

SOUTHEASTERN YEARLY MEETING OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
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Epistle—2005 SEYM

3/27/2005

To All Friends Worldwide,

The **43rd Annual Session of Southeastern Yearly Meeting** was held during the third month of 2005, 23-27, at the Florida United Methodist Life Enrichment Center, Leesburg, FL.

“Living in the World as Quakers” was our centering focus for this week, which began when Linda Chidsey spoke on “Walking in the Light”, followed the next morning by her workshop, “Letting our Lives Speak”. As Linda raised topics such as redemption, corporate identity and, walking in a manner which “takes away all occasions for war”, we gathered together in joyous expectation of workshops, meetings and activities—all planned to help Friends to be “active followers and not just believers”.

Each morning began with early worship near the quiet eastern shore of Lake Griffin. After a community breakfast, worship sharing in small groups provided opportunities for spiritual dialogue among Friends.

Meeting for Worship for Business was gentle and fruitful, where diligence and care of individual Friends serving on committees was demonstrated and approved. The Marriage and Commitment section of Faith and Practice, as amended, was approved.

An important focus of our work this week was a threshing session to take up the deep concern expressed by letter from St. Petersburg Meeting “regarding Friends United Meeting (FUM) minute 88-GB-52, which supports a personnel policy that is discriminatory towards Gays and Lesbians.” The following three queries helped to define the issues:

- #1. What does it mean to be affiliated with FUM?
- #2. What has been the real level of our activity as members of FUM?
- #3. Are we viable members of FUM or members in name only?

The discussion which followed caused us to examine the nature of our relationship with FUM and how best to speak truth to the injustice which we find inherent in FUM’s personnel policy. We were blessed by the presence of Ben Richmond, a staff member of FUM, who spoke clearly, providing his perspective on this matter. The session came to a close and, as noted by our clerk, a “sweet, sweet spirit” filled the room. As silent worship ended, thunderheads rumbled loudly overhead.

The issue of SEYM’s relationship to FUM was carried over to the 7th day Plenary Session. As rain poured outside and a tornado watch was posted, the concerns and leadings of many Friends were expressed. Theological Issue or Human Rights Struggle? Friends labored

together seeking a clear place to stand. As the thunder subsided and the rain ceased, the following minute was approved:

05YM18 SEYM requests that Eduardo Diaz, Clara Diaz, Cathy Gaskill, and Jan Dahm prepare a letter to be sent to Friends United Meeting (FUM). The letter will be presented to YM before the end of the current business sessions. SEYM also requests its constituent Monthly Meetings to consider prayerfully whether the SEYM should continue its relationship with FUM.

Throughout the week workshops and special sessions engaged us, and programs for young Friends were reported to be, “Neat”, “Cool”, and “Massive”. Lillian Hall from ProNica, Julie Harlow from Friends House Moscow, and Oskar Castro from A.F.S.C. all traveled great distances to share their work, to teach and inspire us. Friday night the auditorium chairs were moved aside and the Quaker Faith-and-no-Practice Band held a rousing contra dance for everyone.

The Walton Lecture 2005, “Intimations of Renewal”, given by Linda Chidsey, spoke strongly to our hearts. The story of New York Yearly Meeting’s renewal has relevance to all Friends as we are called individually but more so as corporate bodies “to a deeper place”. “We can’t be shy anymore” Linda exhorted, reminding us that “the Gospel of Jesus is a Gospel of Peace” and that “Quaker faith and practice must be present at the interfaith table. Our corporate support for people we send out is a powerful witness. We need to do that!” A long period of silent worship followed.

First Day was Easter, and in early worship Friends proclaimed, in both word and joyous song, “He Is Risen!”

The final Plenary was held, and the letter to FUM was read, clarified, and approved. Committee reports concluded our business followed by minutes of appreciation ending with a special minute thanking Dan Vaughan for his service as yearly meeting clerk. Before our final meeting for worship, young Friends reported creatively on their activities.

In summation, this chorus:

Stand together for what you believe.

Work for what must be done.

Love each other in all that you do,

‘till all my people are one.

In the Light,

For SEYM, p.ackerman

Teen Friends' Epistle

We opened our hearts at the fish bowl.
All the adults were enriched in their souls.
Amazing Oskar, Javier, Karen, and Jim
Talked to us about conscientious objection.
To avoid the misleading questions of the draft
board,
You must show deeply held faith in the Lord.

The fantastic dance didn't cause us to frown,
But it did cause us to ooze on down, ooze on down.

On Saturday, we broke into committees
The business meeting put us at ease.

For next year, we've decided our theme should be
"The structure of Quakerism and its history."

Our new co-clerks include Elizabeth Croce,
And the Schmalstig: Alan and Annie.
Daniel Doan will record our minutes and such,
For this we are grateful, and thank him very much.

Linda Chidsey was the fantastic Walton Lecturer.
Her powerful story was important to us and her.

Before we all pack up and decide to take flight,
We would like to hold everyone in the Light.

Peace to y'all from SEYM,
See you next year; we'll all come again.

Teen Friends of SEYM
of
Junior Yearly Meeting

SEYM Young Friends Epistle

Dear Friends,

We are the Young Friends from Southeastern Yearly meeting. We met in Leesburg, FL on Easter weekend, 2005. We did lots of fun stuff, like:

- Tie-dying shirts
- Making musical instruments
- Coloring
- Making hats
- Making friends

We learned about God and George Fox. We learned that God is always with us. We learned that George Fox was the very first Quaker and he believed that God was right inside him.

As we go home today, we are different, because we've made friends, and we love each other. We've learned how to crochet, and we've learned that you can make a musical instrument out of anything!

We thank our leaders and all the volunteers who helped us in Young Friends.

In the Light,
SEYM Young Friends

SEYM Wee Friends' Epistle

First, a big thank you to all the volunteers who helped us. We could not have done it without your presence and sense of humor. We incorporated the theme of "*Living in the World as Quakers*" as our theme as well.

Our lessons included topics such as self-awareness, interconnectedness, cooperation, peace, sharing, and many discussions as to why the rain IS in fact a good thing for the world and us.

One lesson consisted of a discussion of Quaker values and testimonies. The children helped list some values, and each chose one of these testimonies to depict on a flag.

- My name is Drew, and we are *Wee Friends*.
- My name is Claire, and my flag is *peace*.
- My name is Olivia, and my flag is *love*.
- My name is Addie, and my flag is *sharing*.
- My name is Annica, and my flag is *worship*.

Thank you,
Rebecca Gaebel, teacher