

## **2019/20 Annual Report Jamaica Partnership**

### **(Featuring Quaker Life Camp in Jamaica)**

For the 28<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, in 2019 a team from Friends Church of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (formerly NCYM) provided a week of Vacation Bible School in Jamaica. And for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, FCNC and JYM provided Quaker Life Camp for almost 200 youth from July 14 to July 27. The administration of the camp included a director and two assistants, 14 camp counselors, 4 fulltime cooks and 9 FCNC volunteers. The setting for Quaker Life Camp was the former Swift-Purscell Boys Camp at Highgate.

FCNC provided Vacation Bible School materials to several Quaker Meetings who then taught VBS sessions at their meetinghouses. In addition, the two week-long youth camps for ages 6 to 16 provided VBS in the mornings and were based on the format of the Quaker Lake Camp in North Carolina. Campers arrived on Sunday afternoons and stayed until Friday mornings. Spending the night away from home was a “big deal” for many of the campers. Some parents were reluctant to send their children to camp since being away from home had never been done!

Each day began with “exercise” at 6:30am followed by showers, devotions and breakfast. The mornings included Vacation Bible School with group singing and dancing, followed by arts and crafts, Bible stories and games. The campers were divided by age groupings and rotated through the various VBS activities. The afternoons were filled with educational programs, nature and history walks, games and “time for sharing.” Each day concluded with more singing, dancing, skits, storytelling and worship. Thursday evenings were special – a time to say goodbye to old friends, new friends and Camp Counselors; a time to share feelings, and a time for testimonials while sitting around a big bonfire! Several campers each week accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Many campers attending Quaker Life Camp summed up the experience as follows; “this has been the best week of my life” or “I can’t wait to come back next summer!! And as expected, all the campers raved about the food and the great cooks!

Plans were well underway for the 2020 Quaker Life Camp with a selected theme and with new activities when the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world. As a result, everything was put “on hold.” The VBS team postponed organizing meetings and watched as the pandemic spread across the USA and into every community. Travel restrictions went into effect in Jamaica and the USA. It soon became apparent that Quaker Life Camp would not take place in 2020 as previously envisioned.

As the coronavirus spread in the United States and in Jamaica, both countries responded in similar fashion. Schools and businesses, including Jamaican resorts, were closed until further notice, and social measures of keeping a distance of 6-feet or more from others, wearing masks, washing hands frequently, and limited number of persons in a group went into effect.

At the time of this writing, Jamaica seems to have the coronavirus under control as businesses are beginning to re-open. The beaches and rivers are open. Food prices are really high and some regular supplies are not available. Schools and colleges have been closed since March and the fall school sessions remain unknown as folks wait on guidelines from the Ministry of Education.

Worship services are returning with changes - no usual meeting and greeting with hugs or handshakes; just nods, smiles and waves! Worshippers must follow social distancing. Fasting and prayer are practiced daily. One good outcome of COVID – 19 has resulted in an inspiring midweek message prepared by one of the pastors and distributed by email throughout Jamaica Yearly Meeting.

No work trip to Jamaica has occurred in 2020 and it does not look possible at this time; however, when travel restrictions are lifted and Americans are allowed into Jamaica, some structural improvements are needed at Belfield and Highgate Friends Meetings. Sufficient funds are available to complete the work at Belfield.

The Jamaica Adoption project which paired twelve Jamaican and twelve FCNC monthly meetings ran for two years and ended at the end of February, 2020. The project is being evaluated.

At this time, Jamaica Friends are largely safe, healthy and joyful. We look forward to the time when we can resume visits-in-person and enjoy our relationships and our work through the Jamaica Partnership.

If you would like to support or be involved with the 2021 Quaker Life Camp, contact Brent McKinney at [dalebrentmckinney@hotmail.com](mailto:dalebrentmckinney@hotmail.com) or 336-374-4472.