

*After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. (Acts 4:31-32)*

To Friends Everywhere,

The Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting met at Wilmington College in Ohio for our 184th sessions. This year we have challenged ourselves with the theme, "Telling Our Stories of Faith."

There is risk in sharing stories of faith. In doing so, some among us have had the courage to strip themselves of all pretence. Their words testify to ongoing, divine revelation. Through careful listening, we have come to better understand the diverse ways in which we experience God. Our spirits are quickened by these bold words.

Our stories included descriptions of life-long spiritual growth and of sudden moments of radical transformation. We were humbled by examples of the courage that faithful living can require and strengthened by reports of God's gifts showering down.

These stories remind us that faithful living is possible.

It is tempting to rest easy in the stories of our past, but we cannot allow ourselves that comfort. This year's business meetings have challenged us to apply these lessons to our present and our future together. We are seriously considering how to pay for the work of the yearly meeting in an equitable and spiritually-based manner. We are in the midst of re-writing our book of discipline. Perhaps most difficult, we are beginning to address the incongruity of monthly meetings that lack the vitality to gather weekly for worship. These have not been easy issues for us to confront and we still have much to do.

The wider society of which we are a part also challenges us. We cannot pretend that we are a people apart. As citizens of the United States, we share responsibility for the violence done in our name. Adopting minutes does not relieve us of that responsibility. We are called to live out new stories of faith, witnessing to our beliefs and modeling a society that does justice, loves mercy, and walks humbly with our God.

### Children's Epistle

Nineteen young friends met at the 184th session of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Wilmington College in Wilmington Ohio from July 28th - August 1st, 2004 to consider the theme, "Telling Our Stories of Faith." The campus of the historic Quaker college was the background for a time of fellowship and deep spiritual learning.

When we arrived we shared our concerns regarding who might be president. We are concerned about young people dying in war. We are concerned for the children in Africa and the AIDS epidemic. We are concerned for the people in the nursing homes.

This week we learned that in the past all Quakers didn't believe slavery was bad. We learned that Quakers used to think that art distracted your mind. We are glad to be Quakers now instead of then.

We want others to know that we think peace is easier to deal with than violence. It is easier to keep people alive than to kill them. We think you should always believe in God. God can help you find what you lose.

~The Children of OVYM

### Middle Youth Epistle

Stand up and repent, ye sinners!

George Fox arrived for a visit with us, in the form of T. Canby Jones. In his old leather breeches and shaggy, shaggy locks, he gave us a first-person account of George Fox's thoughts.

We visited the Peace Center and were disturbed by pictures of Japan after the atom bombs were dropped. Many people were killed, and others were horribly burned and mutated.

Gretchen Stone talked with us about her medical work in Sudan. We found it amazing that such small things could be so valuable when people have almost no possessions.

We volunteered one morning at Our Father's Kitchen. We sorted clothes, pulled weeds, and helped get ready for serving lunch. We were impressed by the way workers there treated the clients with respect and equality. They see God in each person the way we do.

We canoed down the Little Miami River. We picked up garbage and old tires, and one lost pair of glasses.

Crickets kept up a constant background song. We serenaded each other on the river. We all had nicknames, and had quite a bit of fun singing silly songs. We also decided that sleep might be important during Yearly Meeting.

We enjoyed each other's company, and want to plan more times together during the year. We would like to meet some of you who are reading this letter in other countries.

### Teen Epistle

These past few days we have been given much to be thankful for. For example, we met new friends and were reunited with familiar faces.

We took an exciting, eventful, and exhausting canoe trip down the Little Miami River. We were inspired by its beauty to take it upon ourselves to leave it better than we found it by cleaning up the litter. A few of our number were refreshed by a quick plunge into the frigid current.

The next day we were enlightened by an informative speech given by our man, J.T. He spoke to us about the meaning of the word "service." Our group also participated in spiritually developing workshops that day.

One of the most exciting things was our service trip, it involved breaking ground on a trail that will, with luck, eventually reach all the way to the Ohio River.

Overall, it was a week full of food, fellowship, and most of all - FUN. We feel blessed to be included in the wonderful yearly meeting.

-The Teens of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting