

South Central Meeting Friends, April 9 – 12, 2009

Greetings to Friends Everywhere,

Two hundred friends from Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Texas, came together under God's guidance, to explore the theme, *Refining Our Witness: Peace, the Military & Us*. This is a topic that not all South Central Yearly Meeting Friends have felt comfortable addressing. However, during the sessions, we found that, united in the Spirit, we were able to open our eyes to the humanity of those different from us.

Our keynote speaker, Chuck Fager, Director of Quaker House in Fayetteville, NC, shared disturbing and enlightening stories about people and events related to the military. Pointing out that the changing faces in Congress have not been successful in stopping the war machine, he said that part of the military's agenda is to keep the truth about it out of the public arena. He suggested that Friends who have little-to-no direct connection to those in the armed forces, know next-to-nothing about it. His message was to get involved and get informed and that it will make a difference in the integrity of our testimonies to know people in the military on a personal level.

A panel consisting of 4 members of our yearly meeting spoke of their experiences with the military from the perspectives of being in it, being married to a military man, being a draft resister, and working overseas on a military base. The overall sentiment was that even though Friends often have a negative view of the military, the individuals these friends know are first and foremost, caring human beings. Several Friends travelled an hour to the Fort Hood area to open dialog and lend support to a coffee house run by a military wife who is developing a vital and caring ministry to returning vets and their families.

Worship sharing groups considered excellent queries that focused our worshipful attention to all facets of the theme.

In our meeting for worship for business, we adopted a Minute that supports one Friend's plans to visit meetings to explore our feelings about creating a listening ministry with military service people who are questioning their role in the armed forces. The deeply held concerns of Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns moved us to adopt a minute calling all within the yearly meeting to support our LGBTQ friends and families and to work for better understanding of these issues in the wider community.

We united with the Adult Young Friends who continued to conceive and develop a supportive community and program for themselves within the yearly meeting. Building on work from the previous year, they enjoyed their own dormitory, held impromptu discussions and facilitated one worship sharing group. These friends shared a business meeting with graduating high schoolers to improve next year's AYF offerings in the program and to suggest a friend to serve at representative meeting. Other adults offered much welcome support in attendance at this

business meeting, and over a series of planning conversations through the weekend.

Well-attended workshops covered diverse topics such as: Godly Play®, Getting to Know You(th), Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy (out of the Quaker Institute for the Future), and Friends and Racism. Other excellent presentations included the border wall and immigration issues which illuminated the increasing militarization within the territory of our yearly meeting.

In addition to the dedicated teaching and well-loved Easter egg hunt on Sunday after worship, the Children's program included for the very first time three Godly Play®/Faith & Play sessions for those aged 3 -12. Teachers and children appreciated this new approach to sharing parables, and stories of Quaker faith. Junior Young Friends enjoyed again this year their very own cabin, and the Young Friends created and participated in their own program.

Musical friends enjoyed music and song at every opportunity, entertained during the annual Talent Show, and offered music on the porch. Those remaining benefited from the fruits of their exuberance!

The theme we explored this year challenged and stimulated us to explore developing new areas of outreach ministry with our brothers and sisters whose experience may be different from ours. Our unity supports us in this mission. As we leave yearly meeting, the hope is for continually deeper understanding of the Light of God in the stranger and ourselves.