

Grades 11 and 12 Epistle

There's an old saying that when one door closes, another is opened. As the oldest group to participate in Junior Yearly meeting, we found ourselves reflecting this week on transition to our new roles.

The week started with the all-too-familiar process of getting familiar with each other. As the week went on, we encountered another, unfamiliar feeling. The sensation of transition was overwhelming for everyone, as the 11th graders moved toward their senior role in JYM, and as the 12th graders phased out of JYM and into an adult Quaker presence. Everyone has experienced the position of being in a simultaneous ending and commencement.

Beach day brought back memories. Our play with the first and second graders reminded us nostalgically of the JYM sessions of summers past. Because we were given responsibility for the young children, we felt a sense of equality in the trust that was placed in us in caring for the children.

We had the opportunity to participate in worship sharing for the first hour of JYM with adult groups. While some did not attend, most who did responded very positively and considered it an invaluable aspect of the week, and thoroughly enjoyed the chance for spiritual exploration. There was much positive feedback on the gender-specific groups, especially, where we felt equal to others in the group, regardless of age. Through these experiences, we sensed a connection to a larger community, which eased fears about the future.

When we regrouped after worship sharing, we explored the theme of equality in a variety of ways. On Monday we had a conversation about our personal prejudices. Some friends were uncomfortable in the negative atmosphere of the discussion, although the discussion was valued at the same time for revealing personal roadblocks to understanding others, knowledge we could use in future situations. Our discussion of equality continued on Wednesday with a session on "isms." We listed our experiences receiving discrimination as well as seeing its effects on others in our daily life. We concluded the day's activities with skits illustrating the sorts of prejudice we discussed on Monday. We talked about ways to improve both the community as a whole, and our relationships individually.

Later on in the week, we met with Bill Galvin, who spoke to us as he had in the past about conscientious objection. This year his message carried new weight for many of us, as the reality that we were now of the age where we could potentially be drafted dawned on us in new ways. We also discussed the inequality in the military, in terms of socioeconomic class, race, and gender. In the valued presence of a professional nurse-midwife, we also talked about equality and the topics of sexuality and gender. At the end of the week, original play, a form of improvised movement, made many of us feel like equal participants as part of this group activity. Singing together also made us feel equal and very much part of a community.

During the week, many doors closed, and others were opened... Our experiences have taught us how to face the unfamiliar, and to gain strength for the uncertainties of the future through faith. Many of us are excited to spread this knowledge and love throughout our communities.