

**Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting
July 29 – August 2, 2009**

Living Our Testimonies Today: Let's See What Love Can Do

Greetings and blessings to Friends everywhere

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting of Friends (OVYM) met for our 189th annual sessions on the campus of Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, July 29 through August 2, 2009, with the theme, "Living Our Testimonies Today: Let's See What Love Can Do." 173 attended, including Friends from OVYM, visiting Friends, and other guests. While this marked a 10 per cent decrease in attendance from last year, we noted significant increases in the numbers of teens and continued strong attendance by young adult Friends. Four well-represented monthly meetings accounted for 41 per cent of all participants, reflecting strong and growing involvement from those meetings alongside a decline in yearly meeting participation among several other monthly meetings. This exemplifies a patchwork of strong and weak elements within our yearly meeting.

Listen deeply and then put love into action – this advice echoed in many areas of our Yearly Meeting sessions this year. This theme ran through the State of Society reports of our monthly meetings. It described our business sessions, conducted with skillful clerking and thoughtful engagement by Friends. Our plenary speakers, Hollister Knowlton speaking on "Right Relationship: A Story of Love for the Planet and a Journey to Gaviotas" and David Hartsough addressing "Living Our Peace Testimony in the 21st Century," each presented us with spirit-led ways to put love into action. Hollister encouraged us to live more lightly on our precious planet, and told us about Gaviotas, a sustainable community in Colombia built around innovative technologies. David recounted his work around the globe employing nonviolent means to challenge injustice and highlighted the many successful nonviolent campaigns in the twentieth century described in the film, "A Force More Powerful." He urged Friends to work ensure that this film is widely seen. Friends were deeply moved and inspired by both Hollister's and David's presentations.

Friends also participated in workshops and interest groups devoted to a broad range of spiritual and social concerns. The spirit continues to lead OVYM Friends to have fun and strengthen our social bonds through intergenerational games, our annual variety show, and biking and rafting for young people. We also remembered Friends at two memorial meetings – one our annual memorial meeting and the other a meeting called to remember a beloved Friend, very active in the yearly meeting, who died a few days before our sessions began.

At these sessions OVYM Friends also addressed a number challenging issues. One quarterly meeting reported that it feels morbidly weak, suffers from low attendance, and feels disrespected by the yearly meeting. This report spurred a discussion about the frail state of both of our quarterly meetings. In addition, we have difficulty finding Friends to serve in many leadership and committee positions, including the Advancement and Nurture Committee. As a result, the work of this committee has been severely curtailed. The revision of our book of faith and practice has also been quite challenging. We have worked for ten years, laboring over several controversial issues, often failing to find unity.

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Yet the Spirit's blessings continue to manifest themselves among us, strengthening our faith and resolve. We found long-sought unity on revised text on membership for our book of faith and practice, and reaffirmed our confidence in the committee laboring on revisions. Our business sessions reflected mutual respect, forbearance, and dependence on our Guide. All ages took joy in the high level of participation and enthusiasm in the youth programs, with a clear sense that our young Friends see OVYM as their home. Our young adult Friends credit their childhood yearly meeting experiences with helping to form their Quaker identities. We celebrated the resurgence of involvement by young adult friends, who engaged so fully in the activities of younger and older Friends that they longed for more time among their peers. We received joyfully the report from the teen trip to Alaska for Spirit Camp in conjunction with Alaska Friends Conference. The trip, which involved financial, physical, and spiritual challenges, rewarded the faith of all involved. The gifts of our Youth Secretary and Teen Committee, and the Spirit Camp staff, created a life-enriching experience for our teens with spiritual benefits already evident in the days following their return. Our plenary speakers inspired and challenged us with specific examples of how Friends, seeing what love can do, contribute mightily to healing a wounded and imperiled world. Not neglecting our own spiritual nurture, we grounded ourselves in waiting worship throughout the sessions and opened our hearts in worship-sharing each morning.

As we look toward the future, we face serious challenges, but we also enjoy abundant gifts that give us hope and joy. As we seek to put love into action, we wonder if we might find the spiritual vitality we seek if we could be more open with each other about our personal spiritual experiences. We share with Friends this query: How can our monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings cultivate our hearts to foster the growth of the Seed?

Epistle of the Young Adult Friends, Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting 2009

Greetings to Friends everywhere! Fifteen of us met at Earlham College between July 29 and August 2. Our community is scattered across activities with all age ranges at our yearly meeting. YAFs make up the majority of our child care providers and chaperones for the teens and middle youth, leaving the other half of us to attend worship sharing, business sessions, and workshops.

Needless to say, our spiritual experiences of yearly meeting are very different. Those of us who provide care for the younger generation are nourished, and sometimes exhausted, by their zest for life. Many of the rest of us labor in Meeting for Business and are nourished by the workshops we attend. Those of us who like staying up late strengthen our fellowship over brownies and conversation, or we relax with our books. The only free time we all have in common is during mealtimes, and you can usually find a table in the cafeteria composed mostly of YAFs who are hanging out and checking in.

It was during one such mealtime when we had our Meeting for Business. Along with conversation about Segways and other such silly stuff, we nominated and approved some officers for our nascent program. Howie Baker is our clerk, Nick Rhein and Newell Pledger-Shinn are our co-convenors and net gurus, and Rachel Dean is our treasurer. We plan to hold a number of retreats over the coming year, with our next to take place at Fall Creek Meeting in late October.

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We hope this Epistle finds you well, and look forward to hearing how the Inward Light of Christ is moving in your community. If you're ever in the area, look us up.

Yours in the Light,
YAFs of OVYM

Epistle from the Teen Program

To Friends Everywhere,

Greetings from the 2009 meeting of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Teens. Even though we seemed separated at first, we quickly coalesced into a single community, and our time here has been very hopeful.

We sat in on Hollister Knowlton's plenary and she came to talk with us about the things we could do to save the biosphere. We came to realize that by living simply we could allow others to simply live. Friday (Seventh Month 31, 2009) we picked up trash in Whitewater Gorge, putting Hollister's teachings into action.

We learned our own personal strengths during both our canoe trip and our talk with Mary Ellen Newport from Olney Friends School, about applying the Quaker testimonies to everyday life. With our new knowledge from the workshops Friday and our various other talks, we know we will leave with new views on our world, and lasting bonds.

Peace Be With You,
2009 Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Teens.

Epistle from the Middle Youth Program

8 Middle Youth attended the annual session of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Earlham College, from July 29 to August 2, 2009. The theme of the gathering was "Living our testimonies today: Let's see what love can do."

We enjoyed many activities together, such as rafting on the Whitewater River, biking, helping at the animal shelter, going to Bike Co-op, and listening to guest speakers.

While enjoying rafting, we saw all kinds of nature including dragonflies, herons, and turtles. We helped each other overcome our fears on the rope swing and we cheered each other on. We had no trash left from lunch because we used reusable containers. Not only did we leave no trash, but we left the river cleaner than we found it by picking up garbage on the banks.

We biked to the animal shelter which took endurance, but saved gas. While we washed around 20 dogs at the shelter, we got to know the cats and dogs better by learning their names and socializing them. We were really showed what love can do. When we showed love to the animals at the shelter, not only did they get calmer, but they shared affection, too.

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We appreciated guest speakers and worship mentors s\who spoke to us about what they are passionate about. Barry Zalph talked to us about bike safety and traffic rules and how we can get exercise and help the environment through biking. Dinah Duvall and her daughter helped us make the masks that we used in the variety show. Hollister Knowlton talked about our ecological footprint and we were surprised to learn that even though we're Quakers, our footprint is not necessarily better than average. David Hartsough spoke about practicing nonviolence and we did some role playing.

During O.V.Y.M., we felt joyful, helpful, and strong. We also felt good about showing our love. We enjoyed ourselves so much, we wish we could have more retreats and gatherings.

The Middle Youth Program, Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting

Epistle from the Children's Program

Greetings to Friends Everywhere

Ten Young Friends aged 1-9 met at the 189th annual sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Earlham College in Richmond Indiana from July 29 – August 2, 2009 to consider the theme "Living Our Testimonies Today – Let Us Now See What Love Can Do."

During worship sharing we talked about equality, peace, and love. Our stories were about sharing and caring. We make dog treats and catnip toys and took them to the animal shelter to share with the puppies and kitties. We showed our love with homemade gifts.

Imaginative play led to the children holding their own worship sharing in the tent Sunday morning. We were aware of their tender hearts as they watched a live bunny outside and wished to include it in their play.

Experiences of equality and love came during the singing and dancing with the adults. We experienced folk dances from around the world. We sang and rejoiced about the children who saved the trees. We felt a part of the larger community through these experiences.

The Children's Program
Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting