

# SouthEastern Yearly Meeting *of the Religious Society of Friends*

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## 2015 EPISTLES

### *to Friends everywhere:*

Loving greetings from the 51<sup>st</sup> sessions of Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM). 172 Friends, including 19 youth gathered at the Life Enrichment Center in Fruitland Park, Florida, from the first to the fifth day of Fourth Month, 2015. The beautiful campus on the shores of Lake Griffin, under the shading canopy of live oaks, Spanish moss, and palm trees, was an inspiration to our time together.

Old friendships were renewed and new friendships made. Our loving community was knit closer by worshipping together, attending to our business, and expanding our horizons in many exceptional workshops. Time to sit together and get to know one another in that which is eternal is a hallmark of our Yearly Meeting sessions.

Over the past several years the youth of our Yearly Meeting have inspired us with their Spirit-led activism. They have supported the Coalition of Immokalee Workers on the Fair Food Campaign, bringing significant progress toward a living wage for agricultural workers in Florida. They've collaborated with Earth Quaker Action Teams to pressure PNC Bank to cease investing in mountaintop removal mining. Friends at these sessions rejoiced in the news that on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, PNC Bank announced its commitment to divest its holdings in mountaintop removal. Our youth's faithful practice of nonviolent protest has opened our minds and hearts to greater possibilities than we had imagined.

During these same years, the SEYM Committee on Earthcare has been helping the Yearly Meeting to season a minute creating the position of Field Secretary for Earthcare for SEYM. Galvanized by the example of our youth, we move forward from approving this minute with faithful expectation of way opening for its staffing and ongoing funding.

SEYM representatives to Friends organizations reminded us of the Spirit-led social justice work being done around the world and in our own Yearly Meeting. We continue to nurture ProNica and to support the Havana (Cuba) Unprogrammed Worship Group with our loving care. We committed our prayerful and financial support to the Friends New Underground Railroad project of Olympia Monthly Meeting of North Pacific Yearly Meeting, providing safe passage to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer Ugandans. We minuted our intention for Yearly Meeting Friends to read and discuss the Pendle Hill pamphlet by Patience Schenck, "Living Our Testimony of Equality: A White Friend's Experience" during the next year as an examination of our own privilege.

Our Walton Lecturer, Nancy Irving, reminded us of the centrality of community to our faith and practice. Her workshops and lecture titled "Creating Space for Community: Both Inside and Out," challenged us to move beyond the societal notion of rugged individualism and practice commitment, willingness, intentionality, and trust in opening the spaces essential to our deeper relationship with Spirit and one another.

Our time together included a balance of laboring to seek clearness and connecting joyfully through conversation, study, worship, and intergenerational play. We concluded our gathering with a sense of what is possible when we remain faithful to the call of Spirit by following our leadings.

April 5, 2015

Phoebe Andersen, Clerk  
Southeastern Yearly Meeting

## Young Adult Quakers (YAQ) Epistle

This year started off with some of us attending workshops which were interpreted as “not very relatable”. The YAQs enjoyed the free time and flexibility of choice in what to attend, but would have liked to have a few more relatable topics for workshops at this gathering. YAQs are interested in discussing current events as well as options for getting actively involved in Quaker groups as a YAQ such as AFSC, FCNL, etc. YAQs would also like to have clearer descriptions of workshops available more than just the catchy title of a workshop.

This Yearly Meeting was a calm and peaceful gathering for the YAQs. The YAQs enjoyed the free time and flexibility of choice in what to attend...YAQs started arriving on Thursday afternoon and attended a few workshops Friday morning. YAQs participated in the ropes course with Teen Friends. Friday afternoon, YAQs participated in the Intergenerational Play workshop with Dr. Drew. YAQs very much enjoyed this workshop opportunity. Friday night, YAQs participated in the Intergenerational dancing and activities. Saturday morning, YAQs participated in the teen program workshop with Karen Putney on Lobbying and assisted Teen Friends in a presentation to Business Meeting on hiring a full-time field secretary for Earthcare. Saturday afternoon and evening, YAQs played capture the flag or split off from the group to attend workshops. YAQs left the Gathering late Saturday night to watch a movie together. YAQs stayed through the end of the Gathering.

*Sincerely, the Young Adult Quakers*

## Teens' Epistle

Dear Friends,

We are the Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) Teens. We have had a very eventful year working on environmental issues with Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT) and supporting the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW).

In April, we planned an action at the PNC Bank shareholders meeting. We worked with EQAT who is trying to get PNC Bank to stop financing mountaintop removal coal mining. This practice is devastating to the global climate as well as local communities in Appalachia. The shareholders meeting was ended in 14 minutes due to our action.

Over the summer, on our way up to the Friends General Conference (FGC) Gathering, we stopped at Kayford Mountain to witness mountaintop removal coal mining first hand. Looking at pictures of mountaintop removal is one thing but seeing the destruction first hand brought the issue alive for us and made us even determined to stop this practice. At FGC we participated in a large action in Pittsburgh that included actions at 6 different PNC Bank locations so it was a great success.

In September a few of us went to New York City for the People's Climate March. It was really inspiring to see 400,000 people marching together for a common cause. In November we had a training in Gainesville with George Lakey and Ryan Leitner from EQAT to learn how to organize individual actions in our home towns. In the past we have always worked as a group to organize actions so it was a new experience to organize actions by ourselves. These actions were part of EQAT's National Day of Action during their Bank Like Appalachia Matters (BLAM!) campaign where many actions were organized in several states. We were all able to take on new roles such as action lead which we had never done before. A few months later, on March 2, 2015, PNC Bank changed their policy so that they are no longer financing mountaintop removal coal mining! It is super exciting to see this success after a year of hard work on the issue.

We also participated in the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) Fair Food Parade and Concert. In the past we have worked with the CIW so it was great to march in the parade.

At yearly meeting we had a lot of fun at the ropes course and the intergenerational dance. We also enjoyed playing kickball with the juniors and elementary kids and playing bananagrams. We also had a workshop with Karen Putney that introduced us to lobbying. We would definitely like to do some lobbying in the coming year. We also presented to the SEYM Business Meeting in support of the Field Secretary for Earthcare position brought forward by the Quaker Earthcare Witness Committee. Next year we hope to work with the new Field Secretary on environmental issues with a focus on water. We would also like to do some lobbying in our local communities and possibly take a trip to lobby in Washington DC.

## Junior Epistle

Since last year's Yearly Meeting, we worked with EQAT at multiple actions until we finally achieved a victory when PNC bank agreed to stop Mountaintop Removal.

When the Juniors began to arrive on Thursday night at Yearly Meeting, the Teens had set up the framework for our video project.

We did the ropes course on Friday and took pictures and videos. Also on Friday, more people arrived in time for the Intergenerational Play workshop.

On Saturday, we participated in an archery activity with the Young Friends. The Juniors took pictures of the archery and took a few turns with bows and arrows after the Young Friends left. After archery, the youth participated in Capture the Flag hosted by one of the Juniors.

After dinner, the Juniors stayed up late to finish the video project. Please enjoy our video.

Signed,

*Junior Friends*

## Elementary Epistle

Greetings to Friends everywhere from Southeastern Yearly Meeting Elementary group. Our week ended much too short but was filled with joy and peace.

I came rather late in the week on Thursday night. To my surprise, I was the only one there on Friday morning and I was thinking how lucky I was to be out of school. We started out the morning doing worship sharing, thinking about questions that Vicki Mariner shared with us. I felt led to share a song: (sing it if you know it)...”Love is something if you give it away...”

After worship sharing, Cathy Gaskill shared stories with us about Jim Crow and life in the south for Quakers. If you haven't heard Miss Cathy's stories, you're really missing out.

For a couple of times, we played Bananagrams. It was pretty good but hard to play against adults. Then Tor took us on the nature walk. He knew a lot about nature. He told us the names of trees and what the sidewalk was made of.

Next Vincent and Matt talked to us about what we thought of the Labyrinth for the video.

Later, we played an indoor game called “Big Wind Blows.” It was pretty fun but the same people were in the middle often. But everyone got a turn.

On Friday night, we danced in the Auditorium. We did all kinds of dancing: chicken dance, square dancing, and circle dances.

Then, on Saturday, we did archery. We walked almost a mile including through a big field of bugs to get there. Mike taught us how to shoot arrows. Most people did better than they thought. Most of us really liked the archery.

We played Capture the Flag. We hid our flags in trees. One team cheated. We decided it as a tie. When the game ended, we found most of our parents in a discussion called “Our Amazing Universe.” While we only heard half of the workshop, it was very interesting and very well thought out.

On Saturday evening, we took a walk in the Labyrinth. We liked being outside. It was peaceful to be outside with only a few people. Also on Saturday, we looked at the lake. The lake was beautiful and peaceful. We also found some interesting fish eggs.

The last thing we did on Saturday was play with the big Cheerio, which is a big yellow Cheerio-shaped piece of stretchy fabric. It was fun and it felt like we were all together. (This was then demonstrated during the sharing of the epistle).

We are thankful to everyone who helped us to be here this weekend and hope that we'll see you all next year.

*Elementary Friends*