



April 9, 2010

Greetings to Friends Worldwide,

“(Friends) are called to live and love in ways that help bring divine healing to this world. To do so, we must become deeply rooted in that Mystery we speak of variously as God, Spirit, the Light, the living Christ, Love, the Good.”

—Marcelle Martin, **Deeply Rooted; Alive in the Spirit**
SEYM Quaker Michener Lecture, January 18, 2009.
*Read by SEYM clerk at the opening meeting
for worship with a concern for business.*

Southeastern Yearly Meeting Friends did become more deeply rooted in the Spirit throughout our 48th Annual Gathering, held March 31- April 4, 2010, at the United Methodist Life Enrichment Center on the shore of Lake Griffin in Fruitland Park, Florida. Though we were concerned that our attendance decreased to 128 adults and 15 youths this year, we were heartened that 26 new Friends attended for the first time. We were grateful for the presence of two teens and two adults from Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association who kindled sparks of possibility for revitalizing our youth program. We ask that you hold us in the Light as we work to find ways to create a Gathering that Friends don't want to miss.

For many, each day of our time together began with unprogrammed outdoor worship by the lake. Sitting under the live oaks hanging with Spanish moss, worshipers enjoyed idyllic scenery, the water birds flying by, and an occasional alligator rising to the surface of the lake. One enormous alligator swam by without even making a small wake. Birds sang and squirrels scrambled through the trees. Later, worship sharing opened our hearts further.

We were grateful for the variety of opportunities to explore living with love in the world through simply being with Friends, taking times of solitude, singing, getting massages at the healing center, and availing ourselves of the many workshops, interest groups, and representatives from Quaker organizations available. As a sampling, Sylvia Graves, General Secretary for Friends United Meeting (FUM), gave an inspiring presentation on the Global Ministries of FUM and, through engagement with us at other times, continued to broaden our understanding of FUM. SEYM Friends active in Friends Peace Teams also gave heart-wrenching reports along with ways to become involved in relieving suffering and increasing skills in nonviolent conflict resolution that have been effective globally. Another SEYM Friend continued her “worship shearing” ministry by cutting Friends' hair to raise money for the beauty school she founded in Nicaragua under the auspices of ProNica, an independent Quaker organization under the care of SEYM. Their programs have increased the quality of life for many Nicaraguans. We were fortunate to have three Nicaraguan women with ProNica, including a teen, join us. SEYM teens flew to Nicaragua last summer to expand their knowledge of life there and do service projects. They reported their lives were changed as a result. Never before had they experienced such generosity and warmth as that shown to them by their Nicaraguan hosts, who lived in conditions of extreme poverty. They remarked at how “spoiled” children in the U.S. are regarding educational opportunities, for Nicaraguan

children they met were so eager to learn that they walked many miles to school through rough conditions.

Our roots continued deepening with retreat leaders and J. Bernard Walton lecturers Betsy Neale and Richard Mitchell from Lexington, KY, Monthly Meeting and Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting. They led us through informative workshops on the historical Jesus, with elaborate notes and bibliography. Their lecture, “The Jesus of History: Bringing Quakers Together, Challenging Us to Live Differently,” asked us to consider why the historical Jesus may be important for a variety of Friends and stressed that uncovering “the layers of dogma” on this teacher, whose most central teaching was on the Kingdom of God, might improve Friends’ relations with a variety of Christ-centered worshipers, those of the Jewish faith, and others.

After the lecture, we were fascinated by a DVD on the “Seagoing Cowboys” who, after World War II, traveled on ships carrying a variety of animals to countries whose animals had been killed in the war. Al Geiger, an SEYM Friend, and his brother, along with other conscientious objectors, were among the cowboys.

The joy of family dancing to the Faith and No Practice Band, followed by an intergenerational talent show, continued to reflect the fruits of the Spirit in our life together. Our Quaker storyteller, Cathy Gaskill, charmed us with a story about Betsy Ross, from whom she is a direct descendant. Artful Nicaraguan dances, musical performances, and even Quaker stand-up comedy filled us.

We remembered Friends who are no longer with us in a meeting for remembrance.

As we continued to deepen our roots, God’s healing love was palpable during most of our five meetings for worship with a concern for business. Our planned agenda changed in order to allow time for laboring with a way forward on SEYM’s relationship with FUM. We are grateful to Friends everywhere who have held us in the Light and provided encouragement throughout this process. Early in our final session, surrounded by waiting worship, we reached unity and approved the following two minutes. One Friend was minuted as standing aside.

10YBM04 At the 5th plenary session of the 48th annual meeting of Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held the fourth day of April, 2010, SEYM approved the following minute on SEYM’s relationship with Friends United Meeting.

Minute on SEYM Relationship with FUM

Having sought over the past five years to gain clarity over the issue of our yearly meeting’s relationship with Friends United Meeting (FUM), the Friends of Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) have discerned three separate issues confronting us in our struggle to resolve this matter.

First, we acknowledge SEYM’s opposition to the FUM personnel policy with its discrimination against our gay and lesbian Friends. Our core belief of that of God in every person leads us to confirm our continuing support and love for our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Friends.

Next, we embrace our desire to honor and respect our FUM Friends and their healing work across the world. We also recognize the generous and invaluable assistance and nurturing given to us from FUM years ago in our process of organizing as a Yearly

Meeting. Many have spoken of a wish to “remain in loving relationship” with FUM, supporting their ministry spiritually, materially, and practically as we aid and support those of our body who are led to work them.

Finally, with regard to the question of our membership in FUM, there is a clear sense among SEYM Friends to lay it down. There are Friends among us who continue to feel strong ties with FUM. Many SEYM Friends readily unite with FUM’s work, while many SEYM Friends have difficulty with the theology implicit in the FUM purpose statement.

SEYM Friends approve this minute with a sense of peace, gratitude, and resolution, while recognizing that some Friends feel sadness and loss:

As an affirmation of who we are, the Marriage and Commitment Section of our *Faith and Practice* defines marriage as a union between a couple before God, and deliberately does not define what constitutes a couple in terms of gender. Our experience in SEYM has been that spiritual gifts are distributed by how Friends are called and their faithfulness to that call, not by marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. SEYM affirms its continuing support for our gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer Friends.

It is our deep desire to remain in a loving relationship with FUM, supporting and sharing in their efforts to carry on God’s work in the world.

SEYM formally lays down its membership in FUM. We look forward to continuing Spirit-led, loving interaction with FUM and are mindful that continuing revelation may enable us to find more common ground in the future through the power of God in work we do together.

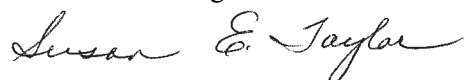
10YBM05 Given minute **10YBM04**, SEYM approves a Minute of Procedure for the SEYM/FUM Relationship:

Having affirmed our intention to remain in loving relationship with Friends United Meeting (FUM) we will appoint and fund, through the Yearly Meeting’s established Representative Travel process, an Observer to attend an FUM General Board meeting once each year. That person will report back annually to the Yearly Meeting sessions of SEYM.

We will also fund an amount to FUM sufficient to cover the cost of their communications with our FUM Observer. Discernment regarding our annual support of specific FUM projects will continue.

Upon completion of final business, Southeastern Yearly Meeting sessions closed with gratitude and gathered worship.

Peace, in the Light,



Susan Taylor, Clerk

Epistle Committee: Andrew Jason, Harold Branam, and Sandy Branam

2010 SEYM Young Friends' Epistle

During this year's Yearly Meeting we had lots of fun. Our theme was the Good Samaritan and we acted out the parts of the main characters in the story. Then Carmen and Lillian came in and told us stories from Nicaragua, which we acted out. Then we discovered a very energizing song called "Battu" by Angelique Kidjo (ahn-geh-KEEK Kih-joe). Thursday morning, we made pillowcases and finished them on Saturday by ironing them. Then on Thursday night we went outside and played with a parachute and a giant rubber-band toy made out of bathing-suit material. Friday morning we went to the High Ropes Course, which was very fun and challenging with very funny instructors. First rule: zombies.

On Friday night, we participated in the talent show by volunteering when no else would. We all need more dancing in this world so we participated in the dancing. Saturday morning we made placemats. Cathy Gaskill came in and told a story about a young Quaker man who followed migrants, and out of his concern, people started building houses for people with low wages in Florida. Koinonia heard about the program and developed Habitat for Humanity. She also taught us how to make the five-pointed stars and then we experimented with them to make different creations. Later, Tor came in and took us on a Nature Walk where we learned a lot about everything. Who knows how cement is created? After lunch we went with Sandy to draw "nature-around-us" even though we didn't have much time, we learned a lot about how to look at nature from a different point of view. Then at 4:00, Jamie went to the Easter Egg Hunt. Sunday morning we wrote this for to everyone who made this experience more experience-ful and to Quakers around the world.

—read by Jamie Loomas, age 10

