



NEW ENGLAND
YEARLY MEETING
OF FRIENDS
QUAKERS

2018 General Epistle

*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;
Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;
For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding
and eternal weight of glory;
(II Corinthians 4:8-9, 17)*

To Friends Everywhere,

Greetings from the 358th New England Yearly Meeting Sessions. We sit on lands once cared for by Abenaki ancestors and appropriated by European settlers centuries ago. Today this is the home of Castleton University and dedicated to our use for five days.

Green mountains surround us. The many trees on campus drink in the intermittent heavy rainfalls. It is hot and humid. And we have struggled with this evidence of climate change: The unusual has become usual.

We are 620 Friends, including 109 children and youth and 56 young adults. We are queer and straight, physically challenged and able-bodied, trans- and cis-gender, are descended from the peoples of most continents of our globe, and are of various income levels. Each of us, in our own way, strives for blessed communion of family, old friends, and newly encountered friends.

We are renewed in our connectedness to the wider Quaker world, through visitors and epistles and our own travels. We affirm our commitment to the life of the Religious Society beyond our Yearly Meeting, and we grieve that the US government prevented our Cuban Friends from joining us this week.

Our Session theme is: “In Fear and Trembling, Be Bold in God's Service.”

We are struggling with our own contribution to the white supremacy that has formed a blood-drenched thread in the fabric of this country, since the beginnings of its colonization by Europeans: contributions to systemic racism by us as individuals and by us as the body, assumptions, priorities, and practices of New England Yearly Meeting.

The unusual becomes usual as we bring our margins—particularly those people of color among us and those economically challenged—to the center of our attention.

And we are afraid for our future: the future of the earth that our domination is making uninhabitable and the future of our society, whose government manipulates us into fear by its lies and dysfunction. In dynamic tension with our affliction is our love and commitment to each other. We hope and pray that this difficult process of repair and renewal becomes an opportunity for transformation, swelling into the flood tide of Grace.

Our day begins early. Two Friends head across the lawn to early morning worship—a decades-long tradition for this pair. A member of sessions committee carries material for a photo frame. Memories of this time together. Golf carts emerge to carry some to early breakfast. A fleet of kids on scooters sails by. Life ordinary and Life extra-ordinary at Sessions.

Friends testify to the nature of God and our world, to help us in these challenging times. Sometimes, our God is a subtle God, who nudges us from the margins in a quiet voice. We have been learning to listen at those margins. And we are reminded that the enemy is no person, no matter their position, but within each of us. The norms and values of our culture (the system) hold us all in thrall.

Our business sessions have been challenging and have served as a microcosm of the work we are called to do as a faithful people. We have heard from our Development Committee and the ad-hoc Challenging White Supremacy Working Group. Their reports have begun to reveal the extent to which the orientation of our yearly meeting manifests the culture of white-centeredness and middle-class values in which we sit. Both Friends of color and white Friends have named these examples from their own experiences. We are struggling to honor and begin to assuage the real pain felt in the moment by Friends of color, as well as the fear of loss of privilege felt by white Friends. We see that we are teachable. We are not where we were three years ago. Nevertheless, we must accept and acknowledge that real healing is long-term work.

Healing is spiritual work. Even if salvation comes as sudden epiphany, the cross must be taken up daily. We must turn our whole selves over to God, letting every nook and cranny of our culture and expectations be illuminated.

We have been reminded over and over again this week that the heart of our faith is paradox—that while we struggle we will not be paralyzed. Growing our faithfulness inwardly and being faithful to our outward work in the world are equal imperatives.

In social action, particularly about immigration and climate change, we are gaining coherence and momentum, working together as a body across our region. Friends with strong calls, in these and other concerns, are providing leadership to our Yearly Meeting to manifest the Kingdom of God, in new working groups and in revitalized committees. For these gifts and this boldness we rejoice.

The fire of the week has brought us closer together in love. Our deepening unity is based on ever more shared knowing of one another, and we find such sweetness together in our struggles to be faithful. We are tearing apart and rebuilding a ship at sea. The new ship may not look like the one we came here in, but it will be built with the strong timbers of our tradition.

Conversation and reports during our attention to business show the ties that bind our home meetings. Our memorial meeting bathed us in joy and love for those still on earth, as well as those who are present only in the hearts of those left behind. Ministry arose that halted time and made place irrelevant. We were gathered in the Eternal Now.

We have heard prophetic ministry about the meaning of money in our religious society. We know that money is not the measure of our faithfulness. Rather, we are called to turn our whole lives over to God.

How much do we hold each other accountable? How much are we able to show our full vulnerable lives to one another and place ourselves in the hands of our Meetings, as we struggle to be faithful to God? For example, are we ready to know, hold and support those who are food insecure in our meetings?

Our work challenging white supremacy in our culture and ourselves is difficult, at times jarring and messy. Friends have prophesied boldly. Early Friends were intimately aware of the discomfort of God working in us. A print of Margaret Fell's words appeared on our podium Tuesday: "Friends, let the eternal light search you, and try you, it will rip you up, lay you open. Provoke one another to Love."

We are feeling our way towards repentance, imperfectly and, at times, haltingly, but moving nonetheless. We feel God's mystery working among us, and we know the fear and trembling.

We go forth with a charge to share the good news we have found. In this turbulent week we have known experientially the rock—the inward teacher, the inward Christ, the little bird—upon which we can rely. As we labor against the powers and principalities to manifest God's kingdom, we turn our lives over to the still, small voice, finding that we, as a community, have everything we need, that we have been given the time we need in which to do our work, and that God can guide us every step of the way. All we have to do is follow.

We receive ministry. We are humbled. We wait in awe, yearning that "all may be lifted up to thrive and flourish in the shared, Life-giving fellowship of the Spirit."

Yours in God's Everlasting Grace,

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends



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2018 Childcare Epistle

Dear Friends,

Welcome from the 18 children of Child Care. We bring to you the Nominating Slate of 2043.

We have healers and leaders and strong, warm-hearted young Quakers.

We want to thank our parents for letting us go, even when we might have cried just a bit.

This was a year of learning: we learned that a shoe can fit down a storm drain (and we learned that we shouldn't do it—more than once). We learned that dinosaur puppets are not scary and can evolve into one of our most favorite toys. We learned how asking a friend to share the toy that we desperately want, can lead to good things.

We enjoyed our visitors including a juggler and a musician and, at least in verse, a dog named Blue. The bubble bottles were the best we ever had, launching glistening spheres of color that floated among us. The “Spot” books were enjoyed over, and over, and over, and over again while settling down to our naps.

Amongst the toys, tents and scooters we made good friends and practiced waiting our turn.

We want to come back next year.

Yours in peace and joy,

The Child Care Children of 2018



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2018 Junior Yearly Meeting K-1

We are New England Yearly Meeting Kindergarten and First Grade children meeting in Castleton, Vermont. We had lots of fun. In the garden we released two Monarch butterflies that came out of their chrysalis. Then, we went on a nature scavenger hunt in the woods and over a stream. We found many treasures; different leaves, moss, sticks, acorns, pinecones, and a big chunk of marble. We saw centipedes, ants, birds and mushrooms. One of our friends found and passed around an exoskeleton of a cicada. We read stories about all kinds of families, how to fill our invisible buckets and other peoples buckets. The ten of us created super power capes from t-shirts that showed our super powers. We ran around in the gym because we couldn't go outside. It was pouring rain and thunder and lightning.

Judith and Marion visited us from Kenya and sang songs with us in English and Swahili. Our grade 5-6 Friends partnered with us to listen to Nancy. She told us stories about the Quaker children that made a quilt in 1997. We found this quilt in storage when we were setting up our classroom. Some of the makers of the quilt are getting married and starting families. We made ice cream with coconut milk. It was really cold to shake and hold. Sometimes we quietly played puzzles, Matchbox cars, built with Legos or drew puzzle people. Some of us made families of puzzle people in different colors and faces. We took turns and worked out how to share wagon rides, building supplies and wait patiently for snacks. We did so many things, even in one day we did so much. Everything we did was fun!



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**Junior Yearly Meeting
Grades 2 through 4**

Dear Friends Near and Far,

The Junior Yearly Meeting Grades 2, 3, and 4 of New England Yearly Meeting met at Castleton State University in Vermont, US. A group of 23 people attended. We had a terrific time together this hot week. We loved our cool inside spaces and our hot outdoor spaces. Our group explored the theme of “Community, being Bold in God’s service.” What do we do when we are Bold in God’s service? What can we do to be Bold in God’s service? Some answers were have courage, be brave, see the light within each person, be positive, swim in the pool in water over one's head, dive off the diving board and take off one floaty. Other thing we did relating to service were we made two tie blankets to give to refugees in the Northeast and talked about the meaning of Conscious Objection and the decision maybe not to serve.

Some of us went to the bookstore and bought beautiful necklaces, chocolate, books and wooden bowls. We played games. One of them was called Junior Yearly Meeting Ball (JYM Ball) created by one of the staff member many years ago. A new game was developed call, “The Meeting Game,” a take-off from the game “Shipwrecked.”

A special mini community was built out of recycled boxes and tubes was fancy with two banana trees. We all met new people and became loving friends during our time together.



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Junior Yearly Meeting Grades 5 and 6

Hello Fellow Quakers,

We are the 5th and 6th Grade Group of New England Yearly Meeting. There are 10 kids and our group and we met at Castleton University in Castleton, Vermont, U.S.A. on August 4–9, 2018. Our theme this year was Listening, Finding Our Gifts, Using Our Voices.

We listened to each other in the big group and in small groups with 3 or 4 kids. In small groups we talked about how we felt, how our day was going, and told stories about our lives. Some of us talked about our personal meditation practices.

In the big group we played lots of games: kick ball, capture the flag, Zen counting, museum, elbow tag, Ha Ha, big bubble big bubble, telephone, Wa, charades, Beanie Babies, and parachute games. We sang a lot of songs including the George Fox Song, Waltzing with Bears, and Sing Hosanna!

We enjoyed making tie dyed tee shirts and signing each other's shirts, clay meditation, learning about lobbying from our staffer who was recently an intern at FCNL, volunteering to carry trays for people who could use help in the dining room, using temporary tattoos, making ugly art that didn't turn out to be ugly, making ice cream, and watching Butterfly Bob emerge from her chrysalis, gain strength, and fly free.

During free time we liked going to the family bookstore, playing pool and ping pong, swimming in the campus pool, a contra dance, talking with each other and eating delicious food at meals. Having a Coffee House for the whole Yearly Meeting allowed us to share our talents and appreciate other people's skills.

Some of us went to Afternoon Choices and participated in drama group, did finger knitting or other crafts, did face painting, read, or played with Legos.

We all like coming here because everyone is so nice. We can be ourselves and be accepted for who we are. We made new friends, saw old friends, and had fun.



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Junior High Yearly Meeting

Dear Friends from all ends of the earth,

We the Junior High Yearly Meeting of New England Yearly Meeting met in Castleton, Vermont, at Castleton University from August 4-August 9 2018. Our theme this year was “In fear and trembling be bold in God’s service” and we tried to understand and embody this theme through our actions and reflection this week.

JHYM started of the week by leading intergenerational worship, where we shared anonymous reflections about how JHYM has helped us on our way to overcoming fears. Even though it was often hot we immersed ourselves in many fun outdoor activities like capture the flag, badminton, and tower of power. Some of us would play on the pool table and most of went to, and enjoyed, the swimming pool through our late night pool party on Sunday and free swim. We spent time reconnecting with our high school friends so our 8 graders could further understand the changes that would come in the coming year of retreats and sessions. On Tuesday we had an abbreviated trip to Bomoseen State Park were we had fun swimming, singing, and playing card games until we were faced with a torrential downpour which we then enjoyed from the comfort of a porch while eating delicious ice cream. We made beautiful and uniquely creative shirts in our t-shirt meditation and participated in a paint blot project that taught us about the intricacies of life.

We spent some time reflecting on a letter we received from an older friend about people chuckling at a Junior Higher’s reflection during Sunday morning worship. As a group we had a wide range of reactions about the letter. We know that the chuckling was not meant to be hurtful. We immensely appreciate the dedication this older friend put into this considerate letter and it sparked deep conversation within our community over time.

We wrapped up the week with a coffee house talent show with many fun performances. We said goodbye to our 8th graders at a reflective and thoughtful 8th grade circle. Though we will miss our friends greatly we look forward to having more sleep and going back to our communities back home. This has been an eventful and thoughtful week of love and reflection and we look forward to the joys of next year.



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Young Friends Yearly Meeting

Dear Friends Around the World:

We, the Young Friends of New England Yearly Meeting gathered at Castleton University, Castleton, Vermont, August 4th to 9th, 2018. Our theme this year was “In Fear and Trembling, be Bold in God’s Service.”

Over the week, we explored the theme both personally and communally and worked to build a stronger and more inclusive group, and to create for each other a safe learning space full of love, joy, reflection, and personal growth.

We first gathered together on Saturday afternoon and started our sessions getting acquainted and reacquainted. Breaking into our “affinity groups,” we ate dinner together and then joined the rest of sessions for an opening celebration. Sunday evening’s program introduced the theme. The Young Friends analyzed quotes that related to fear and service to God. Young Friends brainstormed queries on the theme.

On Sunday, we joined the plenary meeting for worship led by Junior High Yearly Meeting. We sang familiar, high-energy songs. In the Young Friends morning program, we discussed the ways in which fear both fuels and impedes our activism, how it can affect our lives, and how to recognize and address it. In the afternoon plenary panel, speakers invited us to face our pride, recognize leadings, and test leadings before moving forward. Following the panel, some Young Friends played a hot but energetic game of Intergenerational Capture the Flag. Others did crafts or listened and contributed to a friendly open-mic session in the pop-up NEYM bookstore. At the Young Friends Meeting for Business, we added members to nominating committee. We then broke into groups for committee work, with committees for ministry and counsel, nominations, dance planning, selection of themes for the coming year, and epistle writing.

On Monday, the Young Adult Friends joined Young Friends for a presentation on Jesus’s life and teachings. Xinef Afriam and Plenary Speaker Adria Gulizia led us through an exercise on Jesus’s teachings in relation to Quaker ideals. They had us imagine ways we would build community around Jesus’s teachings, or, as Xinef was inspired to refer to it: “Yeshutopia.”

After lunch, we joined electives such as yoga, crafts, swimming or napping. Afternoon workshops included storytelling through nature, silk screen design, and a presentation on Friends Committee on National Legislation and lobbying. For some Young Friends, the highlight of the day was our combined program with JHYM where we sang songs, played games, and reflected in small groups about the work Young Friends has done this year to build intentional community

and what the transition into Young Friends is like. We wrapped up the day with a joyous all-ages contra dance.

Tuesday Young Friends shared a worshipful morning hearing stories out of the silence of how young friends have acted with courage and integrity even when it was difficult. Theme team shared their thoughtful and stellar work for the years upcoming retreats. After lunch friends boarded a big yellow school bus and traveled to a nearby lake. A raucous thunderstorm interrupted the trip but the group enjoyed dancing in the rain after returning to campus. Once the lightning drove them indoors, Young friends and YAFs stood on the balconies of their respective dorms, singing between the thunder-claps.

We joined the adult business meeting after dinner which brought up various responses from friends to the need for more inclusive leadership in the Yearly Meeting. Some of our younger members closed the day by joining JHYM lounge.

Wednesday we approved our slate with the added role of media co-clerks. These people will hold the community outside of retreats through social media platforms. In the afternoon, Young Friends attended workshops, some made silkscreen designs, some attended the crowded workshop on clerking, and several joined the workshop titled “Off-white: an investigation of the role whiteness plays in our lives.”

Several Young Friends gave moving performances at the coffee house, and then we joined the Young Adult Friends for a dance in the campus center. The dance committee put a lot of work into decorations, lighting, a photo booth, and a great song selection.

We continue to feel hopeful for our future as a community. We will continue to hold each other with love and care as our community transforms. Just as the yearly meeting is seeking to become more inclusive, young friends are also committed to improving our community with love and compassion for each other.