



Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative)

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Seventh Month 30, 2016
To Friends Everywhere,

“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.”

~George Fox

Alive and fresh, we are children of this yearly meeting and we traveled home from places as far away as Montana, South Dakota, Missouri, Minnesota, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Indiana and Germany to be together during this blessed gathering in Iowa. It is striking that geographically we have become a diffuse group but our heartstrings are as strong as they are long. Visiting Friends joined us from Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, North Carolina and New Zealand. The warmth of the weather matched the warmth in our hearts as we converged at Scattergood Friends School and Farm on Seventh Month 26-31, 2016 at the 139th annual session of our yearly meeting.

We searched for Truth this year through our theme “Be not afraid, for I am with you.” In one evening Collection we practiced active-listening in pairs formed by rotating concentric circles of Friends. Imagine “speed-dating” for God. The following evening Greg Elliot, Friends Relations Associate with American Friends Service Committee, and Jeff Kisling from Indianapolis, described how the Quaker Social Change Ministry helps Friends share stories and spiritual exercises, and then work with people closest to problems we hope to solve. Greg reminded us, “Really simple things, right now, really matter.” He encouraged us to overcome fear in accepting God's call for us to co-create the Beloved Community. Robin Mohr, Executive Secretary for Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas helped us understand that we are not separate from any other person or concern on Earth; we share one story; and there are things for each one of us to do that are good and important. “God needs us to know about a lot, and work on a few.” But how can we trust that we are not avoiding work that is meant for us? A Friend shared, “The practice of staying awake to God in myself is how I know I’m not running away.” Stephen Donahoe, Major Gifts Officer at Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) was a joyful presence with us this week; he offered a report on exciting changes made possible at FCNL through the financial support from Friends. In our last Collection, Aaron Fowler and Laura Dungan led us in an evening of joyful, thoughtful, spirit-filled song.

We cannot create the Beloved Community unless we know one another. Are we willing to listen deeply and truly know each other? Can we open ourselves to the transformation available to us through small acts of connection? Are we willing to be changed? The Spirit present in our midst challenged us with these questions, and our hearts were made tender as we took greater risks to connect. Often, it is not apparent how ready we are to reach out, to respond joyfully to the shedding of our masks and the sharing of our true selves. We rediscovered that in sharing the tasks of our faith community our connections are renewed and we are blessed.

We continue our shift from an assumed to a chosen relationship with our beloved Scattergood School and Farm. Miracles happen at the school every day and every school year. We look for ways to bring in youth from around the world and the U.S. who seek a rigorous education in an emotionally supportive, ecologically minded, and spiritually grounded boarding school.

During our State of the Meeting and Query reports we sit together and listen to the voices of our monthly meetings and know our corporate whole a little better; these small meetings express our discernment of Truth. Our Bible study sessions helped us lean into God's Love in order to know that sometimes the things of which we are afraid are much smaller than our fear of them. In our seeking we sometimes forget that God is always with us, just waiting for us to turn and open our hearts. Another moving program was led by our Ministry and Counsel Committee, which built our awareness for tending to the physical and emotional safety of our children and youth.

It is holy to be heard.

Our Junior Yearly Meeting Friends were a joy to us all week. JYM built and displayed a beautiful birdseed mandala which lifted our spirits. They brought adults into the ceremony of dismantling it in the manner of Tibetan Buddhists. In tossing the birdseed we experience the poignancy of lost beauty and we send out a blessing to all of Creation. May our epistle to you, our Friends, be such a blessing as we sadly close our annual sessions. Know the joy that we know - we are not separate; there is no "away". We shall live in one another still.

In love and Friendship,

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Our 2017 yearly meeting will be held 7/25 to 7/30, 2017 at Scattergood School and Farm near West Branch, Iowa. We warmly welcome you to join us.

Iowa Junior Yearly Meeting Epistle to Friends Everywhere

Seventh Month 30, 2016

Dear Friends Everywhere,

Iowa Yearly Meeting Conservative met at Scattergood Friends School and Farm in West Branch, Iowa, from the 26th to the 31st of July, 2016. Our Junior Yearly Meeting had seven young Friends in attendance. We had a fantastic week! Highlights included swimming in the Scattergood Pond and at our annual trip to the Tipton City Pool, going into Iowa City to see a movie, playing Magic, Foosball, Ping-Pong, and Pool, learning to use the Diabolo, and going into West Branch for a quick ice cream run.

On our first day together we watched a short movie on Tibetan Buddhist Monks and how they make sand mandalas out of colored crushed marble. After spending many days making a mandala, the monks will destroy it the following day and deposit the sand with healing prayers into the water near them. We then made our own mandala out of different colors of birdseed, which we dismantled during a ceremony later in the week. Members of the Yearly Meeting were then invited to scatter the seeds around Scattergood campus.

One day we talked about the different names of God, and then walked a labyrinth with prayers in mind using our favorite name for God, and reflected on how this went. Later the same day, Robin Mohr from FWCC came and talked to us about our Quaker craft and about Friends around the world, and Stephen Donahoe from FCNL came and talked about lobbying and how all of us can be lobbyists in our own lives.

Later in the week we went outside and wrote our own haikus about nature, sitting in one place until we noticed details that we hadn't noticed before, and writing about them. We also painted friendship stones for the rest of the Yearly Meeting in many different languages, did Zentangle in a workshop lead by Karen Greenler, had a campfire (with s'mores and singing) at the pond, and hosted our Yearly Meeting's annual talent show on the final night.

It was a great week overall, and we look forward to sessions next year!

Blessings,

David, Reid, Chris, Bing, Liam, Kai, and Arius

Junior Yearly Meeting Friends of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative)