

Epistle from YAF at Olney, 2007

Sixth month, 2007.

To Friends everywhere,

Greetings from the young adult Friends who gathered at Olney Friends School in Barnesville, Ohio, where 80 Friends from across the US and Canada came together for a reunion of the Young Friends of North America (YFNA) and an intergenerational Quaker Camp. Seventeen young adult Friends participated in this week of deep worship, fellowship, and play. Older Friends shared deeply about how their personal and spiritual experiences were influenced by the community of YFNA. As younger Friends, we listened and shared about our experiences living our faith.

Through the whole week, many Friends felt the power of the Spirit in the very land that held us. Young adult Friends joined both with our hosts and our fellow guests in spiritual vulnerability to teach by learning, and to learn by teaching. From the YFNA reunion, we got a great sense of the power and joy that comes from speaking truthfully about our experience of Quakerism with as many Friends as possible and the many dangers and mistakes that are possible while doing so without great care. By engaging with Friends from Ohio Yearly Meeting (Conservative), we gained a greater sense of the depth of our tradition, not only of our ancestors but also of the power of the Christian roots from which we come.

Over the course of the week, the young adult Friends present felt a clear leading to create an organization in which young adult Friends from across North America can build spiritual community together. We spent a lot of time discerning how to move forward with this leading, with the care that is necessary to bring Friends together across theological divides into a diverse community of Quaker youth.

We struggled through in deep discernment, praying for way to open for us to begin this work. We each wrestled with individual discernment of our own leadings and also felt the pressure of our own deep want for this dream to become a reality. We have felt keenly the absence of a true diversity of Friends with us here, and feel much caution at the idea of moving forward without all branches of Quakerism involved.

At the recommendation of the Visioning Committee (which met in Fourth Month, 2007), we are forming a Naming Committee (to be in consultation with the Visioning Committee), which would then form a Steering Committee. The Naming Committee, while not formed in its entirety yet, will meet in the fall of 2007 to name the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will be active by First Month, 2008. This Steering Committee will include representation from the various branches of the Religious Society of Friends. *We are asking young adult Friends from all branches throughout North America to discern deeply and come forward if they are being led to do this work or have names they*

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would like to offer the Naming Committee for discernment. Please email suggestions to Andrew Esser-Haines at esseran@earlham.edu.

During the discernment, Friends present felt a strong leading to a coordinated intervisitation among yearly meetings, by young adult Friends in the summer of 2008, from which they could spread the word of the new young adult Friends' organization. This event sprang from many individual Friends' leadings to engage in intervisitation among Friends. Many of those Friends present in Barnesville expressed that they will begin to engage in the work of intervisitation personally once home. Friends also discerned that the next major North American gathering of this generation of young adult Friends would take place during the summer of 2009. Until the Steering Committee is active, a working group will begin arranging some of the logistics for the coming events. Those who feel led to join the working group are encouraged to contact Nathan Sebens at [<nathansebens@yahoo.com>](mailto:nathansebens@yahoo.com).

Simultaneously, we experienced a process of discovering ourselves and each other. When we needed clarity, we found it in the vocal ministry of older adult Friends in worship. When we felt frustration with the pace of our progress, we recognized in this a need for deeper worship and found courage in taking small steps.

And so, we wait upon God. We trust that those who are led to do this exciting work will come forward, and that God will provide all that we need to engage fully with this work. We give deep thanks for the depth and breadth of the Spirit, which was powerfully felt during our week in Barnesville.

Faith-fully,

Eric Armstrong

Betsy Blake

Mike Goren

Frederick Martin

Ruth Raffensperger

Emily Stewart

Micah Bales

Nate Blood-Patterson

Alex Haines

Erin McDougall

Claire Reddy

Gavin White

Lauren Baumann

Andrew Esser-Haines

Becka Haines Rosenberg

Elizabeth Piersol Schmidt

Nathan Sebens