

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends

The Religious Society of Friends in New England

To all Friends everywhere:

With the continuing violence in the world heavy on our hearts, the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends met on the campus of Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island, from August 6–11, 2005, for our 345th Annual Sessions.

Not only the US-led war in Iraq but the violence that pervades so much of our nation and world gave a feeling of urgency to our work and worship together, sometimes opening our hearts and humbling us, sometimes lifting up our hearts and emboldening us. We must do all in our power to change the direction of a world rushing toward destruction, and many among us expressed a yearning for our Yearly Meeting to step out into the world with a visible, muscular, and irresistible witness. Yet Friends also reminded us of the need to trust God and to center ourselves in worship.

The tension between these two perspectives challenged us, and at times we were distracted by feelings of fear, despair, and anger. We struggled to speak with compassionate hearts and are grateful for the many ways God's grace moved through our meeting and helped us to proceed in love.

Our plenary speakers told how, in their own lives, they had learned to be open to uncomfortable situations and ideas and to feel the pain of others who are suffering. In our study of the Parable of the Sower, we learned of the need to churn up our hearts, so that the seed of God, already sown within us, can grow. Then we are called to "...hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience." (Luke 8:15)

Young Friends brought a minute to the one of our business Sessions, reminding us that worship must be centered and not full of talk. When we are grounded in our community and in the Holy Spirit, we can begin to hear the voices of those who differ from us. When our hearts are tender, we are able to trust each other and to hear what God would have us do.

Individual Friends spoke of their active witness in racial equality and inclusivity, tax resistance, environmental stewardship, community organizing, peace education, and spirit-led radical economics—they invited others to join them in seeking ways to engage our meetings more fully in this work. Some spoke eloquently of how deeply their witness depends on the support and spiritual health of our meetings. We thank God for the witness and example of these Friends. We also value those who maintain the spiritual health and the practical work of our Yearly Meeting, especially those who work with the young to nurture the next generation, which is our hope and our delight.

After years of struggle and prayer, we have found unity to send a message to the Quaker world based on our experience: we know that the Divine Light is present in all persons, and that the gifts of the Spirit in ministry and service are given without regard to sexual orientation. We have been blessed countless times by the ministry and leadership of gay and lesbian Friends. We acknowledge that much remains to be done within our own Yearly Meeting to care for all who feel pain because of these issues and to bring our practice more fully into obedience to God's command of love.

Grateful for the movement of the Spirit among us, hopeful that we may grow into deeper and more effective witness, we closed with the intention of laboring together in love throughout the coming year.

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A los Amigos de todo el mundo,

Con el corazón acongojado por la continua violencia en el mundo, la Junta Anual de Amigos de Nueva Inglaterra se reunió en nuestra sesión 345^a en la Universidad de Bryant en Smithfield, Rhode Island, del 6 al 11 de agosto de 2005.

Nuestro trabajo y nuestra adoración recibieron un ímpetu de urgencia debido a la guerra en Iraq y a la violencia que tanto satura a nuestro país así como al mundo entero. Esta urgencia a veces nos abrió el corazón y nos llenamos de humildad, otras veces nos ensalzó el corazón y nos llenamos de osadía. Hemos de hacer todo que nos sea posible para cambiar la dirección de un mundo que se precipita hacia la destrucción. Muchos Amigos expresaron su anhelo de que nuestra junta anual se presentase al mundo con un testimonio visible, fornido, e irresistible. Por otra parte también recordamos que hemos de confiar en Dios y centrarnos en la adoración.

La tensión entre estas dos perspectivas nos puso a toda prueba, y a veces nos sentimos aturdidos por el miedo, la desesperación y la cólera. Nos esforzamos por hablar con corazón compasivo, y nos sentimos agradecidos por las muchas maneras en que la gracia de Dios se manifestó en nuestras sesiones y nos ayudó a proceder con amor.

Los que predicaron en nuestras sesiones plenarias nos contaron cómo en sus propias vidas habían aprendido a abrirse a circunstancias incómodas y a sentir el dolor de los que sufren. En nuestro estudio de la parábola del sembrador, aprendimos que es necesario labrar nuestros corazones, para que la semilla de Dios, desde siempre ya sembrada en nuestro interior, puede germinar y crecer. Entonces hemos de retener esa semilla en un corazón bueno y recto, y dar fruto con perseverancia (Lucas 8:15).

Los Jóvenes Amigos trajeron una acta a los adultos, aconsejándonos que en la adoración debemos ir más al centro y no hablar tanto. Cuando nos basamos firmemente en nuestra comunidad y en el Espíritu Santo, podemos empezar a oír las voces de los que tienen otras opiniones. Cuando los corazones están tier-nos, podemos confiar los unos en los otros, y oír lo que Dios quiere que hagamos.

Varios Amigos hablaron individualmente de sus testimonios activos en pos de la igualdad racial, la resistencia a los impuestos para usos bélicos, la mayordomía del medio ambiente, las organizaciones comunitarias locales, la educación por la paz, y los experimentos de sencillez económica guiados por el Espíritu. Estos fieles Amigos nos invitaron a cooperar con ellos para buscar maneras de involucrar más a nuestras juntas en estos esfuerzos. Algunos hablaron con elocuencia de cómo su testimonio depende profundamente del apoyo y de la salud espiritual de nuestras juntas. Le damos gracias a Dios por el testimonio y el ejemplo de estos Amigos. También apreciamos a los que mantienen la salud espiritual y el trabajo práctico de nuestras Junta Anual, y especialmente a los que trabajan con los niños y los jóvenes, y nutren la próxima generación que es nuestra esperanza y gozo.

Después de años de lucha y oración, hemos logrado la unión para enviar al mundo cuáquero una palabra basada en nuestra experiencia: Sabemos que la Luz Divina está presente en todas las personas y que los dones del Espíritu en ministerio y servicio se nos dan sin consideración de orientación sexual. Hemos recibido bendiciones innumerables por medio del ministerio y del liderazgo de Amigos homosexuales. Reconocemos que nos queda mucho que hacer dentro de nuestra Junta Anual para atender a todos los que se sienten adoloridos por causa de estas cuestiones, y para hacer nuestra práctica más consecuente y completamente obediente al mandato divino del amor.

Agradecidos por el movimiento de Espíritu en medio de nosotros, y con la esperanza de que crezcamos hacia un testimonio más profundo y más eficaz, clausuramos con la intención de laborar juntos en amor durante el próximo año.

Epistle from the NEYM Young Adult Friends

Greetings to Friends the world over,

In the summer of 2005, NEYM met once again at Bryant University in Rhode Island, and once again the irrepressibly independent Young Adult Friends struggled with several prominent concerns while trying to remain “young” adults. The uncertain future facing us seemed reflected in the ever-changing weather. Our uncertainty arose from three primary concerns.

First, following the resignation of the Yearly Meeting’s dedicated administrative assistant, the position of a YAF coordinator was eliminated, and so we currently find ourselves without the direct staff support YAF programs previously had. Second was the further investigation of our expectations of self-conduct at YAF events in light of issues raised at our midwinter retreat.

To brainstorm possible solutions for these pressing matters before meeting for business we had two separate threshing sessions, which brought several possible solutions to business meeting. In order to hold the mid-winter incident in the light, we had an open Ministry & Oversight meeting as well as a worship sharing session. In meeting for business we eventually settled on courses of action to deal with these important concerns.

We approved a proposed job description of a one-fifth time YAF coordinator without benefits, which was brought to us by the staffing threshing session. We expect it to have less of a burden on the yearly meeting’s budget. At business meeting, YAFs approved a short, broadly worded statement to guide our general conduct, focusing on our responsibilities to ourselves, our program, and our host meetings.

The third concern was one shared between both us and the wider yearly meeting: Friends United Meeting’s personnel policy, which excludes members of sexually active heterosexual, gay and lesbian couples from serving in a staff or volunteer position unless married, defining marriage as being between one man and one woman. While struggling to remain tender with Friends who are more in unity with this policy, we feel that it is wrong. Our own community is blessed by the ministries of gay and lesbian YAFs. We cannot deny them the chance to voice the Spirit. This denial of their Light pains us deeply—spiritually and personally. We felt that this was not only a problem in and of itself, but that the conflict this created during the earlier sessions of the wider meetings for business was also indicative of a larger concern: the unwillingness to discuss matters of sexuality in the wider yearly meeting. We approved a minute of exercise addressed to NEYM’s business session, and continue to hold this issue in the Light.

Even as we worked to resolve these issues, YAF life continued on as it always has. We had the traditional kidnapping of graduating Young Friends, and have enjoyed strengthening our own community by sharing meals, worship sharing, workshops and a concert and auction to raise funds for the World Gathering of Young Friends, with music by our own Kara Price. Tuesday evening after dinner, preparations for the WGYF culminated in a send-off for NEYM’s ten attendees. Young and not so young joined together to support our foreign-bound Friends. We have also continued to build upon our relationship with the wider yearly meeting by attending business meetings, joining discernment groups with the “OAFs” (Older Adult Friends) and Young Friends, and by sending out brave volunteers from our ranks for intervisitations. We feel especially connected by serving as youth staff amongst the other age groups present at Yearly Meeting, and many of our number were fulfilling such a role as well as being YAFs.

Sooner rather than later, Thursday rolled around and Friends once again prepared to return to colleges, marriages, and mortgages. We look forward to seeing each other at our upcoming October, Mid-Winter, and June retreats, which will keep us together until next year’s sessions.

Peace & Friendship, Young Adult Friends

Epistle from the NEYM Young Friends

To Friends Everywhere

Young Friends gathered on Saturday the sixth to Thursday the eleventh of August at Bryant University for the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends, under the theme of the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:5–15) Young Friends' love and energy is infectious. Our openness and maturity allows us to feel comfortable within our community even though we come from many different places and see one another only a few times a year; we are connected like brothers and sisters.

Throughout the week, Young Friends were able to return to and re-examine the theme, reinforcing the idea that silence and listening can cultivate and nurture the seeds of spirituality.

One of the strongest facets of our Young Friends program is our worship. This year we led the Sunday morning intergenerational worship, preceded by a welcome of cheering and affirmations in the "Gauntlet of Love." We then split up groups of adults and led them in brief small group "getting to know you" discussions. Then we led them in a period of centered prayer, which we seasoned with the joy and playfulness that are hallmarks of New England's Young Friends. The following morning, during a centered worship, we received a spiritual journey talk from Katey Baker-Smith on the beauty of nature's patterns and migrations, a beauty that humans do not always display. The next day, Young Friends sat in a spiral formation in equally powerful worship holding the concerns of others in the Light, and ending in spirited song. That evening, Young Friends met for vespers at dusk to watch the sunset.

We infused our business meetings with the energy of our worship with the addition of a facing bench and with the help of excellent clerking. Business was blessedly short and focused, and Young Friends approved a Peace statement to reinforce our beliefs and practices of nonviolence.

Many felt that our meetings for worship contrasted sharply with the Sunday adult worship we attended, which had little silence. Concerned about the quality of the adult worship, Young Friends were led to write a minute which we brought and presented to the adult business meeting, gently asking the adults to look at how they worship and consider a change in practice. The adult meeting responded with letters and minutes of affirmation. Many Friends felt that we caringly planted the seeds of change and raised the issue of centeredness in worship in the minds of the adults.

This year our program also provided countless ways to learn from and connect with each other, including games of Winkum, Capture the Flag, swimming, Slip'n'Slide, a trip to the beach, and a dance party. We sponsored an intergenerational fishbowl where older Friends learned about us younger Friends and we learned things we wanted to know but had been afraid to ask (What is your favorite mid-life crisis?). Peterson Toscano vigorously performed a poignant one person play titled "Queer 101" that was simultaneously hilarious, educational and serious. We also received three visitors from the Seeds of Peace Camp that seeks to open Middle Eastern youth to the viewpoints of one another, who spoke about their hope for a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

With peace, love, and light to all, and hopes that the seeds which you sow fall on good soil,

The Young Friends of New England Yearly Meeting

Epistle from the NEYM Junior Highers

Dear Friends everywhere,

Between August fourth and the eleventh 2005, more than 50 of us met once again at Bryant University for the gathering of the Junior High New England Yearly Meeting. The theme of this year's gathering was the Parable of the Sower. We explored being the sower, the seed, and the soil as well as doing multiple activities on the theme.

On Sunday morning, JHYM joined the Young Friends and Young Adult Friends to organize an intergenerational worship. It was a pleasure to cheer the older and younger Friends into the building and help lead the worship. That afternoon we played a rousing game of capture the flag. On Monday we had four visitors from the older meeting come to talk to us. They were Beth Collea, Brian Drayton, Eric Edwards, and John Calvi. They talked to us about feeling led to do things and working from the inside out.

On Monday afternoon, each JHYM member made a burlap square showing what they perceived as God's garden. On Tuesday we left the campus at eight thirty in the morning to go to Pulaski Park. At the park we sewed the unique and creatively decorated squares to make a fine and natural tapestry. We spent a great 5½ hours swimming, hiking, eating, and playing games.

During the program on Tuesday evening we made mosaics with seeds and clay and we gave them to each other. That night we had a pool party. Starting on Monday, it had taken us two days to be able to find both life guards and keys to get into the pool. We appreciate the willingness to help from two Young Friends who sacrificed an hour of their evening to come and be lifeguards at the pool party. On Wednesday night we went to the NEYM coffee house where we watched people perform.

We're all very sad about leaving our new and old friends as well as the departing eighth graders. We are already looking forward to seeing each other next year.

With love, Junior High Friends of New England Yearly Meeting

Epistle from NEYM Junior Yearly Meeting, grades 3-6

"Listen, listen, listen to my heart's song. I will never forget you, I will never forsake you, I will always love you."

Greetings from JYM, grades 3-6. About 50 children met for 6 days at Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island. We sang together morning and night, with the "Listen" song being our favorite. We did Paper Bag Skits, played Capture the Flag, went swimming, made bean bags, played "extreme" JYM Ball and Big Wind Blows. The 5th and 6th graders watched "Godspell" and made a full size body sculpture out of newspaper and masking tape. The 3rd and 4th graders went on a hike. Some of us learned to crochet.

We were cheered by the Young Friends when we entered Sunday worship. It was really neat.

Some 5th and 6th graders attended the evening program about the "Seeds of Peace" camp and listened to two students who graduated from it. It is a two-week summer camp in Maine that invites teenagers from countries at war around the world to live and play together. They are trying to get kids together to be friends, hoping that if they become the future leaders of their countries they will want to stop the war.

We will remember the “Parable of the Sower” and the different places seeds fall. We had great fun with our staff leaders. They are awesome!

To all the children of the world, we would love to share our songs and games with you. Please send us yours! From our hearts we say “so long!”

Junior Friends of New England Yearly Meeting

Epistle from the NEYM Junior Yearly Meeting, grades K-2

Dear Friends Everywhere,

Hello from the K-2 grade group of JYM at New England Yearly Meeting. There have been 17 children in our group from many different monthly meetings. This week we have been having a good time and building community by playing name games, working and playing together, singing songs, listening to stories, and helping each other solve problems and learning to do new things. We even celebrated the birthday of some of our friends.

Every morning after whole group singing, “Bible 10 Minutes,” worship and announcements, we would go outside for a while. We played zoomball, soccer, beachball and practiced hitting the badminton birdie. We used pipe cleaners to make things like ships and little people. We taught each other to make parachutes, boats, rafts and God’s eyes from coffee filters, yarn, egg cartons, clay, toothpicks, craft sticks and paper. We also strung beads, and had snack.

Inside our K-2 room we have enjoyed playing with Legos, making playdough pies, building with knomes and playing other games like “Mousetrap,” “Don’t Break the Ice,” “Snail’s Pace Race” and “I Spy Bingo.” We’ve sung songs like “Jambo,” “I Want to Walk a Mile in Your Shoes.” “Sansa Kroma” and “Bi Bam Bim Bam Razzama Tazzama.” We read many stories and discussed them. It was fun doing paper bag skits with the 3rd-6th graders.

We were all sleepy by the end of Yearly Meeting but are looking forward to coming again next year.

Hopefully and peacefully, The children and staff of JYM K-2

Epistle from the NEYM “Wiggles”

To all Friends Everywhere,

Our Friends and blessings have multiplied this week! Each morning we gathered in a circle to sing and greet each other. We nourished our community by playing music together, dancing, splashing in the pool and playing, playing, playing. Our play was a constant testing of our leadings in sharing, trading, negotiating, with our words and communicating our needs for space and hugs. The enthusiastic “hi’s” and spontaneous hugs of the children on campus, outside of our program times, showed us just how much we have grown to love one another. Let us share with you our name song, our daily practice in knowing our Friends. “We have a name: it’s not the same; as any-body else’s name; the Wiggles!”

New England Yearly Meeting Child Care Program