

Informational Update: Young Adult Friends Midwinter Retreat

February 2025

Submitted by: Nia Thomas, Program Director (Nia@neym.org)

I write to share the joyful news that our annual midwinter retreat for young adult Friends (ages 18-35) took place this February 14-18 at Woolman Hill Retreat Center in Deerfield, MA.

The retreat was fully enrolled with a participant expected for every available bed at Woolman Hill however after a higher than usual number of last minute cancellations due to a particularly bad flu season, extreme weather conditions, and family emergencies for some Friends, we ended up with a fabulous but smaller than expected group of 30. About one in five registrants were first timers to NEYM events, the majority of whom heard about the retreat from a personal invitation from someone at their meeting. Friends came from twelve meetings across New England, with concentrations of participants from the Boston Area and Western Massachusetts. Care for the gathering was shared across a coordination team of myself, Teen and Outreach Coordinator Collee Williams, and Program Assistant Kenzie Burpee, with many participants taking on key roles such as small group and interest group facilitators. In addition, Tim Dzurilla (Storrs, CT) served as a pastoral care presence and James Golden (Hartford) was our fabulous cook.

The theme was “*a gift to be received: covenant community*” and the program explored how Friends' understanding of the role of community in one's spiritual life is in dialogue with our lives now. Although icy conditions kept some of our guest presenters away, we were grateful to be joined by Abby Fitzpatrick (Northampton, MA) who led the group in an “Elements of Quakerism” style reflection on Tom Gates' Pendle Hill Pamphlet *Members One of Another*. We were also joined by Noah Merrill (Putney, VT) who guided a spacious conversation about how early Friends experiences can offer wisdom to us regarding the cultural tensions we find living into spiritual community today.

In addition to the rich program and time spent in worship, the group spent its evenings in “semi-structured fun” sitting around the woodstoves sharing craft projects, games, songs, poetry, jokes, and even a push-up competition (which I lost).

In closing, I include a cheering group photo and would also like to express our continued gratitude to the dedicated Woolman Hill staff who were hard at work day and night keeping the paths free of ice and snow throughout the weekend-long storm.

