

## **New York Yearly Meeting Epistle**

Seventh Month, 22-28, 2007

Silver Bay, New York

From the NYYM Epistle Committee  
Loving Greetings to Friends Everywhere,

The 312th Session of New York Yearly Meeting commenced with worship—contemplative, quiet, gentle, and centering. Our clerk likened us to fields of wildflowers blooming before her and asked us to see the Light in all gathered and in the earth around us. Our clerk affirmed: “We carry in our souls the world as we want it to be.” She asked that we open ourselves wider to the Source. The week’s tone was set for receiving the ministry of lake, trees, and mountains around us, the labors of love by our committees, and the work of the Spirit creating all things new.

This year our speakers expressed various aspects of our theme, “Stewardship: Our Earth, Our Mind, and Our Soul.” Louis Cox and Ruah Swennerfelt’s presentation on Quaker Earthcare Witness encouraged us to take individual action. In the way that John Woolman challenged earlier Friends, we were challenged to examine our choices and possessions. Roland Kreager spoke on the economics of Right Sharing. Sabbath Economics, or Jubilee, can be a spiritual ground for any economic system and can effect an even allocation and redistribution of wealth across the globe. Wealth is owned by God and is used for the common good, and individual accumulation needs to be limited. Sabbath Economics requires a strong sense of community and trust within that community. Anne Thomas led our Bible Study, choosing readings concerning stewardship. Biblical covenants were between God, humanity, and the land. What covenant do we now make with the divine and creation?

In his report our general secretary’s message was about renewal, noting that the first renewal report was prepared almost 40 years ago. He acknowledged that renewal is happening right now with the presence of 126 first-time attenders. We remembered those Friends absent due to incarceration or parole limitations. Friends are hungry for spiritual growth, which is indicative of God seeking us.

The Transition Working Group brought forth changes to revitalize the Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel and the Coordinating Committee on Ministry and Counsel. The Yearly Meeting embraced the spirit of this renewal.

We were led to faithfulness as we heard reports from the Quaker Initiative to end Torture (QUIT). We were deeply pained by our nation’s primary role in the practice and dissemination of torture techniques throughout the world. Friends were led into deeper territory about the realities of torture through the Theater of the Oppressed. Héctor Aristizábal, in a powerful autobiographical dramatization, engaged us in his life growing up in Colombia, experiencing political and economic oppression and torture. Through breathing, movement, and sound, he led us to enact our cultural wounds and our own antidotes. We knew experientially the miracle of transformation.

Our representative to the New York Council of Churches Collegium reported on their peace and poverty mission. This ecumenical body brings a prophetic and pastoral response to concerns of national and global issues.

The general secretary of Friends United Meeting reported on the current work of FUM. Our clerks brought two queries: one on theology and gender; the second on the impact of the unresolved Orthodox/Hicksite split on our relationship with each other and the rest of FUM. During the following meeting for listening many Friends spoke from their personal experience of sexual orientation issues. In spite of the hurt and the loss spoken of, there was an abiding sense of love as the first motion toward healing. In the future, more opportunities for expressing concerns and insights into our relationship with each other and the rest of FUM will open.

Friends acted intentionally to increase intergenerational fellowship, worship, and work. We celebrated our families and younger children with family worship. Throughout the week age-appropriate epistles were read to each Junior Yearly Meeting group. A task group on youth sponsored two exciting and lively evening meetings, which generated many ideas to be taken forward this coming year.

New initiatives among youth and young adults further our renewal. A working group is developing a two-pronged program in which several young adult graduates of our youth program will live in an intentional community and provide youth programs to those meetings in areas distant from our youth center. Plans for the expansion and renovation of our youth center were presented. As we make our building more accessible to physically impaired people, we commit ourselves to nurture inclusive human and spiritual relationships. Young adult Friends presented a query for discernment: "What is the role of young adult Friends in the Yearly Meeting body and what can we all do to nurture it?" In the following meeting for speaking we heard the concerns and offerings of many.

Our young Friends acted quickly when a young adult was injured in a serious swimming accident. Their compassion, empathy, and trust in community showed their tenderness to one another.

For the first time at NYYM the Healing Center was recognized as a Quaker ministry. Friends were able to obtain help with physical, emotional, and spiritual discomfort. This essential ministry is growing as Friends realize and experience its value.

Continuing the recent Yearly Meeting themes relating to racial healing, concerned Friends conducted a listening project, asking Friends to talk about their personal experiences of race and what Friends might do to heal racial hurts. We aspire to be a community where the social construct of race does not matter, and we can celebrate our differences without the deadening weight of the racism that pervades our wider culture. We are not there yet.

Friends doing Alternatives to Violence Project workshops in Colombia and Indonesia made clear connections between militarism, globalization, environmental destruction, poverty, and violence. As we live our faithfulness, we accepted the call to prepare individual Statements of Conscience on paying for war and preparations for war and to

ask our government to accommodate our convictions. We issue a call to Friends everywhere to join us in this action.

Earthcare Working Group brought us an Eco-Spirituality and Action Minute, which included this excerpt: "...we are led to widen our witness ... to work for peace between humans and our sacred earth community. Our culture has considered the Earth our property to be exploited, and we have all, knowingly and unknowingly, been complicit in this violent appropriation of world resources. We must now search for the seeds of this war in our possessions and our lives and work to nurture a new mutual relationship with the Earth in all of our actions. ... Can we now commit ourselves to ending humanity's war with the Earth?"

We are being called to bear witness to the testimony of equality, of unreserved love of all individuals and the Earth. To love and care about one another. To wait and listen, to be transformed, and to act for justice.

### **Visitors**

Daniel Angell (Germantown, PYM)  
Martin Beer, Kendal MM, PYM  
Louis Cox, QEW  
Adam Dorcher (Princeton, PYM)  
Sylvia Graves (FUM)  
Eden, James, Isaiah, and Jesse Grace, FUM  
Vanessa Julye, FGC Staff, Central Philadelphia MM, PYM  
Hollister Knowlton, QEW (Chestnut Hill MM, PYM)  
Roland Kreager, Right Sharing of World Resources (RSWR)  
Clinton Pettus, AFSC-Middle Atlantic Region  
Christine Rizzo, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)-Syracuse  
Margery Rubin, Medford MM, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM)  
Carol Sexton, Pendle Hill  
Emily Stewart, Friends General Conference (FGC) Youth Ministries, Durham MM, North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative)  
Alan Stockbridge, Salt Lake MM, Park City, Utah  
Ruah Swennerfelt, Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW)  
Carole Treadway (Friendship MM (MM), North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative)  
Ray Treadway, Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)  
Rosetta Webster-Graham, Baltimore Yearly Meeting  
Penelope Wright, FGC

### **Interest Groups**

Barclay's *Apology* and Its Relevance Today  
Coming Up with a Definition of Racism: Finding Words for Our Experiences  
Continuing the Core Beliefs Discussion  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Conscience and the Christian Church  
Drumbeat for Mother Earth  
Earthcare and the Bible  
Ethical Investing  
FUM: Its Work, Its Changes, Our Relationship

Helping NYYM Help Seniors  
Impeachment—a moral imperative  
In Unity with Nature  
Living Our Faith Out Loud  
Quaker Earthcare Witness  
Quaker Quest  
Quaker Witness at the UN: The Work of the Quaker UN Office  
Relating to the Needs of Bolivian Quakers as an Essential Part of Our Stewardship  
Sabbath Living  
Sharing Experiences Of Race  
Strengthening Ministry and Counsels for Renewal  
Trade and War Colombia: A Case Study  
Who Dunnit? You Dunnit? No Not Me!  
Worship Sharing on Peace