

EPISTLES

of PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING

2014



**Philadelphia
Yearly Meeting**

of the Religious Society of Friends



ABOVE: Yearly Meeting Leadership: Rebecca Bubb (Abington Meeting), Assistant Clerk; Jada Jackson (Trenton Meeting), Clerk; Arthur Larrabee (Central Philadelphia Meeting), General Secretary; David Rose (Lehigh Valley Meeting), John Lavin (Birmingham Meeting) and James Herr (Lancaster Meeting), Recording Clerks; and Steve Olshevski (Radnor Meeting), Assistant Clerk.

DEAR FRIENDS,

This booklet shares the epistles of our Annual Sessions this summer. These are a record of the Spirit moving among us as we gathered with one another.

Every year for the last 334 years, Friends from more than one hundred meetings in four states have come together for worship, fellowship and business. (This is where the name Philadelphia Yearly Meeting comes from – a community of people who gather once a year.) These days, we gather on a college campus and live together for five days in a Quaker community of all ages – from very small children to those in their ninth decade. Every person in every meeting is welcome and encouraged to attend and to renew our Quaker community together.

When early Friends met one another, they would ask each other “How does the Truth fare with thee?” rather than asking “How are you?” They wanted to know about each others’ spiritual condition and relationship with the Divine. I learned recently that in addition to asking about their friends’ personal spiritual journeys they would ask about the movement of God within their meetings. These Epistles are an answer to that same query – they show our current experience of living together in the Spirit.

I invite you to read these epistles, share them with others and continue to move with the Spirit in your own life and in the life of our yearly meeting.

With love,

CHRISTIE DUNCAN-TESSMER
General Secretary

To FRIENDS EVERYWHERE:

“To love and be loved is a universal human urge. Is it any wonder, then, that we are moved to seek God’s love?... It is to this divine love that we are called. This is the high promise of man’s life. We are called away from indifference, from meanness, malice, prejudice, and hate. We are called above the earthly loves that come and go and are unsure. We are called into the deep enduring love of God and man and all creation. Worship is a door into that love. Once we have entered it, our every act is a prayer, our whole life a continuous worship.”

- N. Jean Toomer, Harlem Renaissance writer and Philadelphia-area Quaker, 1947

To Friends everywhere, loving greetings.

Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting from Delaware, part of Maryland, central and southern New Jersey and central and eastern Pennsylvania came together July 23-27, 2014, at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. We met to consider our business in the light of the theme “Worship is a door to love,” drawn from the above quote, and to celebrate our hope for the future. We have come through difficult years of financial crisis

to a more stable place. We feel that we are on the verge of new life.

One gift that emerged from the last seven years of transition has been realizing the power of worship and work as a full community. We started our days with worship sharing guided by queries composed by high school Friends. We began and closed business sessions with all ages present. We ended the day with vespers led by middle school Friends. At meeting for business, we rejoiced in the active involvement of so many younger Friends, whether as clerk of a standing committee, seated at the clerks’ table, offering messages, participating in the Long Range Planning Group or presenting on stage.

We bid a loving farewell to outgoing general secretary Arthur Larrabee, whose gifts, skills and steadying guidance helped carry us through our financial and organizational quandaries.

WORSHIP IS A DOOR TO LOVE

Incoming general secretary Christie Duncan-Tessmer addressed all ages of Yearly Meeting attenders, calling us into living with the Spirit as our center. She challenged us to rekindle the practices of intervisitation and of greeting Friends with an inquiry into their spiritual lives.

In evening workshops, roundtable conversations and individual exchanges we saw seeds planted and roots growing

for work within our yearly meeting around serious concerns of our day, including global violence and drone warfare, mass incarceration, white privilege and racism, economic injustice, and destruction of the planet. Keynote speaker Peterson Toscano wove many of our deeply held concerns together through personal stories and performance art, calling us to move beyond denial to confront the reality of climate change with a spirit of creativity.

After two and a half years of hard work, dialogue and discernment, the Long Range Planning Group presented a bold proposal for simplifying our structure and process. We ultimately gave approval for the plan, with faith that it will be implemented in a way that brings us closer to our testimonies.

A BOLD PROPOSAL FOR SIMPLIFYING OUR STRUCTURE AND PROCESS.

A strong concern rose up that the plan did not make an explicit commitment to moving us closer to the ideal of an inviting community that “embraces all God’s people.” We had to acknowledge that we have not given sufficient support to our long-existing structures established to work on racial justice and equality, and that we need to change if we are to become a welcoming place for all seekers.

We come away from Sessions this year with ongoing queries about our connection to the source of our authority. When does a minute carry that authority? What can the role of our elders be? How do we keep each other and ourselves

accountable? Trusting that worship is a door to love, can we prayerfully, vulnerably step over this threshold?

Signed in and on behalf of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends,

JADA S. JACKSON,
Presiding Clerk



YOUNG ADULT FRIENDS' EPISTLE

BELOVED FRIENDS,

The Young Adult Friends community concurs with the Epistle of the wider Philadelphia Yearly Meeting community.

This 2014 Annual Sessions we embraced the theme “Worship is a Door to Love” by celebrating new life, transitions within the YAF community and new opportunities. We are

WE ARE ENCOURAGED BY THE INCREASE OF YAFS SERVING WITHIN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS OF THE LARGER PYM BODY AND THE RE-EXPANSION OF THE YAF COORDINATOR POSITION.

encouraged by the increase of YAFs serving within leadership positions of the larger PYM body and the re-expansion of the YAF Coordinator position. We had nearly 40 YAFs at Annual Sessions this year, including many new faces. With many of us working with youth and serving on committees, we appreciate the hard work and collective effort it takes to make Sessions successful.

We spent evenings deepening our peer group. We nurtured each other in

LEFT: Joel Wilson (Fallsington Meeting) and Oliver Danni Green (Chester Meeting) lead a Huzzah! After presenting the Young Adult Friends Epistle.

spirit with daily check-ins and shared a safe space. This year's keynote speaker, Peterson Toscano, joined us Friday night

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and challenged us with a query about our role in the new climate.

This has been a week of joyful fellowship and celebration of who we are and who we hope to become. This year we look forward to deepening our connection with the Spirit and opening doorways to LOVE within in the YAF community and beyond. This includes addressing power and privilege and making way for discussions of inclusion. We are called to be stewards of this work in our communities. There is still more work to be done to build connections across generations and to lift up the gifts of Young Adult Friends.

Huzzah!

Awesomely Yours,

THE YOUNG ADULT FRIENDS
of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

DEAR FRIENDS,

Young Friends would like to recognize the epistle put forth by the members of PYM. With more than 20 people attending, we began the gathering with several games focused on community building and had our opening programs. Every day a group of Young Friends accompanied the children to the pool. Through this and multi-generational morning worship sharing the experience helped promote the inter-generational community. During business meeting, Young Friends approved two standing clerks to lead us in the absence of our presiding clerks and a Friendly Adult Presence to serve as recording clerk. Friends also approved a dance on Friday night as an additional form of community bonding. Peterson Toscano presented a video that he co-produced titled "This is What Love in Action Looks Like" as well as a workshop based on gender variant people and gender non-conformists in the bible.

The incoming General Secretary of PYM, Christie Duncan-Tessmer, joined Young Friends in an informational discussion about the five-year long-range plan for PYM, which was later

approved by the greater PYM group. Young Friends had expressed concerns regarding diversity and representation of the limited member council as well as pointing out discrepancies between the long-range plan and the realities of Quakerism. These concerns were presented to the incoming General Secretary during the discussion with the hope they will be observed during the transition.

Friends had a fabulous time hiking up the Glen Onoko Falls, getting lost on the way there, as well as on the mountain and having lunch with new friends. The keynote speaker, Peterson Toscano, spoke about discernment, climate change, and other Quakerly concerns as well as performing a scene from his new play, "Does This Apocalypse Make Me Look Fat?" After the Keynote speaker, Young Friends attended Vespers

hosted by the Middle School Friends, which included worship sharing with attention to Apples to Apples. Our time at annual sessions was an exceptional experience and we are grateful to the staff, and other friends who created an environment for spiritual enrichment.

With love and in worship,
YOUNG FRIENDS



Tenaja Henson (Lewisburg Meeting) and Robert Neff Taylor (Green Street Meeting) present the Young Friends Epistle.

MIDDLE SCHOOL FRIENDS' EPISTLE

We are the Middle School Friends, and we are about to read our Epistle for 2014. Many of us will be reading, and some of us will be holding the readers in the Light.

- » We played Frazzlyram, a running field game created by Baltimore Yearly Meeting.
- » We went on a hike to a waterfall, and the water was cold. Several of us went completely under the waterfall.
- » Our theme this year is going to be Quaker history and we began by talking about a few historical events: the Schism, George Fox and his followers being persecuted.
- » We talked about the struggles of early Quakers making difficult choices about staying in England and possibly being jailed or traveling to the new world.
- » We planned vespers (a 15 minute worshipful close to the evening's events for everyone at yearly meeting) every evening.
- » We had really healthy snacks,
- » We went to the pool,
- » We enjoyed having meeting for togetherness during the beginning of the afternoon each day. We connected to the pure spirit with others.
- » We had many first time attendees, and even had a couple of new people

join us in the middle of sessions.

- » Some of us lost our keys and some of us found our keys.
- » We spent time in small groups getting to know each other closely through games and worship sharing. We became very good friends.
- » We enjoyed the picnic/celebration for Arthur.

WE ENJOYED HAVING MEETING FOR TOGETHERNESS DURING THE BEGINNING OF THE AFTERNOON EACH DAY. WE CONNECTED TO THE PURE SPIRIT WITH OTHERS.

- » Some of us participated in a short golf cart joy ride.
- » We talked about fears and comforts.
- » We followed our guidelines very closely, one of which was to have fun, and we did.

With love,

MIDDLE SCHOOL FRIENDS

RIGHT: Ellie Bradley (West Chester Meeting) and other Friends present the Middle School Friends Epistle.

CHILDREN'S EPISTLES

FELL GROUP EPISTLE 2014

We, the rising 3rd and 4th graders of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting greet you with a ... HUZAZH!!!!

We had a fun-filled learning experience at sessions this year.

We created a labyrinth of intent and identified behaviors and actions that create obstacles as well as behaviors and actions that help us to move forward toward our intent. We abbreviated as **RILI** to remind us to Respect the Inner Light and Ideas of others.

Each day we joined our adult friends and

WE LEARNED ABOUT HISTORIC AND LIVING FRIENDS WHO LET THEIR LIVES SHINE AS PATTERNS AND EXAMPLES FOR US.

reported on our journeys. We learned that they were focused on the theme, "Worship is a Door to Love". We took that theme and added it to our activities. We made table tents with doors and queries and concepts to stir conversations at meals.

We learned about historic and living Friends who let their lives shine as patterns and examples for us. Many were inventors, educators, activists and artists who each contributed to changing the world for the better.

We heard Faith and Play stories about meeting for worship, meeting for business and listening for God. We used some of what we learned

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as we sought continuing revelation during the Children's Summit, where we discussed a minute of leading together with the younger children.

We heard the story of "Old Turtle and the Broken Truth" and we learned that even a beautiful truth can be incomplete and create unintended problems.

On our last night together we had an ice cream social together with our younger brothers and sisters.

We had a really great time together at sessions and we hope you will join us at Junior Interim Meeting, October 11 at Arch Street Meetinghouse and at next year's annual sessions.

FISHER GROUP EPISTLE 2014

We, the Fisher group of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, made a chain of love where we wrote down what love is on a piece of paper and turned them into a chain. We asked the adults to make some also.

We swam and listened to stories about people around the world and about God.

We talked about love that grows between meetings, in our hearts, between friends, between two people, families and neighbors.

CHILDREN'S PRIORITY for 2013-2015

We are called to make the world a better place by finding fun ways to care for specific environments so that creatures that live there can be healthy.

CONTINUING REVELATION, CHILDREN'S SUMMIT, SUMMER 2014

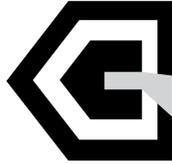
From our deep places we heard that care for the environment needs to be a continuing effort beyond the time line of the children's priority. We encourage Friends everywhere to join us in caring for not only our specific environments, but for all. Reducing the waste we create and putting the waste we do create to good use are important not only to us, but to the health of our planet and all creatures who live here.



James (West Chester Meeting) and Brie (Springfield Meeting) present the Fell Group Epistle.

*Baker (Trenton Meeting) and
Erica (Green Street Meeting)
present the Fisher Group Epistle.*





Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

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Epistle: A public letter of greeting and ministry. Such letters are sent from a Friends meeting or organization to other Friends groups, to supply information, spiritual insight, and encouragement (*Faith & Practice*).

ON THE COVER: *Quakers have traditionally asked one another about their spiritual lives when they met. We love this practice! Try these queries. Ask someone to tell you their story. Listen. Share your journey.*