Baltimore Yearly Meeting Epistle

Annual Session 2024

The Hood College campus is a lovely place to nurture our Quaker community and do our Yearly Meeting business. The food is tasty and plentiful, the staff is welcoming, the dorm rooms are new and spacious, and the campus is compact.

BYM's retreat, led by Francisco Burgos, was rich with challenges.  Participants were asked to notice when Spirit is challenging them individually, and recognize a collective call to each to be loving within this world as it is now.  Participants were also invited to remember a time when we individually knew that Spirit was leading or speaking to us.

The youth were happy to be together. When asked what she liked best, one child, who looked to be about 8, quickly said “ice cream!” When asked what was second best, she said “games!” as she bounced up and down and smiled. Our youth program is small and growing; we still have not totally recovered from the pandemic.

The chapel’s acoustics aren’t great for business meeting, but they are marvelous for singing. A small group can sound like a great choir, and the singers have a good time. For those who chose to sing – chanting around the morning queries or hymns after dinner - there was a definite feeling of joy and renewal from our time together.

These, along with the other morning groups and the cookie ministry of Right Relationship with Animals (a tradition of home-made vegan cookies), all contributed to making a safe container in which we could openly share and be vulnerable, in both our business meetings and our evening programs.

Much of the business was smoothly gone through. There were several important highlights.

The camping program continues to grow and flourish. A beautiful video introduced us to Opequon Quaker Camp at Rolling Ridge. The campaign to fund the camp is doing better than expected. The wealth of projects being worked on by the yearly meeting has put an unacceptable amount of stress on both the staff and volunteers of the yearly meeting. We as a yearly meeting need to acknowledge this and give serious thoughts to our priorities, so we don’t burn them out.

The Indigenous Affairs committee shared their work to start a remediation process for the damage BYM Quakers did to the children of the Pawnee Nation. They have been in touch with leadership in the nation, written an apology and proposed that we send $20,000 over the course of two years to start to heal the harm we did when Quaker schooling deprived the children of their language and their culture. An emotional discussion followed. It became clear that this was the first small step in potentially a much larger effort to compensate for a piece of the harm we did. We were reminded that we do not get to choose how reparation funds are spent; also, although we may desire to develop a personal relationship with those we’ve harmed, we cannot assume that will happen. After so many years of doing harm, it is presumptuous to assume that friendship is possible.

This was followed by a moving presentation by Rania Maayeh, from Ramallah Friends School. She vividly described some of the horrors that are occurring in the West Bank and Gaza. And, she proudly shared how well the students at Ramallah are doing, despite the horrendous conditions in which they are currently living. The school has been a beacon of hope which nurtures the gifts and talents of the students and prepares them for the challenges of the world. The seniors all passed their International Baccalaureate exams this year, and most of them are going on to college.

Our first night together we heard from three BYM Friends who shared their paths to activism in an open and vulnerable manner, which was very moving. They invited us to find our own paths.

Chief Dennis “White Otter” Coker from the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware spoke to us on Wednesday evening. He opened with the Words Before all Words: The Thanksgiving Address. We were included as he asked us to say “and now are minds are one” after he mentioned each aspect of nature to be acknowledged and thanked. Chief Coker then spoke frequently about healing and honoring our Mother Earth every day. He also spoke about the excitement of reaching state recognition for the Lenapes, and he shared that it was a miracle that he is still on his homeland and practicing his culture.

The Thursday night intergenerational carnival was joyful and fun, as the children led their elders in play and lightness. This continued on Friday evening with the coffee house.

The Carey lecture completed our evening events.