

2006 Epistles

Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting

30 July 2006

To Friends everywhere,

Greetings to Friends throughout creation, from Friends meeting at Earlham College for the 186th annual session of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting.

Both familiar faces and many new faces mingled in love and joy at our sessions. In these perilous and momentous times, we remember the counsel of George Fox: “Sing and rejoice, ye children of the day and of the light; for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt. And truth doth flourish as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns, and the plants atop of the hills, and upon them the lambs do skip and play. And never heed the tempests nor the storms, floods nor rains, for the seed Christ is over all, and doth reign. And so be of good faith and valiant for the truth.” (Epistle 227, Eleventh Month, 1663) We have indeed felt God’s presence working strongly among us this week, as we have worshiped together and explored how God is leading us, as we have sought guidance on our most deeply-felt concerns.

The theme of our Yearly Meeting has been “Seeking an Earth Restored: The Spiritual Path of Stewardship,” a theme we have explored in two plenary addresses and in a variety of workshops. We feel a sense of both urgency and hope.

Our two plenary sessions were experienced as powerful trumpet blasts of the Holy Spirit. Doris Ferm called us “to commit to radically changed lives but filled with Spirit and universal love, in faith and in hope,” as we explore how to bring about a new planetary culture. Doris reminded us that “the earth is not to be used up. Rather, it is a gift to be treasured and to be passed on to our descendants.”

Previous generations of our ancestors have planted fruit trees, such as date trees, that matured long after the death of the planter. Let us see where we are called to plant such fruit trees. Instead of looking at ourselves primarily as stewards of our fellow creatures, let us act out of a sense of oneness with the natural world. All creatures belong to God: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.” Dear God, “you open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.” (Psalm 24:1-2; Psalm 145:16) Doris reminded us that our despair over global warming and environmental degradation had at last removed the scales from our eyes, allowing us to see that we humans are neither separate from, nor above, the natural world.

Carl Magruder helped us understand the pain and guilt expressed by many Friends during worship sharing. He said it arises because we are embedded in a system that does not allow us to live in integrity with our beliefs. He urged us not to succumb to a paralyzing sense of inadequacy. If we miss the mark, we must pick up our arrow and let it fly again and again.

Building on Doris’ message that we have been called to commit our lives to acts of faith, to live out a new truth, Carl urged us to embark on another leg of the journey that Quakers had endeavored to travel for over 350 years. We must willingly abandon the treasured values of the North American culture: comfort and convenience.

We belong to a worldwide community of Friends as well as to local communities. And our communities may be the best green technology we have. These are spiritual edifices far surpassing the grandeur of cathedrals and temples wrought of fine stonework, colored glass, and dazzling mosaic. Our religious communities are built from the very stones the Lord has lifted up to do His work. No matter where we are on Earth, we humans, fashioned by God, stand on holy ground to sing the praises of the Creator and the Creation.

Our workshops included an experiential exploration of expressing earth spirituality through music; examining the Biblical basis of earth care; an examination of the challenges of “peak oil” production, global warming, and the transition to a low-energy society; gardening as a spiritual path; starting an earth care committee at your local meeting; embracing earth care as a religious calling; and a look at sustainability in light of the spiritual and moral challenges of declining resources.

Friends in attendance expressed a sense that they were being led by the Spirit or of being uplifted and awed by the Light we experienced as a gathered meeting. We felt blessed by the loving spirit that characterized our business sessions and the absence of contentiousness over problematic issues such as the budget, the proposed revisions of our Faith and Practice, and financial stewardship of the Yearly Meeting.

We heard a variety of prophetic voices. At the beginning of our sessions, the Nominating Committee's slate had over 30 unfilled positions; the Committee found Friends to fill many of these positions by our sessions' end. We approved a minute urging our government to act to de-escalate hostilities in Lebanon and Israel. We held Mid East Yearly Meeting in the Light upon hearing that their assembly in Lebanon had to be canceled this year. We were disgusted by the erosion of civil liberties illustrated by the arrest of AFSC interns who were distributing counter-recruitment leaflets outside of "a Free Speech Zone" in Chicago on July 7.

These voices were accompanied by voices that reminded us repeatedly that discouragement and despair were not part of the Spirit of God. In a variety of settings Friends expressed a sense that there is no time to waste and a desire for concerted community action. But we must also have patience to wait in the Spirit for way to open.

"I must *be* the song I sing about," sang Carl Magruder. Then, in conclusion, he proclaimed, "There is a symphony to be played, and I am longing to hear that music."

We call for Friends everywhere to dedicate themselves in order to put the needs of the natural world first. We believe there will be no end to war, and no end to poverty, and no end to injustice, unless we create a new web of allegiance with the earth.

In God's Love and Peace,
Virginia Wood, Clerk

Children's Epistle

Seventeen children ages one to ten met at the 186th session of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting in at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, from July 26-30, 2006, to consider the theme "Seeking an Earth Restored: The Spiritual Path to Stewardship." The peaceful and beautiful campus of a historic Quaker college was the background for a time of fellowship and deep spiritual sharing. Our speakers taught us about nature and the earth. We learned that children don't go out in nature to play much anymore. We learned about recycling food. We experienced many fun activities. We discussed what we feel about nature and the earth. We made musical instruments and costumes and sang about our favorite things in nature. We are concerned that people waste things and cut down too many trees. We hope to find a way to recycle everything and a way to energize cars with electricity and solar power. We presented a query to the business meeting and sent a message to you all that we care about the earth.

Middle Youth Epistle

Greetings from the 2006 Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Middle Youth, who met at Earlham College from July 26, 2006 to July 30, 2006. The theme of this session was "Seeking an Earth Restored," and our service project connected to this idea. We bicycled to the Cope Environmental Center to learn more about solar power, wind power, composting, and other sustainable eco-friendly alternatives. While we were there, we tackled and removed a number of invasive plants such as: Russian olive, honeysuckle, grapevine, and multi-flora rose. Invasive plants crowd out the native plants, they don't provide food or home for wildlife, and in general they take more than they give. This reminded us of another species. We realized as humans we use a lot of resources that we don't replace. People should help each other to be more life-giving than life-taking. Using more sustainable resources instead of disposable resources will help us accomplish this goal.

Not only do we need to hold each other in the Light, we need to hold up our solar panels, too.

Teens' Epistle

Love and greetings to Friends around the world!

Thirteen Quaker youth (ages 14-19) met at the 186th annual sessions of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, from July 26 to 30, 2006, to consider the theme of “Seeking an Earth Restored: The Spiritual Path of Stewardship.” The elegant and serene campus of a traditional Friends college was the backdrop for this year’s spiritual retreat. It was a time of self-realization, bonding with our fellow Friends, deep spiritual growth, and learning from others’ experiences.

We learned that despite age differences, we *can* relate to adults and appreciate the wisdom they have to share. In the words of one of our dedicated leaders, Tahnea Jafari, “What you fear you attract; what you resist persists. You create your own reality.” The truth we’ve learned from this is that by conquering our fears we overcome obstacles.

We realize that one obstacle we face every day and will soon inherit fully is the responsibility for our planet’s ecological future. We discussed this concern with plenary speaker Carl Magruder. We discovered that although each of us carries different concerns within our hearts they all lead back to a central root, which is a deep human concern for God’s creation. We sincerely hope you share our concerns, because we are the future, and we can’t do it alone.

We shall overcome. The future is uncertain, but one thing is certain:
WE ARE QUAKERS.