

Pacific Yearly Meeting 2017 Epistle

To Friends Everywhere:

Greetings from the heart of Pacific Yearly Meeting. Our clerk, Diego Navarro, introduced the theme of our 71st session, "Awakening to the Presence", by reminding us to soften and open to the Spirit. Pay attention to your body. Listen to your heart and your gut.

Sky Road Webb welcomed us to the land of his people, the Coast Miwok. Young Adult Friends spent time with Sky Road during their pre-Yearly Meeting Gathering, and joined him in leading a Miwok song. The teens in Junior Yearly Meeting went to Point Reyes Seashore with Sky Road for a service project. Throughout the week at Walker Creek Ranch, we saw deer, gray fox, raptors, and other wildlife from the plenary tent and near our worship-fellowship groups.

We cheered for Friends from meetings in California, Nevada, Hawaii, Mexico and Guatemala; visitors from other Quaker Yearly Meetings and organizations. Newcomers, and Ministry and Oversight committee, had special nametags to encourage us to approach them.

Our Ministry and Oversight committee asked us to respond to the question, "What makes me feel welcome at Annual Session?"

- Even if you don't know me, sit with me at meals
- Connect with me as a person before raising committee business
- Ask me how I am, or how Spirit is moving in my life

Zachary Moon, an adult child of Pacific Yearly Meeting, returned to share his experience of receiving an unlikely call to become a Navy chaplain. God calls insistently, like a cat pawing us awake to be fed. This call brought more questions than instructions. What does it mean to be a good Quaker? Who am I to turn away from what God gives me?

Clarity came through a thousand little moments over years, testing questions with friends and strangers. For the past eight years, Zachary has ministered to the suffering of hundreds of marines, sailors, and their families.

We see and acknowledge those in our midst whose lives have been shaped by war and its institutions. We also question our own complicity in the seeds of war. What do we pass on to our own families? Do we still pay war taxes? Do we see our own privilege, in distancing ourselves from people who participate in wars on our behalf?

When the Spirit comes, we do not know how it will manifest. We explored examples from the writings of early Friend Isaac Pennington and from the book of Acts. The apostles were given messages they themselves did not understand. When they spoke in obedience to the Holy Spirit, others did understand. We are reminded that seeds seldom resemble what they grow into. How do we nurture the Presence among us?

Ministry is a team sport. We need to make it the center of our lives. We need elders to midwife the birth of our deepest gifts.

In this Annual Session, we have used the practice of eldering, or spiritual accompaniment, to support us in staying awake to the Presence. Elders are paired with clerks and others with work or ministry to carry.

Every Meeting for Worship is grounded by Friends arriving early and deepening the silence. Junior Yearly Meeting and Young Adult Friends have held our worship with tenderness and care. In our plenary sessions, at least one Friend remains in silent worship, as spiritual accompaniment for our collective discernment. The clerk meets regularly with a support group, and has invited past Yearly Meeting clerks to open each Meeting for Worship for Business with reflections on Quaker process.

This year, open committee meetings have taken place on two different days. This allows for committee work to be visible, and for complex issues to be addressed outside of business meeting and brought back.

One issue that is still working on us is a desire for a new name for our Ministry and Oversight Committee. How can we shed the association with overseers of enslaved people, and still express the guidance and accountability we seek from this committee?

Fewer Young Adult Friends came this year, and many could only afford to do so by working in the children's program during the day or receiving financial assistance. Young Adult Friends are exploring new ways to support each other, to be more integral to the Yearly Meeting, to include young people of different classes and situations.

How many of us reach out and listen to people of different generations, backgrounds, languages, gender identities? How many of us answer the call to connect with Friends with disabilities?

Many of us yearn for fellowship that feeds us more deeply. Some find this in worship-sharing, in affinity groups, in the dining hall, spending time with the children of the meeting, or on committees. Others wish for more free time for music, yoga, or writing. Many of us have never walked to the Turtle Pond or on the Enchanted Forest trail. Might we find time next year?

We are grateful to all the people who make the Annual Session possible. Being held in these ways facilitates our openness to awaken to the Presence. May all of us and you, our Friends, remain open and faithful to the Spirit.

Diego Navarro, Clerk
On behalf of Pacific Yearly Meeting
July 14-19, 2017

Epistle from the Preschool Children

Dear Children all over the World, Hello.

We went to the garden and also chased the sheep two times. We played with water and shaving cream. Some of us tried to eat it and it was yummy. We made new friends. We made necklaces in Meeting for Memorials. We had a good time. We want to come back next year.

Pacific Yearly Meeting Preschool Program

Epistle from the Elementary Children

To Friends everywhere:

We had a fun time at Yearly Meeting, because ...

- We went to the pond, where we swam and went boating. We raced canoes; one canoe had 3 paddles and the other canoe only 2, so it wasn't really fair.
- We walked to the creek. We cheered for Aurora when she went up hills and across the creek in her wheelchair. The bridge was so narrow people had to hold up two wheels so she wouldn't fall off.
- We played gaga ball, and got all dusty.
- We went to the barn dance and had a great time dancing.
- We made beady animals ... in all different designs: like geckos, snakes, mice, pipefish, owls, ducky, tadpole, watermelon, a hot pepper, and Hermy the worm.
- We did coloring at Meeting for Memorials.
- We did painting on flowerpots and ceramic flowers with Peggy.
- At family night, we did an amazing performance, singing about the three things to do with your waste. And then we had ice cream.
- We saw foxes (one by the Owl cabin, another by the Big Tent), at least 2 jackrabbits and 7 deer (including fawns) by Willow, 2 turtles, a snake swimming, fish and an eel. Our class pet was a black speckled kingsnake named Specia.
- We practiced sharing what God said to each of us.

We learned:

- How to make beady animals.
- How to be nice.
- How to sit quietly and be present with God.

Goodbye until next year.

Epistle from the Middle School Children

We named ourselves ACEAJAIH¹, for the initials of all of our names. We made a banner of letters that spells out our name.

¹ Pronounced ACE - AJIAH

At PYM we played gaga ball, played with our F(f)riends, went swimming, and played games ... very energetic games.
At the pond, we went in canoes and kayaks (we were old enough to paddle kayaks.)
We went to Meeting for Worship, where we felt peaceful, bored and happy.
We ate breakfast and snacks ... it was good, especially when we could talk with our F(f)riends and family.
We did a picture activity in small groups where we learned how to make decisions without arguing.
We did individual art activity that wasn't that interesting.
We played hangman ... a lot.
We lined up according to how many pets we have.
Half of us played a game while the rest worked as a team so all of us could get up in a tree.
This was: interesting, co-operative, engaging, energizing, fun, and exciting.
We learned new ways to communicate because we had Aurora in our group. Everyone in the group ACEAJIAH has an exceptional talent.
We all want to come back next year.

Epistle from Junior Yearly Meeting (teen program)

Beyond the Pond

JYM is a distinctly different experience each year. This year we combined our AVP theme, power in relationships, and Respectful Relationships, which made an arc through the week. We bonded with new members of our community, both JYMers and YAFs, through games, the dance, and AVP activities like concentric circles and the affirmation activity. We went to several interest groups and learned about military recruitment in schools and other yearly meetings down under. On our service project we went to Point Reyes National Seashore, learned about the native people with Skyroad Webb, and helped clean up and build an acorn storage unit. Throughout the week we used Quaker process in our business meetings and our meeting for discernment. During free-time or down-time we went to the pond and swam and we sang and played music and ping-pong. At the beginning of the week SYM's presiding clerk, Diego Navarro, came and talked to us about awakening to the presence around us, in our communities, and within us. We have been very privileged this annual session to be reunited in our community here and return to Walker Creek Ranch, and we all look forward to returning next year to a new experience.

"Now thou must die in the silence" -George Fox, on sleeping in yearly meeting
"The Buckeye room holds a sacred place in our hearts. May it hold the peanuts and bread crumbs that we left upon its carpet in the light." -John Woolman
"This year we did not harvest the snake-like weeds from the turtle pond. Instead we clapped, we wheel-barrowed, and we tore down the rotting structure." - Alice Paul
"All that's left are the peanut butter, apples, oranges, and seeds." -Margaret Fell
"Can someone please play 'Walk in the Light?'" -George Fox, JYM Dance 2017
"Thou must not write the epistle at the last minute for thy words will be garbled." -Unknown

Young Adult Friends

The Young Adult Friends group did not issue an epistle this year, as they did not organize separate programming at annual session, seeking to integrate more fully into the adult program. More information about their discernment process over YAF structure for the future can be found in their report to annual session on the Pacific Yearly Meeting website.