

# *New England Yearly Meeting of Friends*

*The Religious Society of Friends in New England*

*Count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the testing of your faith produces endurance. — James 1:2-3*

*Let every one be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. — James 1:19*

*Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers — James 1:22*

Beloved Friends everywhere,

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends gathered for its 346<sup>th</sup> Annual Sessions from August 5 to 10, 2006, in Smithfield, RI, under the theme *Holy Obedience, from Worship to Witness*.

We were reminded that our worship and our witness are one. Corporate worship is the union of the love of God with the love of neighbor. Our obedience to God requires surrender of our individual wills and preferences, as well as intense listening to God and to one another. Throughout this week, we have felt the love of God over all, blessing us many times with the grace of confession, submission, and integrity.

This discipline comes into specific focus in our long-term work of rewriting our *Faith and Practice*. We pray to yield our individual perspectives, to be led to precious words that can pull us to a place where we can stand together beyond words.

We rejoice in the hard and faithful work of many Friends among us, including our continuing struggles against racism and homophobia; beginning a new Quaker initiative against torture; learning to care for our beautiful and diverse ecosystem.

We held a special "Meeting for Worship for Yearning," a time for grieving and prayer and weeping and discernment, in our deep distress about the state of our country and the world: wars, arms, occupations, torture, destruction of the natural world, debt, abuse of authority, economic and physical violence in our cities and abroad. We grieve how war tarnishes the soul of our nation, the maker of war, though most of the violence is elsewhere. We pray to God, the compassionate, the merciful, to renew us in that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars, to restore us and our society to our rightful mind.

We mourn the loss of many beloved Friends whose service and gifts have so enriched our lives and our meetings. We rejoice in a rising generation of youth who bring us gifts of joy and hope and fun; love and truth-telling; fresh insights and challenges. Young adults who attended the 2005 World Gathering of Young Friends presented us with rich new advices, including: "Have joyful worship. Do not always be somber," "Love boldly, share deeply," and "Forgive and forgive and forgive."

We feel divided among many diverse theological understandings and we struggle with issues of race, sexual orientation, and social class. These challenges arose very sharply during our business session on the last evening. In one case, a committee included in their oral report that they perceived racism in an incident within our Yearly Meeting; Friends disagreed as to whether that perception was accurate and how the matter should be recorded in our minutes. In the second case, a substantial number of Friends asked to be recorded as standing aside from approval of the budget because it includes our regular

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contribution to Friends United Meeting, which has a personnel policy which many Friends in this Yearly Meeting strongly oppose.

Across such differences we seek to speak truth with integrity and gentleness, and to listen with open, grateful hearts to words that may seem wounding, critical, or alienating. We know that what binds us together as one family is stronger than what divides us. Through speaking and listening we seek to love, to forgive, and to grow toward deeper unity.

Obedience is not simple. Our spiritual work is to listen and learn and love with undefended openness, to find together how to love deeply enough to hear challenges and hard truths and to obey the divine will. Then, grounded in this community of shared obedience, may we go out into the world ready to undertake the wide variety of work to which God calls us.

God gives us breath and bread each day. God holds us always, even when we forget, and strengthens us with courage and love. We cannot find words enough to express our gratitude.

*Tened por sumo gozo cuando os halléis en diversas pruebas, sabiendo que la prueba de vuestra fe produce paciencia.* — Santiago 1:2-3

*Todo hombre sea pronto para oír, tardo para hablar, tardo para airarse.* — Santiago 1:19

*Sed hacedores de la palabra, y no tan solamente oidores.* — Santiago 1:22

Amados Amigos en todo el mundo,

La Junta Annual de Nueva Inglaterra se reunió en su 346<sup>a</sup> sesión anual del 5 al 10 de agosto del 2006, en Smithfield, RI, bajo la lema *Obediencia Santa, de la adoración al testimonio*.

Se nos recordó que nuestra adoración y nuestro testimonio son uno. La adoración corporativa es la unión del amor a Dios con el amor al prójimo. Nuestra obediencia a Dios exige que le entreguemos nuestra voluntad y nuestras preferencias individuales, y que escuchemos a Dios y los unos a los otros con intensidad. Durante toda esta semana, hemos sentido el amor de Dios por encima de todo, bendiciéndonos frecuentemente con la gracia de confesión, sumisión, e integridad.

Esta disciplina resulta específicamente aplicable en nuestra labor a largo plazo de re-escribir nuestra *Fe y Práctica*. Oramos para que podamos someter nuestras perspectivas individuales, para que se nos guíe a palabras de gran precio que puedan elevarnos a un lugar donde podamos morar juntos, más allá de toda palabra.

Nos regocijamos en la fiel y difícil labor de muchos Amigos entre nosotros, incluyendo nuestra lucha continua contra el racismo y la homofobia; el comienzo de una nueva iniciativa cuáquera contra la tortura, y el aprendizaje para mejor cuidar de nuestro hermoso y diverso ecosistema.

Tuvimos un "Culto especial para la añoranza," un espacio para sentir nuestro duelo, para orar y llorar y discernir, dentro de nuestra profunda angustia sobre la condición de nuestro país y del mundo: guerras, armas, ocupaciones militares, tortura, destrucción del medio ambiente, deuda, abuso de autoridad, violencia física y económica en nuestras ciudades y en el extranjero. Lamentamos cómo la guerra mancha el alma de nuestro país, hacedor de guerras, aunque la mayor parte de la violencia está en

otros lugares. Le pedimos a Dios, el Compasivo, el Misericordioso, que renueve en nosotros aquella vida y poder que quita la ocasión de toda guerra, que nos restablezca a nosotros y a nuestra sociedad en mente sana y recta.

Lamentamos la pérdida de muchos Amigos queridos quienes enriquecieron nuestras vidas y nuestras juntas con sus servicios y sus dones. Nos regocijamos en una nueva generación de jóvenes que nos traen dones de alegría y esperanza y diversión; amor y verdad, nuevas percepciones y nuevos retos. Los Jóvenes Adultos que asistieron a la Reunión Mundial de Amigos Jóvenes nos dieron una lista de nuevos y ricos consejos, incluyendo: "Que la adoración sea alegre; no quedéis siempre sombríos." "Amad con audacia, compartid profundamente." "Perdonad y perdonad y perdonad."

Nos sentimos divididos entre muchas diversas ideas teológicas, y luchamos con cuestiones de raza, orientación sexual, y clase social. Estos retos se expresaron con agudeza durante la sesión de acuerdos en la última noche. En un caso, una comisión mencionó en su informe oral que habían percibido racismo en un incidente dentro de nuestra junta anual; los Amigos tuvieron diversas opiniones sobre la exactitud de esa percepción, y sobre la cuestión de cómo registrar el asunto en las actas. En el segundo caso, varios Amigos pidieron la inclusión de sus nombres en las actas en desacuerdo con la aprobación del presupuesto porque tiene nuestra contribución acostumbrada a la Junta Unida de Amigos, a cuya política de personal muchos Amigos en esta junta anual se oponen apasionadamente.

Por encima de todas estas diferencias, tratamos de decir la verdad con ternura e integridad, y tratamos de escuchar con corazones abiertos y agradecidos a palabras que nos pueden parecer hirientes, críticas, y enajenantes. Sabemos que lo que nos une en una sóla familia es más fuerte que lo que nos divide. En el proceso de hablar y escuchar, deseamos amar, perdonar, y madurar hacia una unión más profunda.

La obediencia no es sencilla. Nuestra labor espiritual es escuchar y aprender y amar abiertos y sin defensa, descubrir juntos un amor tan profundo que podamos oír retos y verdades duras, y obedecer la voluntad divina. Entonces, basados en esta comunidad de obediencia compartida, deseamos salir al mundo listo para emprender las muchas labores a las que Dios nos llama.

Dios nos da aliento y pan cada día. Nos sostiene siempre, aun cuando lo olvidamos, y nos fortalece con valor y amor. No tenemos palabras suficientes para expresar nuestra gratitud.

## Epistle from the NEYM Young Adult Friends

Greetings to Friends around the world!

From August 5 to 10, 2006, the Young Adult Friends met at New England Yearly Meeting Sessions at Bryant University. In doing so, we caught up with old friends and welcomed new faces. During our time together we focused on rebalancing ourselves and trying to find where the Spirit was leading us.

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Tom Fox, who was killed in Iraq while fighting the battle for peace. The YAF community is holding his family in the light.

This year at Sessions we were blessed with the presence of many visitors from other Quaker organizations. Among them were Andrew Peterson, an FCNL representative from Intermountain Yearly Meeting; Amelia Templeton, a war radio correspondent from Washington D.C.; Emily Stewart from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting; and Zachary Moon and Christina Repoley from Friends General Conference.

We found many activities to take part in together. Among them was our annual "kidnapping" of the Young Friend seniors to welcome them into the YAF community. Other YAF's enjoyed going to the adult business meeting, worship sharing, and putting on an improv performance of Exodus chapters 3 to 5 for the wider Yearly Meeting.

Some of us have found niches within the wider Yearly Meeting as more and more begin to serve on committees. This year, many YAF's were also staff members for the JYM, Junior High YM, and Young Friends, both at youth retreat programs during the year and at Sessions.

One topic that was present at Sessions was the lack of cohesiveness as a YAF community. Many YAFs find the transition from Young Friends to YAFs difficult due to the fact that there are few planned YAF-specific activities. Our Ministry & Oversight Committee has decided to plan Sessions more thoroughly next year, with YAF-specific programs scheduled for each day.

This week at Sessions proved to be enlightening and fulfilling for YAFs. Throughout the next few years, we plan to develop spiritually and maintain contact with Friends.

## Epistle from the NEYM Young Friends

Dear F/friends Everywhere,

The Young Friends of NEYM gathered on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month in the year 2006 at Bryant University in Smithfield, RI. During Sessions this year, we engaged with each other lovingly in worship, discussion, and play. Once again, we found ourselves in a joyous and tender community; we rejoiced in each others' presence with singing, dancing, and games.

Last year after a particularly uncentered Intergenerational Worship Sunday morning, Young Friends wrote a minute directed to the adults expressing our concern. We were delighted to find that the discussion we started last year had continued among the adults and that the adult Ministry & Counsel had worked on this issue extensively over the past year. This year's gathering was marked by a depth of worship and ministry that we had not seen before. We came away from worship feeling centered, spiritually engaged, and with a sense of satisfaction in the spiritual life of the Yearly Meeting. This experience set a positive tone for worship and discussion in the week ahead.

During the Intergenerational Worship Sunday morning, Trayce Peterson, from Richmond, IN, facilitated a Bible Half-Hour. She led a meeting for reading on a passage from the Book of James. Two translations of the passage were read and then, out of deep silent worship, some Friends shared their personal reflections on the passage. This practice allowed Friends to focus on images, language, or even the difference between translations, offering listeners diverse interpretations of the same text. Meeting for reading resonated with Young Friends, and reconciled our apprehensions about the Bible with our desire to engage in meaningful Christian education. The experience was palatable enough for Young Friends to request that we engage in meeting for reading twice more during the week.

Throughout our time together, in our worship, free time and discussion, we were drawn to the sessions' theme of *Holy Obedience: From Worship to Witness*. In our ministering, both in and out of meeting for worship, we recognized that our experience of the divine occurs in small callings in our daily lives and in a sense of the immanent presence of the spirit. During Sunday worship, we were challenged with this question: "Are we ordering our lives to be centered enough to hear the spirit?" While we will still struggle to carry our centeredness out into the world, our week together has sought this order.

A sense of imminent transition also pervaded the week. Lisa Graustein, our coordinator of two years, is stepping down this fall. On Monday, the adult meeting for business recognized Lisa's gifts of energy, creativity, playfulness, devotion, integrity and bold ministry. The entire room, adults and Young Friends alike, celebrated her two years of service with rowdy song and silliness, and expressed the great appreciation felt by all for the gifts she has given to countless people. We have loved Lisa's leadership, but can look forward to her continued ministry as a Resource Person, and the new set of gifts offered by the new coordinator of Young Friends and Young Adult Friends, Kimberly Allen. As a large senior class moves forward in their lives, however, the question of how we will maintain our connections and involvement with the Society of Friends weighs heavily on our hearts.

During our worship with attention to business we learned of NEYM's minute on the Quaker Initiative on Torture (QUIT). Also, Amelia Templeton talked with us about War News Radio, a project supported by Swarthmore College reporting on conditions in Iraq through interviews with Iraqi citizens using Internet and cell phone technology. Young Friends sponsored an intergenerational workshop on singing: as in past years, adults enthusiastically joined Young Friends in song. Zachary Moon, from the FGC Youth Ministries Program, led a workshop on reconsidering traditional Friends' testimonies and our role as Young Friends within the Society of Friends that encouraged the often disheartened to persevere in their longing to share their vigor with the rest of their Yearly Meeting. One evening, Peterson Toscano performed his one-man play *Doing Time In The Homo No-Mo Halfway House* for the adult Yearly Meeting. He shared his experience in the ex-gay movement, his struggle to reconcile his Christian faith with his same-sex attractions, and how he ultimately came out as a gay Christian. We were moved to tears and laughter by his witness.

On Tuesday morning, we shuttled to Scarborough Beach in Narragansett, RI. We all had fun as we played on the beach and in the water, tossing seaweed, water Frisbee, wave-riding and burying ourselves in the sand. Wednesday evening we hosted the annual Coffee House followed by an intense and sweaty late night dance party. We closed our sessions on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month, 2006 with renewed souls, watery eyes and exhausted bodies.

May your worship be spirit-filled and your witness spirit-led.

## Epistle of the NEYM Junior High Yearly Meeting

We send greetings from Bryant University, where we were part of 800 Friends who gathered for New England Yearly Meeting from August 5 to 10, 2006. The theme for this week at New England Yearly Meeting was *Holy Obedience*.

We had many opportunities to explore this theme. The first activity that we did was to find out what obedience meant to us by writing the definitions on a card, and compared that to the meaning of the Holy Obedience. We had several adults come and talk to us about how they use Holy Obedience in their everyday lives. These visitors were Amelia Templeton, War News Radio; Karen Sprague, Artist and Stone Carver; Philip Fitz, Clerk of Ministry & Counsel's working party on FUM Personnel Policy; Jill Horton-Lyons, Farmer and environmental educator; and Joyce Ajlouny, Director of Ramallah Friends School.

Tuesday evening's program was filled with contentious exploration of different paths to peace. On Wednesday, two Junior Highers from our group talked about what Holy Obedience means to them. Dylan Anderson talked about his application process to Interlochen Arts Academy and how he used obedience to achieve his goal of acceptance. Kristina Johnson talked about how she was invited to Holland to play soccer and how she was obedient to her leading to be herself and speak up so she was able to be known by people all over the world.

People in our group participated in several activities and efforts of all ages. At intergenerational worship, we held the silence and prayer together before breaking into song. Our community participated in the making of 10,000 peace flags representing the 100,000 Iraqis who have died. This was to complement the AFSC "Eyes Wide Open" exhibit in which a pair of boots symbolizes each New England service person who has died. We enjoyed intervisitation between the business meetings of different ages. We welcomed representatives in our business meeting and thoroughly enjoyed visiting the YAF pirate pizza party, and the flamboyant, artistic younger age groups. Some of us participated in the yearly Coffee House which is a talent show we have on the last night of Sessions.

We did many things for entertainment including a pool party and a trip to the park. The pool party was Monday night and was filled with water basketball, which was more like water rugby. One of the enjoyable parts was that we had the pool to ourselves. On Tuesday we went to Pulaski State Park. We did a lot of outdoor activities including swimming, kickball, and playing chess.

The amazing sense of community was a refreshing break and leaves us waiting for more sessions to come.

Yours in De-Light

## Epistle of the NEYM Junior Yearly Meeting

Greetings from JYM, grades 3, 4, 5 & 6:

About 40 children met for six days in August at Bryant University, Smithfield, RI, USA.

We met in a big group two times a day, morning and evening. We also met in smaller grade groups two times a day.

In our big group we talked about planting seeds of community. Every morning we had singing and then a Bible Ten Minutes in which a staff member told us a small story from the Bible. We had business meeting, with a clerk and two recording clerks. We also had a Wheels Committee which set out rules for use of wheeled objects (like bikes and scooters). Sometimes business meeting was long and tiring. We sent representatives to other parts of the Yearly Meeting sessions and our representatives reported back to us.

In our group of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders we balanced balloons on plates and made bean bags. We went outside and slid down a hill on a tarp and played JYM ball. Some of us made a bean decoration outside that is called a mandala. We made new friends from all over New England. We learned about community that you should treat everyone like they are your brother and sister and that you should be generous, kind, and have fun.

In our group of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders we made videos about our ideas about community. A community is a group of people who have at least one thing in common. We had visitors from Cuba Yearly Meeting. The visitors told us their children didn't really do as many chores as we are expected to do in our homes, and if chores got in the way of their education, the parents would do the chores. Two of our 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders talked about living in Costa Rica and Kenya. Our Yearly Meeting pastoral counselor spoke to us about how making community is sometimes hard. We learned some new outdoor and indoor games. Some of us showed our "tricks and gifts" like juggling, back flips and splits, and rolling our eyes in two different directions at once. We shouted "JYM is Awesome" a lot. Some of the older children had fun scooting, joking, and laughing, sometimes to 10:00 pm, or later.

## Epistle of the NEYM Junior Yearly Meeting

Greetings from JYM, kindergarten to second grades

Hello to everyone and especially to all the other JYM'ers in the world!

We met at New England yearly meeting at Bryant University in Rhode Island on August 5 to 10, 2006. Our JYM leader was Betty Ann. We made new friends. We heard really good stories and sang songs. We played lots of games and had lots of visitors. We had fun. We think that life and community are the most important things. Worship is in everyone. If we were with you we think we could be your friends.

Good bye.