

To Friends everywhere,

We, the Young Friends of New England Yearly Meeting, met from August 1- 9 2020 over Zoom. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to meet at our planned site- Castleton University in Castleton, VT. Although we were not able to be around each other in person, we found great joy in seeing each other online. The theme for this session was “row on,” a theme that taught us to keep striving to stay present in the community online and work to make our community stronger and more just.

On the first day of the program, the Young Friends coordinator, Maggie Nelson, told us to write any questions about Quakerism into the chat box on Zoom. The queries were used to help us connect to our Quaker community. Throughout the week, we got into home groups and discussed the queries in depth. The queries included “What is your interpretation or experience of God?” and “What do words like “God”/“the Spirit” mean to you?”. Through silent contemplation and sharing our beliefs with the Young Friends group, we were able to answer the queries to our own truth.

We worshipped in many ways throughout this week to stay in touch with our community spiritually. We joined Junior High Yearly Meeting (JHYM) and held worship with clay. To close the week, we worshiped with rocks. Both talked about how life molds us and how we connect to each other through the earth we all held. With JHYM we broke off into small groups to discuss a series of queries relating to fear. This brought about discussions on the difference between fear when we feel in control and when we lack control.

Throughout this week, Young Friends (YFs) have explored the theme of “Row on” through racial justice topics. Some YFs attended a plenary that was open to all of Sessions, discussing racial justice and spirituality in a creative and inspiring way, led by Dr. Amanda Kemp. Another way the theme was discussed this week was during our workshop on police and race where we discussed how to keep working towards social justice. In this workshop, we were together with Young Adult Friends (YAFs), who shared their experiences with the police. YFs made a space for each other to ask and answer questions that helped us go deeper into the need for defunding the police. These workshops were a place for us, as YFs to explore a topic or activity in depth. We heard many other people’s views and learned from the experiences of others. We wanted to know more and got to deepen our knowledge.

During the week, we found ways to connect in a variety of ways on and off-screen. We deepened friendships across YFs through *Walk and Talks*, paired chats on the phone. We listened independently to podcasts to meditate and reflect on presence, fear, and the unknown. Some of us attended creative writing workshops and wrote our own personal celebrations. We played games (the Codenames competition was fierce), created whimsical stories together, built crazy hats, and each night we checked-in with our Home Groups and sang together before bed. These connections helped us grow as a community despite our distance.

Though the week started off with apprehension for some, we grew to cherish the zoom calls we could share with each other. By having time with friends and exploring our emotions as we face personal challenges at this time we were able to become a more vulnerable and caring community. We hope to meet in person at Castleton University in Castleton, Vermont next year.

Sending love from the Young Friends of New England Yearly Meeting.