

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends

The Religious Society of Friends in New England

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you...
Because you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you.
(Isaiah 43:1b, 2, 4a, NRSV)*

"War: God Help Us!" called Friends to the 348th New England Yearly Meeting Sessions, August 2nd through 7th, 2008. We convened on the campus of Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island, at a bountiful table, aware of those suffering from violence, war, and poverty, both near and far.

We called on God and heard the Creator challenge us to love each other and to work for justice and peace in our world, our meetings, and our souls. Throughout the week, we heard calls for reconciliation—for love, patience and forgiveness.

On Sunday morning, our children led us in singing songs of love, ending with "I will never forget you, I will never forsake you, I will always love you."

We heard from a Friend who had spent many hours in a hospital, hugging babies dying of AIDS, holding them as they died, so that they would know the warmth of loving arms and the beat of a human heart; she knew that God was holding them both. *In the valley of the shadow of death*, even when we may not be able to know it, the Healer's arms are holding us and will never abandon us.

We prayed fervently for two leaders of New England Yearly Meeting who had medical emergencies during our sessions. Within a few days, Friends folded over 2,000 paper cranes for healing.

We implore holy wisdom to guide us to effective witness against U.S. policies of killing, terrorism, and torture. We long to align our hearts and actions with the spirit of peace.

In recent years we have frequently labored over the personnel policy of Friends United Meeting (FUM). Friends recognize prejudice and discrimination within FUM policies against gay and lesbian Friends. Some among us feel strongly that by continuing to support FUM, we are complicit in that discrimination.

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Yet, we value and respect FUM in its many streams. Those among us who work on FUM projects testified to the love in which the work is carried out. We honor Kenyan Friends who have lived the peace testimony in the face of danger and hatred far beyond the safe experience of most of us. Some of us feel we are called to continue to support FUM and to continue to witness there that the Holy One loves all people equally, regardless of sexual orientation. We heard powerful testimony from gay and lesbian Friends urging us to stay engaged with FUM. We cannot make peace in the world, unless we stretch our hearts to be in peace with our fellow Friends.

We approved a budget that includes the contribution to FUM we feel we can afford. We recognized that some Friends are in pain at this decision. Our Finance Committee is seeking a way that Friends who feel they cannot conscientiously support FUM to contribute to our yearly meeting without their funds going to FUM.

In considering where we are led, we realize that we must be able to articulate our own belief about what constitutes appropriate sexual relationships. Over several years, our young people have challenged us to be clear about our sexual ethics.

Last year, we approved a Minute of Commitment (NEYM 2007-67) to talk with each other about sexual ethics and the deepest meanings of family, marriage, and committed relationships. We also asked our monthly and quarterly meetings to seek Divine guidance on same-sex marriage, where we are not yet united. We were deeply touched when all eight quarterly meetings reported on what their monthly meetings have done on these subjects. We strongly feel that the Spirit is calling us to continue this work, recognizing that in the face of much hesitancy in speaking openly about these matters, the work must be done with great tact and love. Friends from meetings that have engaged in the discussion spoke of finding it a blessing.

Over and over again, we were reminded of our need for reconciliation and wholeness, forgiveness and patience. Beneath our joy and love, we are conscious of our brokenness. We fear the God of the burning bush may call us to risks and sacrifices. We are resentful over differences within our yearly meeting which may bring schism and loss. We know that our Inward Teacher challenges us to deeper love and commitment, but we sense the power of the separating spirit. We need to let ourselves feel the pain of knowing that we and the world should be better, and then transform that pain into something else.

Jesus told us to love one another. To do it, not just to talk about it. We pray that we are so filled that we are overflowed with love, with thy love so strong that as we go out from this place we are changed. Fill us so that we can truly be Friends to all people.

The call to love each other weighs heavy on us. There is no minute that is going to resolve our problems; we need to learn to love one another again and again. We need to learn to forgive each other.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.
(1 Corinthians 13:4-5, 7-8a NRSV)

Dear Friends, pray for us. Dear God, draw us near to your Center. Bring us home.

*No temas, porque yo te redimí;
te puse nombre, mío eres tú
Cuando pases por las aguas, yo estaré contigo;
y si por los ríos, no te anegarán.
Cuando pases por el fuego, no te quemarás,
ni la llama arderá en ti,
Porque a mis ojos eres de gran estima,
yo te honro,
y te amo.
(Isaías 43:1b, 2, 4a)*

“¡GUERRA: Dios nos guarde!” sirvió de llamado a los Amigos en su 348ª sesión de la Junta Anual de Nueva Inglaterra, del 2 al 7 agosto del 2008. Os reunimos en la Universidad Bryant en Smithfield, Rhode Island, con una mesa abundante, conscientes de los que cerca y lejos sufren por violencia, guerra y pobreza.

Clamamos a Dios, y oímos al Creador llamándonos a amarnos los unos a los otros, y a laborar por la justicia y la paz en nuestro mundo, nuestras juntas, nuestras almas. Durante toda la semana oímos llamados a la reconciliación—al amor, a la paciencia, al perdón.

En la mañana del domingo, nuestros niños nos dirigieron a cantar coros del amor, y el último fue “Jamás te olvidaré, jamás te abandonaré, siempre te amaré.”

Oímos el mensaje de una Amiga que había pasado muchas horas en un hospital, abrazando a recién nacidos ya muriendo de SIDA, sosteniéndolos mientras fallecían para que sintieran el calor de brazos amorosos y el latido de un corazón humano; y sabía que Dios estaba abrazándola a ella tanto como a los niños. *En el valle de sombra de muerte*, aún cuando no somos capaces de reconocerlo, nos abrazan los brazos del Sanador, y jamás nos abandonará.

Oramos fervientemente por la salud de dos líderes de la Junta Anual de Nueva Inglaterra que padecieron de graves emergencias médicas durante nuestras sesiones. Dentro de unos pocos días doblamos más de 2,000 grullas de papel por su salud.

Suplicamos a la Sabiduría Santa que nos guíe hacia un testimonio eficaz contra las políticas estadounidense de matanza, terrorismo, y tortura. Anhelamos alinear nuestros corazones y hechos con el Espíritu de la paz.

Frecuentemente en los últimos años hemos considerado penosamente el reglamento de empleo de la Junta Unida de Amigos (JUA). Vemos en la JUA prejuicio y discriminación contra los Amigos homosexuales. Algunos entre nosotros opinan fuertemente que continuar nuestro apoyo financiero a la JUA nos hace cómplices en esa discriminación.

Sin embargo, apreciamos y respetamos la JUA en sus muchos aspectos. Los Amigos de nuestra Junta que trabajan en proyectos de la JUA testificaron del amor con que se hacen. Honramos a los Amigos Kenyanos que han vivido el testimonio de la paz en circunstancias de peligro y odio mucho más allá de la experiencia de seguridad de la mayoría de nosotros. Algunos de nosotros sienten el llamado de continuar con nuestro apoyo a la JUA y continuar allí con

nuestro testimonio de que el Santísimo ama a todas las personas igualmente, sin tener en cuenta su orientación sexual. Oímos testimonio conmovedor de Amigos homosexuales que nos exhortaron a seguir con nuestra participación en la JUA. No podemos hacer paz en el mundo, a no ser que ensanchemos nuestros corazones para vivir en paz con los demás Amigos.

Aprobamos un presupuesto que incluye la donación a la JUA que está a nuestro alcance. Reconocemos que esta decisión apena a algunos Amigos. Nuestra Comisión de Finanzas busca una medida por la que los Amigos que sienten que su conciencia no les permite apoyar la JUA puedan contribuir a nuestra junta anual sin que sus fondos vayan a la JUA.

Mientras consideramos la guianza que hemos recibido, estamos concientes de que hemos que poner en claro nuestras propias creencias sobre las relaciones sexuales apropiadas. Durante varios años, nuestros jóvenes nos han retado a que hablemos claro sobre nuestra ética sexual.

El año pasado, aprobamos un Acta de Compromiso para comenzar una búsqueda conjunta sobre la ética sexual y el significado más profundo de la familia, el matrimonio, y los prometidos. También pedimos que nuestras juntas mensuales y trimestrales busquen la dirección Divina sobre el matrimonio de parejas del mismo sexo, cuestión sobre la que todavía no estamos unidos. Nos impresionaron mucho los informes de las ocho juntas trimestrales sobre lo que sus juntas mensuales han llevado a cabo al respeto. Sentimos un fuerte llamado del Espíritu para que continuemos esta labor. Sabemos que tiene que hacerse con mucho amor y cuidado, porque muchos se sienten cohibidos de hablar abiertamente sobre estos temas. Los Amigos de las juntas que se han adentrado en este discernimiento hablaron de las bendiciones que el proceso les había traído.

Una y otra vez se nos recordó nuestra necesidad de reconciliación y unidad, perdón y paciencia. Por debajo de nuestro amor y gozo estamos concientes de nuestro quebranto. Tememos de que el Dios de la zarza ardiente nos llame a riesgos y sacrificios. Estamos resentidos a causa de las diferencias dentro de nuestra junta anual que pueden ocasionar separaciones o pérdida. Sabemos que nuestro Maestro Interior nos llama a un amor y un compromiso más hondos, pero también sentimos el poder del espíritu de separación. Tenemos que aceptar y sentir el dolor de saber que nosotros mismos y el mundo deben ser mejores, y transformar ese dolor en otra cosa.

Jesús nos mandó amarnos los unos a los otros. A hacerlo, no sólo a decirlo. Rogamos que nos llene hasta que rebosemos de ese amor, con Tu amor tan fuerte que cuando salgamos de este lugar vayamos transformados. Llénanos para que podamos en verdad ser Amigos a toda persona.

Sentimos el llamado a amarnos como un gran peso. No podemos resolver nuestros problemas redactando actas. Tenemos que aprender a amarnos una y otra vez. Tenemos que aprender a perdonarnos los unos a los otros.

*El amor es sufrido, es benigno; el amor no tiene envidia, el amor no es jactancioso, no se envanece; no hace nada indebido, no busca lo suyo, no se irrita, no guarda rencor: todo lo sufre, todo lo cree, todo lo espera, todo lo soporta. El amor nunca deja de ser.
(1 Corintios 13: 4-5, 7-8a)*

Queridos Amigos, oren por nosotros. Querido Dios, acércanos a tu Centro. Condúcenos a tu morada.

Young Adult Friends

The 2008 Sessions of New England Yearly Meeting began on Saturday, August 2 on a sad note as we learned of a life-changing accident that affecting one of our Young Friends. We have worked to hold her, her family, Young Friends, and the whole community in the Light. Our community was further challenged as we faced this year's theme of "War: God Help Us!" and looked at the war in and around us as Quakers and as citizens.

Tensions mounted in the wider meeting for business as we faced the difficult topic of our association with Friends United Meeting (FUM). The YM is torn on whether to continue supporting FUM financially. Helping to fund the good work they do may imply our support of a discriminatory personnel policy. We have felt the need to examine our own sexual ethics in light of this issue, both within NEYM and the YAF community.

This year in particular YAFs have been trying to balance our connection to the wider YM with our identity as a group. We had a few specifically YAF events, such as Anna Crumley-Effinger, of Richmond, IN, giving a workshop on peacemaking in light of her time at the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) and a brief presentation from Rachel Miller, of Greenfield, NC, on an upcoming project for the Quakers United in Publication (QUIP). We led our own workshop open to all, on war tax resistance featuring a panel of people from NEYM who have, in various ways, resisted paying taxes which support the military and offered information and advice on how to proceed in refusing to support military spending.

The YAF community also came together at our annual beach trip and midnight worship beside the campus pond. We still had space to attend workshops, and felt a need to be present in the wider business meeting. We ended, as usual, by attending the annual coffeehouse, followed by enthusiastic participation in the Young Friends dance.

This yearly meeting was characterized not by a common sense of community identity—we are a group in transition—but by scattered points of connection and recognition within our group and the larger yearly meeting of which we are a part.

The Young Adult Friends of New England Yearly Meeting

Young Friends

The Young Friends of New England Yearly Meeting gathered together for the 348th Annual Sessions from August 2–7, 2008. Our sessions started with the news that an important member of our Young Friends community was severely injured in a serious car accident. However, we joined together throughout the sessions to support her and each other. Throughout the week we shared much joy and sorrow, and established an increased appreciation of our community. Together we explored the yearly meeting theme, participating in activities that helped us grow closer as a community and programs that connected us to the greater yearly meeting.

The theme of New England Yearly Meeting this year was "War: God Help Us." Activities led us to consider our role as peacemakers in a world of conflict, and others encouraged us to think about non-violent conflict resolution in our daily lives. On Monday evening, Young Adult Friend Anna Crumley-Effinger, an activist in the Quaker United Nations office, visited our program. She spoke about her work with Quakers and diplomats in the United Nations, how she was led to that work, and what we could do as a community of young Quakers. We also had a program of sharing our more personal conflicts with each other one-on-one, and describing how we dealt with them. Both of these programs inspired us to approach conflicts creatively and non-violently and to reconsider what it means to be peaceful.

Throughout Sessions, we grew closer as a Young Friends community. To support the Young Friend who had been injured, we gathered with the broader YM for worship and encouraged everyone to join us in making 1,000 paper cranes. The response was overwhelming. Folding these cranes constantly reminded us of the support of which the Young Friends community was capable.

We created an intentional spaces where Young Friends could share how they were feeling both in affinity groups and in more personal discussions. Also, choosing "secret fairies," a tradition in which each Young Friend gives and receives spontaneous, loving messages, affirmed the importance of each member in our community. Young Friends enthusiastically filled our space with these fun messages. Young Friends gathered on Tuesday morning to hear a message about the spiritual experience of one of our peers, Nora Spicer. All of these events led to an increased appreciation of our community.

Not only did our own community grow closer, but we felt an increased connection with the larger adult yearly meeting. Young Friends sponsored an intergenerational discussion in the form of a fishbowl. We appreciated the honesty with which the adults responded to our questions. Their willingness to be open with us affirmed their respect for and admiration of our community. On Tuesday night, the whole yearly meeting came together to hear and participate in a concert given by Anaïs Mitchell. Anaïs' politically and spiritually driven music moved and inspired both Young Friends and adults. At the end of the performance, Young Friends led everyone in powerful song.

Our gathering at these Sessions helped us explore peacemaking, strengthen our community, and reach out to the greater yearly meeting. Our spiritual unity was increased by joyful group activities. These included a trip to the beach, a contradance, fun games, our annual coffeehouse, and our yearly Young Friends dance. As always, our program also included worship, singing, and business. Though this week came not without challenge, we hope that Young Friends everywhere have the enriching experience that we have had during YM Sessions. Light the fire or fan the flame?

The Young Friends of New England Yearly Meeting

Jr. High Yearly Meeting Epistle

To Friends Everywhere,

On August 2, 2008, 51 Junior Highers of New England Yearly Meeting gathered in community at Bryant College in Rhode Island. This year's theme for YM Sessions was "War: God help us!" The first night we did skits that included these words. Some staff members dressed up like Batman and the Joker for one of the skits with JHYMers playing clueless extras. We found that the phrase "War: God Help Us!" can be used in many ways both positive and negative.

Intergenerational worship the next morning was led by JYM. We were welcomed in by walking under beautiful waving scarves to the sound of recorder music. There was an exhibit of boots, each pair for a soldier from NE who died in Iraq. We started singing JYM songs and heard a folk tale about the first mandala. These were awesome ways to begin our time together.

We thought about war in our JHYM worship-sharing where people spoke out of the silence about how war affected their lives. Two JHYMers had lived close to war in the past—one with a sister in Iraq and one who had lived through the violent elections in Kenya.

We learned about ways of responding to war from the many people who came to talk with JHYMers about what they do to promote peace. We heard about ministry in Kenya during the violence there this year, about peacebuilding in gang war regions in Providence, RI, and about the efforts of peace activists and of Quakers working in the United Nations. We learned that more people from RI have died in gang wars than soldiers from RI have died in the war in Iraq. We looked at a map of yearly meetings from around the world and were surprised to see all the places where Quakers live. We performed conflict-resolution skits in which the audience tried to solve the conflict by replacing actors in the skits. Some of the skits were hard to resolve because the problems are so hard. Even small things like where you sit on a school bus, or personal things like divorce in a family, can be hard to change.

Prayer is a way of asking for God's help. One of our small group activities was to make prayer beads—different beads strung together to make a hand toy to help you focus in worship. Some cultures use beads to count how many times they chant something, such as the 99 names of God in the Islamic faith. Our prayer beads signify important things in our lives. They are beautiful to look at and calming to hold.

Last year we took three business meetings to do nominations and eventually ended up with three co-clerks and two recording clerks. This year we used a nominating committee and they did a really thoughtful job of picking people to clerk who can be serious and silly at the same time. We affirmed the nominations easily and have just one clerk this year as well as our two recording clerks. There has been lots of knitting at business meeting this year.

Along with our business meetings and talk of war and peace we also had fun times, such as a pool party on Monday night. We played water basketball, did lots of diving, and just swam around. The time went way too fast but was very fun. Twice during the week we had a lounge with snacks and games such as billiards, spoons, extreme four square, and Apples to Apples. Best of all, we spent Tuesday at Quaddick State Park. It was a bit chilly in the morning, but most of us swam in the lake anyway. We made a huge fish out of sand and played hot potatoes in the water, passing people as the potatoes. After our picnic lunch, we did craft projects decorated wooden picture frames and swam and played some more. Overall we had a very wet and exciting time. The Epistle Committee is still wet as we write this.

The Junior Highers of New England Yearly Meeting

Junior Yearly Meeting Grades 3–6

Dear Friends Everywhere,

In our New England Yearly Meeting, a bunch of Quakers got together for our 348th Annual Sessions on the campus of Bryant University in RI from August 2-7, 2008. There are 15 of us in third and fourth grade, 27 in fifth and sixth grade, plus our wonderful staff in the Junior Yearly Meeting. We ate in a big dining hall. We played fun games and activities like JYM ball. We slept in townhouses, dorms, and some of us in tents. Everyday, we would have a sport. The best part about meals is ice cream! We loved it.

We would like to describe our experience like the layers of a sandwich. On the top layer was intergenerational worship, which we led. The third and fourth graders waved the silk banners to bless each attendee as they came into meeting. We passed out lyrics and sang songs from JYM retreats. The fifth and sixth graders sang loudly and sat and grounded the meeting.

The next layer of our sandwich was special activities. The third and fourth graders made a web out of yarn by passing it among ourselves, recognizing our connections in community. We also made ice cream and worked on our seed mandala and made wooden models. The fifth and sixth graders played the cat-and-mouse game with the parachute and made a collage about ourselves. We did a silent walk, gathering sticks to make a bundle that represented the unity and strength of our community. We love playing games with giant orange-and-white parachute from 1956. At afternoon choices we made global flags. Several of the flags will be chosen and made into a large flag that will be hung over a highway.

The next layer of our sandwich was sports. JYMers 1–6 grade played kick ball, complete with cheerleaders. One player was heard saying “good players don’t keep score.” We also played JYM ball and capture the flag. Some of us went swimming. Some of us rode scooters, bikes, and skateboards: people with special needs used golf carts to transport ourselves to and from programs.

The next layer of our sandwich was visitors. Our special guests included someone from the Quaker United Nations office, who taught us a game, and someone from Friends United Meeting, who taught us a new George Fox song. We had many representatives from all the age groups in our Yearly Meeting.

The next layer of our sandwich was the food: it was awesome! One day we had a simple meal for lunch, with rice and beans and simple salad. Most lunches and suppers had pizza and other choices, with at least ten choices for dessert.

The final layer of the sandwich was music. We began the day singing with a leader using a handmade giant song book filled with songs from JYM retreats. We sang these songs at intergenerational worship and to center down and focus during business meetings and evening vespers. Our favorite song’s first line is “Listen, listen, listen, to my heart song.”

We will wrap this word sandwich with gratitude for those who served us at meals, our leaders, and our leaders’ leaders, and our parents who took their vacation time here, and made us have a good time. We hope everybody comes back next year and has a wonderful time.

Junior Yearly Meeting Friends 3–6

Junior Yearly Meetings Grades K-2

Dear Yearly Meeting and Friends everywhere,

We've been having a good time with our Friends at New England Yearly Meeting. We liked making our hands, feet, and heads for our mandala. We liked having time to read books and having our JYM teachers read to us. We had fun making butterflies and building the little houses from wood and foam. We all liked swimming. We look forward to seeing our new and old Friends next year. Bye until we write to you next year.

Junior Yearly Meeting Friends K-2

Childcare

Dear Friends around the world,

In our childcare program this year we talked about the peace we find when we listen. We practiced listening to each other in our hello song, in our sharing, and in music and movement.

In our listening, we learned that we are the same in some ways and different in others. We had a visitor who told us about the children she met in Rwanda. They like to play and sing just like we do. We learned one of their songs and one of their games.

We also talked about God, the Light, the still small voice within. The children shared that they feel God in their hearts, in their minds, in the flowers, in the trees and in our dreams. We listened in the silence for the still small voice.

In between all of this sharing and listening, we played, played, played, and made art, spent time outside, and rested.

Peace to all!!