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2017 Ireland JYM Trip Report

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On April 9<sup>th</sup>, at the invitation of Irish Young Friends, a group of four high school Friends from meetings throughout New York Yearly Meeting journeyed to Ireland to attend Ireland Junior Yearly Meeting. The trip was supported by a \$600 grant from the Nurture Coordinating Committee to cover the IJYM program fee. Additional support was received from the Bob Bacon Fund (\$400) and Purchase Monthly Meeting.

Carolyn Ritchie, Youth Coordinator for Ireland Yearly Meeting, met us at the Dublin airport. With Carolyn as our guide, we saw many historical sights along the northern coast, in the southern Wicklow mountains and in the cities of Dublin and Belfast. In Belfast, Carolyn showed us the peace wall separating Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods and took us to the site of the former Quaker House Belfast which provided a much needed safe space for Protestant and Catholics to dialogue.

These experiences gave us a knowledge of Irish history that we did not know of before. It was intriguing to find that Quakers have played an integral role in the lives of many Catholic and Protestant families in Belfast. Through discussions with Carolyn, we also discovered the powerful impact Quakers have had in prisons, all throughout Ireland.

We had the opportunity to speak with other Irish Friends, who we stayed with for the first two nights. We discussed current Irish and US politics and economics as well as learning more about Irish life. We found our hosts to be welcoming and engaging, happy to share their opinions and genuinely interested in ours.

For much of our trip, we had the privilege of participating in IJYM, at the Moyallon Centre in Portadown, Northern Ireland. Quaker Youth from all over Ireland, aged 14-18, came together to participate. The program was run by a committee of youth. We were impressed by their involvement in planning the sessions and activities throughout the week and by the support the group of youth gave to their peers in leadership positions. There was an amazing evenness and balance to the group activities creating a sense of cohesion and connection. In contrast with what we have often experienced in our own JYM, we felt a more unified and shared sense of purpose to their gathering.

They played a number of games that were similar to those that connect us here. They were as eager to learn new games from us as we were to learn ones from them. We returned with Airport, Whomp 'em and Wild Men and left them with Prui and Standing Ovation. Everyone felt very at home and welcomed, especially those of us new to the group. Continued contact through Facebook affirms the open and caring community that they have formed. In these ways our JYM program and their JYM program are similar.

It was interesting for us to see the smoothness and ease of the multiple business meetings the youth held. Quaker Business Meeting, conducted in an efficient, yet respectful and helpful manner is one of the practices we would like to use more effectively in our own NYYM JYM. We were also inspired by an informative and enjoyable session called “Quakers in Space” which we brought back and used successfully this year in our high school group.

Participating in IJYM with the Irish young friends made us realize how much we get out of our time together with other young friends. We were glad to see that Quaker youth in other countries have this great opportunity, just as we have at Powell House and NYYM JYM. IJYM also helped us see that the role of a clerk is to benefit and guide their community not govern it. More broadly, being a Quaker leader means taking action when you feel called to do so and talking with other people about your concerns and working to form solutions together.