

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends

The Religious Society of Friends in New England

To All Friends Everywhere,

Friends of the New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM) of the Religious Society of Friends send our loving greetings from the campus of Bryant College, Smithfield, Rhode Island, where we gathered in our 344th Sessions from August 7 to 12, 2004. Our theme, *And Who Is My Neighbor?* comes from the parable of the Good Samaritan. Our opening speakers, Vanessa Julye of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Donna McDaniel of NEYM, ministered to us from their leading to research the relationship of Quakers of European descent and African-American Quakers and non-Quakers. Their address dispelled the myth of widespread Quaker commitment to racial equality. We have too often been led by only a courageous few who were willing to answer God's call to justice despite the disapproval and censure of the broader Quaker community. Many New England Friends benefited directly from slavery; commercial and other relationships blinded Friends' eyes and hardened their hearts to its human horror. Friends of African descent were denied membership in meetings and relegated to benches at the back of our meetinghouses. In recent years, we seem unable to sustain an active and vibrant corporate commitment to racial equality.

Pastors of six New England meetings led our morning Bible Half-Hours. Drawing upon the parable of the Good Samaritan, they invited us to "walk into it, and let it wash over us and see ourselves in it." We could easily identify with those who passed by without stopping, but Jesus focused on the one who acted as a neighbor—the one who showed mercy. The Samaritan's response evokes the traditional Quaker concept of concern. A concern is more than feeling strongly about something; it is a passionate summons from God that cannot be denied, asking us to be God's instruments in this world.

We were also invited to enter this parable by way of the wounded man in the ditch, recognizing our own brokenness. The ditch is not a comfortable place to be, but there is a power that comes from standing still in our brokenness. For it is there that we are able to hear the summons from God, calling us to know our neighbors as fellow children of the Divine.

In meeting for business, we heard the ministry of a lesbian Friend who asked us, "Am I your neighbor?" She spoke of her anguish over Friends United Meeting's (FUM) excluding from leadership positions people who have sexual relationships outside of heterosexual marriage. We seek to open a caring dialogue on this issue within our Yearly Meeting and within FUM, of which NEYM is a member.

The difficulties of our neighbors beyond this Yearly Meeting remind us of our position of privilege, particularly in this time of war. Although we were graced with the presence of Enelia Escalona from Cuba Yearly Meeting, the U.S. government denied visas to two other representatives of Cuba Yearly Meeting. Diana Abdel Nour, the Principal of the Lower School of Ramallah Friends School, Palestine, shared with us stories of trying to teach tolerance and preserve hope while living in the midst of violence. We were moved by her example of love and forgiveness. We are grateful for her work and that of many other visitors including: Mary Juma of Kenya who spoke of her work among AIDS orphans; and Rick McDowell and Mary Trotochaud of the American Friends Service Committee who are based in war-torn Iraq. With great joy, we endorsed a travel minute for Eden and James Grace and their sons Isaiah and Jesse, who go to Kenya this year to serve as staff for FUM.

We are dealing with a number of transitions in our Yearly Meeting. This year two of our dedicated youth staff members resigned: Susan Morris after 23 years as Director of Friends Camp, and Christel Jorgenson, after 17 years as Youth & Education Secretary. We are indebted to both women for the dynamic growth of these programs. We have embarked on a new *Faith and Practice*, a review of our corporate structure, and an appraisal of our committees procedures, and youth staffing. We trust that this marks a period of transformation in service to the Spirit.

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Our Yearly Meeting was blessed by a loving openness and a depth of worship that allowed us to hear a number of challenging issues. In a Bible Half-Hour, we were reminded of the Jewish tradition of *Tikkun Olam*—the call to be part of the healing of the world. Each time we are present to the Spirit, we participate in that healing. We pray to call forth ministry from among us and to support it when it arises. We pray to recognize and discern when the summons heard by one or a few individuals is a call to corporate prophetic witness.

A los Amigos de todo el mundo,

Los Amigos de la Junta Anual de Nueva Inglaterra (JANI) de la Sociedad Religiosa de los Amigos les mandan saludos cariñosos del Colegio Bryant, Smithfield, Rhode Island, donde nos reunimos en nuestra sesión 344^a del 7 al 12 de agosto del 2004. Nuestro lema, *¿Y quién es mi prójimo?* se encuentra en la parábola del Buen Samaritano. Vanessa Julye de la Junta Anual de Filadelfia y Donna McDaniel de JANI nos presentaron el discurso de apertura. El ministerio de ambas hermanas surge del llamado a investigar la relación entre los cuáqueros de descendencia europea, los cuáqueros de descendencia africana-americana, y los no-cuáqueros. Su presentación disipó el mito de la firme dedicación de la mayoría de los cuáqueros a la igualdad racial. Muy frecuentemente han llevado la delantera unos pocos valientes que estaban dispuestos a responder al llamado de Dios a la justicia, a pesar de que la mayoría de los cuáqueros los desaprobaban y censuraban. Muchos Amigos de Nueva Inglaterra recibían ganancias directas de la esclavitud. Las relaciones comerciales cegaban a los Amigos y endurecían sus corazones. Los Amigos de descendencia africana no eran aceptados como miembros en las juntas, y tenían que sentarse en los últimos bancos. Recientemente, no hemos podido sostener un compromiso corporativo activo y vivo a la igualdad entre las razas.

Los pastores de seis juntas mensuales de Nueva Inglaterra nos guiaron en el estudio bíblico. Basándose en la parábola del Buen Samaritano, nos invitaron a “andar en ella, hundirnos en ella, y a vernos a nosotros mismos en ella.” Es bien fácil identificarnos con los que pasaron de largo, pero Jesús hizo hincapié en el que actuó como prójimo, el que manifestó misericordia. La actitud del samaritano nos recuerda el concepto tradicional cuáquero de la preocupación—no es simplemente

tener opiniones y sentimientos fuertes, sino que es un llamado de Dios apasionado, que no podemos negar, que nos llama a ser los instrumentos de Dios en este mundo.

También nos invitaron a entrar en esta parábola como el hombre herido en la cuneta al lado del camino, a reconocer nuestra propia condición quebrantada. La cuneta no es un lugar cómodo, pero hay un poder que sentimos cuando aceptamos nuestro quebrantamiento. En la cuneta podemos escuchar el llamado de Dios, que nos llama a conocer a nuestros prójimos como hermanos, hijos del Ser Divino.

Durante la sesión de acuerdos, escuchamos el ministerio de una Amiga lesbiana que nos preguntó “¿Soy yo prójima de ustedes?” Nos habló de su angustia causada por la política de la Junta Unida de Amigos que excluye del liderazgo a personas que tienen relaciones sexuales aparte del matrimonio heterosexual. Intentamos comenzar un diálogo respetuoso y lleno de amor sobre este tema, dentro de nuestra junta anual y dentro de la Junta Unida de Amigos, de la que somos miembros.

Las dificultades de nuestros prójimos más allá de esta junta anual nos hacen pensar de nuestra posición de privilegio, especialmente durante este tiempo de guerra. Aunque fuimos bendecidos con la presencia de Enelia Escalona de la Junta Anual de Cuba, el gobierno de los EE. UU. negó visa a dos otros Amigos de Cuba. Diana Abdel Nour, directora de la sección primaria de la Escuela de Amigos en Ramallah, Palestina, nos contó sus esfuerzos para enseñar la tolerancia y la esperanza en medio de la violencia. Su ejemplo del amor y del perdón nos conmovió. Nos sentimos agradecidos por su labor, como por la de muchos otros visitantes incluyendo a: Mary Juma de Kenya que nos habló de su obra entre huérfanos de la SIDA; y a Rick McDowell y Mary Trotochaud del Comité de Servicio de los Amigos Norteamericanos, quienes trabajan en medio de la guerra en Iraq. Con mucho gozo aprobamos una minuta de viajeros para Eden y James Grace y sus hijos Isaiah y Jesse, que este año viajan a Kenya como empleados de la Junta Unida de Amigos.

Nos enfrentamos a varios cambios en nuestra junta anual. Este año dos empleados que trabajan con la juventud concluyeron su trabajo entre nosotros: Susan Morris después de 23 años como directora del Campamento de Amigos, y Christel Jorgenson después de 17 años como Secretaria de Juventud y Educación. Damos gracias a estas dos

hermanas por el crecimiento dinámico de sus programas. Hemos comenzado un nuevo libro de *Fe y Práctica*, un estudio de nuestra estructura como corporación, y una evaluación de nuestras comisiones, procedimientos, y empleados que trabajan con la juventud. Nos sentimos confiados de que estamos entrando en un período de transformación en nuestro servicio al Espíritu.

Nuestras sesiones fueron bendecidas por gran profundidad en la adoración, y nos sentimos abiertos a escuchar con amor varias ideas que constituyen retos. Durante un estudio bíblico se mencionó la tradición judía de *Tikkun Olam*—el llamado a cooperar con la obra de Dios para sanar el mundo. Cada momento que estamos abiertos al Espíritu, participamos en este proceso. Oramos que Dios despierte ministerios entre nosotros, y que podamos apoyarlos cuando surjan. Rogamos que se nos permita reconocer y discernir los momentos en que el llamado que siente un individuo, o unos pocos, también es un llamado a un testimonio corporativo y profético.

Epistle from the New England Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends

To All Friends Everywhere,

New England Yearly Meeting's Young Adult Friends gathered on the Seventh day of the Eighth month of 2004 at Bryant College to celebrate fellowship, life in the Spirit, and cafeteria food with approximately 30 fellow Friends between 18 and 35 years of age.

We are struggling to understand our identity. As a group, we recognize the challenges presented by the diversity of life stages within our community: some of us are preparing for a second year in college, while others are beginning the journey into marriage, or even a first mortgage. Many of us are actively involved in serving other parts of the community—through committee work, office and youth staffing. Because of these opportunities, we have gained a different perspective on the amount of hard work it takes to hold Sessions every summer, but we find it difficult to be as active in the life of the YAF group as we would like. This year, we also felt the absence of several dear Friends who could not join us. We send them our love, and pray that we shall be drawn together again soon.

Inspired by the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37, the question of *Who is my neighbor?* served as the theme of these Sessions. Through our time in worship and discussion, we have come to realize that understanding the identity of our neighbor is essential to understanding the identity of ourselves.

We labor with our identity as Quakers, and in relating to our neighbors within the Religious Society of Friends. We are grateful for the ministries of Friends United Meeting, but troubled by their personnel policies that discriminate against the beloved gay and lesbian members of our community called to roles of ministry and leadership within the Society. However we, like the wider Yearly Meeting, cherish the fellowship with the diverse body of Friends worldwide that FUM provides us. While we must bear witness to what we hold to be True, we must also proceed lovingly.

Likewise, our community is excited by the potential spiritual power of the World Gathering of Young Friends in 2005. Knowing the incredible impact that the 1985 and 1991 World Gatherings had on New England Yearly Meeting and the Society of Friends as a whole, we have begun the difficult process of dis-

cerning which two of the many energized YAFs will represent New England Yearly Meeting at this gathering of young adults from around the world.

Our identity as an anti-racist society and our relationship with our neighbors of color was challenged by Vanessa Julye and Donna McDaniel's opening plenary address on Quakerism's mixed history with the historical anti-slavery movement and racism today. Following the address, YAFs engaged in a serious late night discussion on the presence of racism in our meetings, nation, and within ourselves. While we were unified in a strong concern for fighting racism, many expressed frustration that—like many Friends—we are more content to discuss and intellectualize the issue rather than to seek change within ourselves and our world.

Many Young Adult Friends expressed concern that the war in Iraq did not manifest as a major concern during Sessions, even as the violence and instability continue as a result of the U.S. invasion last year.

We prayerfully offer our gratitude for the gift of Chris Jorgenson's ministry, and send her our best wishes and love as she embarks upon the next stage of her life. Many of us grew up in the youth programs that Chris nurtured as Youth & Education Secretary. Others came to know her as adults, but still found they had a great deal to learn from her playful wisdom. We are all grateful for the powerful impact her work has had on the YAF community. To all of us, she is a mentor, teacher, servant and friend. We are blessed with Karen Armstrong, our staff coordinator, whose tireless support and ministry has continued to energize our program. Her support during the past few years has allowed the community to flourish.

Despite the challenges encountered this week, we have found immense joy in the presence of one another. Through silent worship, song, Bible reading, Wink, snacking, random late-night discussions, lazy mornings lying in the grass and other venues for unexpected encounters of the Spirit, we are learning from one another. We look forward to growing together in the coming year. Through the three YAF retreats scheduled before the next Yearly Meeting Sessions, we hope to further our corporate and individual understandings of what it means to be Quakers, peacemakers, and good neighbors.

With Love,
Young Adult Friends of New England Yearly Meeting

Epistle from the New England Yearly Meeting Young Friends

To All Friends Everywhere,

The theme of our 2004 sessions at Bryant College was *And who is my neighbor?* a reference to the Good Samaritan story, which comes from Luke 10. Maggie Edmondson and James Douglas spoke to this during the adult Bible Half-Hour, which was followed by a worship that Young Friends felt was not centered. This lack of center proved to be instructive as we did our own Bible half-hours, led by Martin Blood-Forsythe and Rania Campbell-Cobb, which we found to be inspiring.

We hope that this inspiration carries us through the retirement of our beloved Chris Jorgenson, who has led almost two generations of Young Friends to adulthood. Although this comes close to crippling, we are blessed with the wonderful Lisa Graustein and Ben Guaraldi to help us hobble on enthusiastically. At an adult business meeting, we recognized Chris Jorgenson's faith and commitment with a ceremony, which shattered the formality that is characteristic of adult meeting for business. Our business meetings were efficient and excitingly less time-consuming. In fact, visitors commented on the speed and grace with which we approved next year's Ministry & Counsel.

Some of our rocking activities this week were a song-leading workshop led by Nick Page, who enhanced our drum circles by teaching us to sing percussively; a Young Friend-led workshop about intergenerational bridge-building; a contra-dance, which was cut short by our bedtime, which is a result of the Resource Persons (RP) inflexibility and our need for sleep; a one man drama about the ex-gay movement entitled "Doing Time at the Homo No Mo' Halfway House" by Peterson Toscano, an RP and an estimable writer/performer. The drama was an appeal for an increasingly open and affirming community.

On Wednesday we went off campus to do service work at the Apeiron Institute for Environmental Living where we were easily put to work. The house is completely environmentally sustainable and educates the surrounding community, and although some Young Friends were frustrated by the lack of tools, we worked enthusiastically and completed many tasks benefiting the institute and the environment. As we traveled back to Bryant College, we were suitably exhausted.

Also on Wednesday, we had the Coffee House, which kept us buzzed all night long. We laughed, we cried and we performed. In spite of some technical difficulties, we had acts from Quakers of all ages, young and old. From the Coffee House we spring-boarded easily into the yearly Young Friends über-Dance Party extravaganza! Young Friends danced the night away, relaxing after the hard day's work before stumbling off to rest our sleepy-weepy eyes *very* early the next day.

Yearly Meeting concluded with farewells all around, but especially to our graduating seniors and Chris Jorgenson, However we look forward to meeting the incoming freshmen and working with Lisa G. and Ben Guaraldi as the year progresses.

Overall, we slept like insomniacs, ate like gluttons, and worked in moderation.

Young Friends of New England Yearly Meeting

Epistle from the New England Yearly Meeting Jr. High Friends

To All Friends Everywhere,

This year at New England Yearly Meeting we did many interesting things revolving around the theme *Who is My Neighbor?* We got the central theme from the story of the Good Samaritan which is found in Luke 10:25–37.

On Sunday, our Yearly Meeting experience really began. We had meeting for worship and our first business meeting. Some Friends participated in a “power sing” with Nick Page. Later, many Friends played Capture the Flag. This was fun. We thought about the Good Samaritan and did skits about the story and its relevance to the modern world.

On Monday we all struggled to wake up in time for our JHYM session. We had five speakers who told us how each of them followed their spiritual leading to devote their lives to subjects such as: international justice and peace; conditions in women's prisons; child abuse; homelessness; and healthcare for the homeless. Then we had our second business meeting. We talked about our Jr. High YM retreats in the coming year under the new coordinator, Gretchen Baker-Smith. Later that day we made pictures to illustrate how we can love God with all our hearts, our minds, our souls, our strength, and our neighbors as ourselves. Our last activity was an enjoyable pizza party

and then we all headed back to bed so as to get up early enough for our field trip to the lake.

Tuesday came around bright and early. At 8:30 in the morning we boarded cars and headed towards Pulaski Memorial Park. There, we had a blast swimming; eating; hiking; lounging; playing group games; and playing Apples to Apples, a game of comparing nouns and adjectives. We ended a perfect day with a story from Kevin Lee about his spiritual journey. We also made beads for strings of prayer beads for the following day. We blessed every bead as we made them. These prayer beads will help us remember the presence of God. Later, some Friends enjoyed an evening in the pool.

Wednesday was the last day for JHYM activities. In the morning we strung the prayer beads together. In the afternoon, we signed each other's “farewell” T-shirts. In the evening, the prayer beads were given randomly as gifts to other Junior Highers. We then participated in a moving on ceremony for those going into high school and Young Friends. After that, we went to the Coffee House, which is a talent show.

We learned more about who is our neighbor and how we can help our neighbor. As Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”

Junior High Friends of New England Yearly Meeting

Epistle from the NEYM Junior Yearly Meeting—third through sixth grade

To All Friends Everywhere,

We met at Bryant College in Smithfield, Rhode Island. We had 50–60 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. JYM has been meeting since 1930. When they first met, they camped out at the ocean, with staff and children in tents and cabins.

We got together in grade groups in the morning and at night. In the afternoons we had free time at “Choices.” At afternoon choices, some of us played Legos and set off stomp rockets.

We played JYM Ball. The JYM Ball rules are complicated but you throw a cloth ball at each other. The game was made up about ten years ago.

We talked a lot about the Good Samaritan story. We did some skits about the Good Samaritan: using horses; *the Matrix*; and *Finding Nemo*; the Future;

and San Francisco. We also did plays reading our parts off of pieces of paper.

We did paper bag skits. One favorite was when a person made their arms into a circle and pretended to be a TV and others got behind and acted.

Grades 3–4 had lots of activities. We had visitors from adult Yearly Meeting. We talked with the adults in small groups about ourselves and “who is our neighbor.” We made an outside labyrinth out of cloth and chalk.

Grades 5–6 also had a visitor who talked to us about Quakers and slavery. We also had a visitor from Gibara Monthly Meeting, Cuba Yearly Meeting. Her name was Enelia Escalona. She taught us a fun indoor game.

The food was good. You could make super ice cream cones.

We all made new Friends.

Sincerely, the children of the 74th JYM.
New England Junior Yearly Meeting Third through Sixth Graders

Epistle from the NEYM Junior Yearly Meeting—Kindergarten through second grade

To All Friends Everywhere,

Jambo, Sanna, Jambo! Hello, Children, Hello! We are the Kindergarten, First & Second Graders from New England Yearly Meeting, and we send you greetings from our annual meeting at Bryant College in Rhode Island. This year our theme was *And Who is My Neighbor?*

We love Yearly Meeting! There are lots of things to do—almost anything you want. We played many different name games and learned about our new friends. Then we used different art supplies like pipe cleaners, glitter and markers to make big posters of our names. One day we acted out the story *Hattie and the Fox* and made the animal sounds. We played with Legos and shared them, a lot. Kevin Lee came and played with us using a parachute, and we made “Wally the puppet” hit the ceiling. Kevin told us about labyrinths, and we walked the one made by the 3rd & 4th graders outside.

We had a visit from a Cuban Friend who spoke in Spanish. A translator helped us hear her words in English. We heard a story about helping and what happens if we don’t, and we sang some Cuban songs in Spanish. Our friend Jesse taught us some words in Swahili, one of the languages in Kenya, Africa, where he and his family are moving in a few months. We shared on a big map where all of us and our families have been and are going.

We played nicely.

In Peace, New England Junior Yearly Meeting
Kindergarten, First and Second Graders

Epístola de la LXXVII Asamblea de la Junta Anual de los Amigos Cuáqueros de Cuba.

Si se humillare mi pueblo, sobre el cual mi nombre es invocado, y oraren, y buscaren mi rostro, y se convirtieren de sus malos caminos; entonces yo oiré desde los cielos, y perdonaré sus pecados, y sanaré su tierra. —II de Crónicas 7:14

A los Amigos del Mundo

Desde la tierra donde se iniciara hace 104 años la obra cuáquera en nuestro país extendemos saludos a los hermanos del mundo.

Congregados en un mismo sentir y guiados por el mismo espíritu, bajo el texto II de Crónicas 7:14 reconocemos la humildad más allá de nuestra condición como una necesidad para la comprensión plena del plan de Dios para nosotros.

La dimensión universal de amor de Dios se hizo manifiesta al recibir a un grupo de estudiantes venezolanos que se preparan en nuestro país para realizar misiones sociales. Sus testimonios nos alientan a la unidad y al fervor cristiano.

Aunque en esta ocasión no contamos con la compañía de grupos de cuáqueros internacionales fue motivo de preocupación nuestra, cómo fomentar una más activa participación con la Junta Unida de Amigos.

Durante las sesiones de trabajo se mantuvo un ambiente de reflexión así como la preocupación de alcanzar a todo el país con la obra cuáquera.

Hemos visto la consolidación de alguno de nuestros proyectos constructivos, de capacitación y renovación.

Nuestros seminaristas incorporan una nueva visión al trabajo pastoral

Damos gracias a Dios porque hoy sumamos una nueva Junta Mensual a nuestra estructura nacional: II Iglesia de los Amigos en la ciudad de Holguín, **Vista Alegre**.

Cada noche hemos profundizado en nuestra realidad cubana y los variados mensajes nos exhortan a ser humildes instrumentos en las manos de Dios y reconocer los valores de nuestros semejantes, sabiendo que el Señor a los humildes oirá.

Epistle of the 77th Sessions of the Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quakers) in Cuba.

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. —2 Chronicles 7:14

To the Friends of the World

From the land where 104 years ago the Quaker work in our country began, we send greetings to the brothers and sisters of the world.

Gathered in the feeling of oneness, and guided by the same spirit, under the text 2 Chronicles 7:14, we recognize that a humility deeper than that of our own condition is a necessity for a full understanding of the plan of God for us.

The universal dimension of God's love was demonstrated when we received a group of Venezuelan students who are in our country preparing themselves to do social missions. Their testimonies encourage us to more unity and Christian fervor.

Although on this occasion we don't have the company of international Quaker groups, we were concerned how to nourish more active participation with Friends United Meeting.

During business sessions there prevailed an atmosphere of reflection, and also the concern to reach all our country with the Quaker work.

We have seen the strengthening of some of our growth projects for training and renewal.

Our seminary students are including a new vision in their pastoral work.

We thank God because today we are adding a new Monthly Meeting to our organization: The second Friends Church in the city of Holguín, **Vista Alegre**.

Every night we have deepened ourselves in our Cuban reality, and the various messages have exhorted us to be humble instruments in God's hands and to recognize the value of our neighbors, knowing that the Lord will hear the humble.

