

23rd day, 3rd month, 2008

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

-Matthew 11:28

To Friends everywhere,

Loving greetings from Southeastern Yearly Meeting, as we gather at the United Methodist Life Enrichment Center in Leesburg, Florida, for our 46th annual sessions. For the past five days, we have worshipped, rested, and played together in God's own living cathedral of vibrant green live-oaks, blessed by both warm sunlight and much-needed rain. We enjoyed many opportunities for worship: early morning worship on the shore of Lake Griffin, daily worship sharing in small groups, and meeting for worship with attention for business, where our visions, leadings, and love come to fruition.

We try to meet each other where we are. Friends feel cared for and accepted here, whether new to our community or already well-known among us. The greatest gift of our time together is the gift of unconditional love.

A variety of workshops, interest groups, and retreat sessions created space to explore our connections to the wider Quaker world, seek deeper engagement with social concerns and Quaker witness, and make ourselves available in a variety of ways to the Spirit among us. We found ourselves often in deep, generous dialogue about our individual experiences of faith, discovering a rich variety of personal belief, language, and experience among us. Yet we find that in faithfulness and love, we have a connection much deeper than our differences.

Stephen W. Angell presented the Walton Lecture, "The Foundations of Liberal Quakerism." Our experience was that deepened understanding of our historical foundations both gave us a sense of rootedness, and provided a context for understanding the challenges facing our yearly meeting today.

Southeastern Yearly Meeting is still challenged by the question of our affiliation with Friends United Meeting. However, as we take a sabbatical rest from considering it in our official business, we are able to see some of the gifts that our process of discernment has given us. Painful struggle has cracked us open, pushed us into deepened dialogue about our beliefs, and reminded us of the need to rest in God's loving arms.

So we have rested together in this time. In resting, we find renewed energy for other important concerns. We established new committees for earthcare and racial justice. During one of our evening sessions, we marked the passing of the fifth anniversary of our country's war on Iraq with a powerful theatrical presentation, "What I Heard About Iraq."

In fall 2007, a committee was established to hold our relationship with Friends United Meeting in prayer and discernment. Southeastern Yearly Meeting seeks ways to move forward in faithfulness with God's unmediated guidance. In order to do this, we must release judgment, forgiving ourselves and others. From this place of love, we find renewed energy for witnessing Truth in the world.

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak."

-Isaiah 40:29