships” talk, sharing both positives and negatives from our experiences in relationships.

Coming to clearness on who would be named as YF representatives to the 2005 World Gathering of Young Friends (the first in twenty years), turned out to be a deeply spiritual and therapeutic experience. The truth that came out of the worship was Spirit-led and full of both pain and joy for the Friends involved. Many of us also participated in a discussion about the idea of a permanent site. Views ranged from excited to apathetic, from passionately in favor to holding deep reservations. Though we could not reach unity, most agreed that the discussion was important and should continue.

The question of community also fueled our desire to “cross-pollinate” with young and not so young members of PYM. Young Friends started the week off with nearly twenty new faces in our ranks, compelling us to delve deeper into the sometimes difficult practice of building community. In playing volleyball, in swimming, in two off-site trips – one to the Santa Cruz boardwalk, and the other our annual “non-vegetarian” campout – we continued to build friendships. Creating the community we envision will be a long process, and we may never reach our ideal – we clearly don’t have unity about what that ideal is – but we enjoy being together.

In the Light,
PYM Young Friends

Epistle from Junior Yearly Meeting, PYM 2004

Dear Friends,

Speaking in silence,
Ecstatic joy, grins and laughs,
Friendships made evermore.

Junior Yearly Meeting grew tremendously in our understanding of the unfortunate barriers between generations apparent throughout PYM. Doors were opened to discussion early in the week. This was apparent in various programs, such as our discussion with Young Friends on “Respectful Relationships,” which created a deeper bond between our two groups as it had last year.

Our theme was also reflected in interest groups we attended, on subjects such as the draft, the Woolman Semester, and Pacific Friends Outreach Society, which addresses needs for a permanent PYM site. This was a topic of great controversy. Our active participation in the plenaries we attended demonstrated the passion we felt about the worship query “What do I yearn for, in my spiritual community ?” and our need for a deeper connection between the youth and the greater PYM.

With love,
PYM Junior Yearly Meeting

Epistle from Middle School Group, PYM 2004

To Friends Everywhere,

This year at Mt. Madonna, our mornings and afternoons were a combination of programmed learning and a sort of free time, with fun and games.

Mornings were filled with educational topics. We were privileged to have two Friends from Friends Committee on Legislation come talk to us about the death penalty. They knew a lot and had so many fascinating stories to tell us. We all benefited a lot from listening to them speak.

We also talked about sweatshops. We looked at all the clothes we were wearing to see where they were made. After each of us had made a list of the countries our clothes were made in, we looked at a world map and circled those countries. Some of them we had never heard of, like Myanmar.

We all looked forward to our afternoons. We played games like elbow tag, freeze tag, and big booty. We also swam in the lake, went to the Boardwalk, and attended a plenary with JYM, which we enjoyed a lot !

Overall, the week was a success. We loved becoming a community and had a great time, thanks to our new friends and teachers ! Go-o-o Quakers !

Epistle from Upper Elementary Group, PYM 2004

Greetings to Friends of All Ages,

This year at PYM, we, the children of Upper Elementary, had lots of fun. Our biggest project was to make and fly kites. We got to swing on a rope swing, climb up a climbing rope, and go swimming in the pond. We learned songs, read stories, ate snacks, and (some of us) got scrapes and bee stings. We sang the “George Fox Song” every day.

We also got to see some very brave deer, who let us get very close if we stayed quiet. We saw at least one buck, several does, and two fawns. All in all, we had a really great time.

With love, from

Laura Adair, Robert Allen, Eli Fowler, Grady Fowler, Anthony Gillespie, Ty Graham, Mika Ingerman, Maya Kratzer, Rose Mackenzie, Rose Mead, Rita Purcell, Eleanor Roberts-Caudle, Arielle Rubin, Lee Sisson

Epistle from Lower Elementary Group, PYM 2004

To Friends Everywhere,

How are you doing ? Our friends here at PYM are really nice. Some of us didn't like the vegetarian food at Mt. Madonna this year, but some of us wanted to tell you we really liked the lunch, especially the chips and salsa, and the Tofutti Cuties. (Max even liked the tofu !)

We loved the lake here and wished there had been more lifeguards and more volunteers in the afternoons, so we could have swum more. We also loved playing with Legos and beads every day.

Some of us were here at PYM for the first time and were working on making new friends in our group of 15. Some of us have been here lots of times: a couple of us eight times, one of us seven times, one six, and at least one five times. A bunch of us also came to PYM before we were even born !

We love to see each other every year and do the things we love to do together. We wrote a poem about what our spirit looks like:

What is Nature saying to my spirit ?

Listen

Do not be afraid, because God is with you.

Breathe.

Be at peace.

Relax.

You are safe with God.

Things will turn out okay.

Be aware and look all around.

Be aware of poison oak.

Here is good, fresh air; you can always feel and hear things.

You are being protected.

You are important, but not more important than the trees and the animals.

When you are quiet and listen, sometimes you will hear, and sometimes you won't.

You can be happy. Don't worry what will happen.

Peace.

Epistle from Preschoolers, PYM 2004

We played. We had some fights. We made up. We made very good friends. We like to explore a lot. We went to a secret temple. It was dark. We had worship.

With love,

PYM Preschoolers