

2014 Illinois Yearly Meeting Exercises

Overheard weather:

Thunder claps, rain pounds, wind gusts.

We are bathed in light.

Friends gathered together in the great, green, growing fields in central Illinois beneath the high ceilings of our meetinghouse. Together in meeting for worship, business sessions, afternoon programs, and evening talks we were challenged by two important themes.

How do we build an inclusive community by listening carefully to each other, speaking our Truth, welcoming those who come among us, and finding a sense of belonging as a Quaker? Do we accept the discomfort of change? Are we called to accept and sit with this discomfort?

Friends allowed themselves to be vulnerable. And in that vulnerability, we heard stories of times when Friends felt excluded and included. These stories were sometimes painful to hear, and yet within each one there was hope as well as a challenge to us to be more welcoming. A Friend shared a story of a particularly vulnerable time when she wanted to leave because it was too hard. Friends held her in love and she stayed.

There was a sense that Friends need to make more than a safe place for stories to be shared. We were challenged to open ourselves and find safety in community with one another, to make a safe place within ourselves where we can hear stories that make us uncomfortable that they may live next to the stories that bring us joy.

We struggled with how we want to express our Quaker faith in a way that speaks for each of us and for all of us. A Friend shared a story that the response to a request for baptism for a couple's baby was not, "We don't do that." It was instead a response that tended to the family's desire to be part of the community.

We were challenged about our complacency about issues of class, gender, socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation, and differing abilities. Blue River Quarterly and Northside Friends Meeting in Chicago challenged us to make our faith visible, to take action to help gays, lesbians, transgendered and other queer people who are being targeted in Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda.

In our review of our faith and practice's section on testimonies, we heard that Friends have come to know that violence can be done by words and deeds. Sometimes these words or deeds may be inadvertent or well-intentioned, and hurt nonetheless.

We were reminded of the amazing things that Illinois Yearly Meeting wishes to have happen: Children's Field Secretary, Peace House on the Prairie, year-round activities, and an Annual Fund. We were encouraged to consider how individual support might impact monthly meeting support. We were moved to think about those who were not able to be here and that we want to remember and keep in our midst those who were not here.

The spirit worked through friends, urging us to greater unity and connection with each other. We are invited to reflect upon messages spoken:

"We have enough time if we seek it."

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26)

"Welcoming without works is dead."

"We need to love the question rather than answer it."

"The best and the worst things that have happened have made us what we are."

"Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul."

(Thomas Merton)

"Remembrance is a way of making use of love."

“We should be undoing oppression in our midst and opening ourselves to deepen and explore the ways to do that together.”

Questions were laid on our hearts during the sessions. We are invited to continue laboring with the themes in our monthly meetings in the coming year.

- * Do we exclude people unintentionally? How can we change this?
- * Do some of the things that we do, in our hope to include people, make them feel more uncomfortable? How can we change this?
- * How does my community support me in becoming the person God hopes I will become? How well do I support others?
- * Do we have a commitment to discerning and following the light within?
- * How do we connect with and reflect the concerns of our younger friends?
- * How do we as large and small meetings reach out to those around us to share our good news?
- * Do our actions represent peace in motion?
- * How do we make our beliefs visible to those who do not share them?
- * Are we inclusive, really?

Our community is faced with numerous and pressing concerns inside and outside our Quaker world. We offer the wisdom of Friends gathered and the hope that we will continue to labor together to find the deeper unity underlying our diversity.

Exercises Committee: Carl Sherrod, Bridget Rorem, Judy Wolicki, Katherine Young

2014 Illinois Yearly Meeting Epistle

Dear Friends Everywhere,

This year we gathered for our 140th session of Illinois Yearly Meeting, from the 18th through the 22nd of Sixth Month, 2014. The spiritual presence of our ancestors drew us deeply into stillness and was palpable as we sat in our meeting house with the surrounding campus grounds, corn and soybean fields, thunderstorms, wind, fireflies, and sunsets.

The experience of our sessions seemed to be an exercise in how to be faithful in the face of challenges: financial, technological, theological, social, and personal. We are delighted with the progress on new parts of our Faith and Practice, work on the budget, environmental concerns and many other areas that Friends have worked on in the last year. Our theme was: Listen, Speak, Welcome, Belong—a Call to Community.

The children worked on faithfulness, carrying boiled eggs tenderly around the campus. And, while all seemed to learn something about faithfully holding precious things, some of the eggs were eaten too. The faithfulness of adults who make our time together possible was shown to the children. The high schoolers and young adults discussed faithfulness to oneself in workshops on sacred sexuality. We square danced together, grateful that the weather made sweet space for this movement of intergenerational joy.

Friends were called to grow in a way we had not been called before. We spoke honestly and from the heart, while beginning to recognize how we exclude and include those among us. Poignant and powerful stories were told which brought profound honesty before us. This calling of truth-telling encourages us to grow to meet one another where we are. We seek to listen and accompany one another, allowing any change that comes to be from the Spirit. This work of faithfulness is like that of Jacob's wrestling with the angel, perhaps being wounded in the process and yet receiving a blessing.

Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name." And he said, "Jacob." And he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed..." And there he blessed him. (Genesis 32:22-31)

We labored with each other passionately and lovingly about gender identity and sexual orientation concerns. We agreed to continue to wrestle, knowing we may suffer wounds, but also recognizing we may receive a blessing. We know that there is a gospel message here in our topic of inclusivity.

In accordance with our Yearly Meeting theme of community and inclusivity we pray that Friends everywhere join us in discerning ways to accept everyone as a child of God, regardless of sexual orientation, race, class, ability, gender identity—and welcome all to our Meetings.

Illinois Yearly Meeting Adult Young Friends Epistle

Greetings from Adult Young Friends of Illinois Yearly Meeting (ILYM) to all Friends worldwide.

We as adult Young Friends (AYF) have experienced increasing momentum and depth of spiritual ministry among ourselves as well as in our participation in the body of the yearly meeting.

AYF potlucks have consistently been a place of fellowship and spiritual depth throughout the year. We are committed to ongoing programming with an emphasis on connecting Friends across geographic distance.

With the highest participation in ILYM Annual Sessions in recent years, AYFs were also led to create a coordinating committee with co-clerks, a treasurer, high school liaison, and coordinators for events, communications, and outreach. For us, these changes indicate an unprecedented level of organization.

The palpable momentum is the manifestation of years of dedicated work, and our hearts are full of joy! Individual young adults report feeling spiritually renewed and challenged. We have found ourselves prepared to participate fully in the life of the meeting, rather than in fellowship alone.

This is the second year in a row that LGBTQ concerns were brought to Annual Sessions, and we were deeply moved. We have a sense that profound social change may be achieved through careful discernment and strengthening the bonds of our communities.

Illinois Yearly Meeting High School Friends Epistle

Introduction- Game show for new attenders

Host: Mark

Host: And our new contestants come on down! We have Kayla Smith, Amal Tamari, Marlana Amos, Kit Perkins, and Liam Gardner! Welcome! Give them all a hand ladies and gentleman

Thursday #1- Dave Wixom's Staph Emporium

1: Laure 2: Marlana 3: Christina

1: Do you feel spiritually lost? Do you need extra inner strength in your life?

2: Do you ever feel like one small feather floating down the endless river of life without any thing to connect you to the fibers of reality?

3: Umm?

1: Well come down to David Wixom's stick emporium to make your own spiritual staph today

Thursday #2- Commercial

Marlana with Laure posing

Attention all ILYM Quakers! We're sending our Friend, capital "F", Laure Goode to Peru and Bolivia on a pilgrimage and we need YOUR help to get her there. How can you support your friend, you ask?

Simply by buying yourself an amazing Quaker t-shirt! To purchase one just find our table at the front of the meeting house.

And Remember: Like George Fox said, "If you don't buy a T-shirt, you're a bad person."

Thursday #3- Two Broke Girls (Dishes)

1: Kayla 2: Claire

1: I'm TIRED of doing dishes for ILYM!

2: I'm doing dishes too but I'm not whining.

1: But I'm all wet!

2: Well ILYM means a lot to all of us, and it only works if we all pitch in.

1: (over done) Wow, you're right. I feel so selfish...

Thursday #4- Storm chasers

1: Sean 2: Annie Teen: Mark Apathetic Sprayer: Kit

Newscaster 1: We are here in McNabb, Illinois, and we are getting reports of a big storm coming our way!

Newscaster 2: -finger to ear- I am being told that the storm is upon us, everyone is warned to stay indoors, in the meeting house basement if possible.

Storm:-sprays both--

Newscaster 1: Oh! Here's one poor soul who has gotten stuck in the storm. What has compelled you to step out into this mess?

Teen: I forgot my phone!

Newscaster 2: Godspeed.

Friday #1- Pudding Shenanigans

1: Quinn 2: Christina

1: Wow! This smells delicious!

2: Thanks! This is actually artisanal pudding, bought from "Dollar General" Now, you lived Milan, this is traditional, no?

1: Yes, actually, the authentic mode of preparation is by using teenagers., Now, mine are top quality. I found these at the High School Friends Bunkhouse!

2:Ooh, local!

1: Yes, you can find them loitering around outside your local 7-11, or at Bed Bath and Beyond.

2: Right! So we have our working surface freshly tarpped so we'll just have them lay down and roll them like so...

1: And we have some pudding already prepared. Care to try some?

2: No.

Friday #2- The Bees

Announcer: Gavin 1: Annie 2: Kayla 3: Claire Bees: Amal, Kit, Sean, Marly

Announcer: Today on cinema buffs, we have a lost film of Alfred Hithcock's, Written by M Night Shamalan, in collaboration with Dick Ashdown, and Rod Serling. Agatha Christie presents... The Bees

Actors: -Panting heavily-

Bees: BUZZZZ

Actors: ahhhh! The bees!

Bees: -Leave-

Actor 1: oh, they're gone

Actor 2: That wasn't bad at all...

Actor 3: I guess the bees were actually inside US all along

Spider: -Enters-

Actors: OH GOD! A GIANT FRACKING SPIDER!

Friday #3- Law and Order

Justice: Gavin Juror: Claire Laure: Laure Marly: Marly Family: All else

Justice: Has the jury reached a decision?

Juror: We have, your honor.

Justice: What is your verdict?

Juror: We find Laure Goode guilty of recording in the second degree. And Marlana Amos guilty of co-clerk in the first degree.

-select parties sobbing- -sound effect-

Friday #4- Pride and Prejudice square dancing

Elizabeth: Claire Charlotte: Quinn Darcy: Marly Hoe Down Announcer: Mason

Elizabeth: Charlotte, he's horrible! Mr. Darcy is a pompous a...(ss)

Charlotte: Lizzie -Shoves her-

Darcy: Ms. Elizabeth Bennet, may I have the pleasure of the first dance?

Elizabeth: Uhhhh -Charlotte shoves her- Yes! -Clears throat- yes.

Darcy: I await it with baited breath (sarcastic) -leaves-

Elizabeth: Uhhh! I just could not think of an excuse quickly enough! And now I must dance with that dreadful man! I would rather my bonnet catch fire!

Charlotte: Lizzie! He's a wealthy man! Make the most of every opportunity! (evil glint in eye)

-Darcy gets Lizzy and you hear "Swing your partner round and round"-

Friday #5- Bob Ross "Happy Trees"

Bob Ross: Annie Painting: Amal

"And now we'll paint a happy little jelly fish.... oops! I have made a mistake!.... -Scribbles out everything- But I don't believe in mistakes. After all, everyone can draw.

Saturday #1- Zoo Safari

Guide 1: Liam Guide 2: Kayla Tourist: Amal Mark: Mark

Guide 1: Here we are at the infamous Miller Park Rain forest.

Guide 2: Let's see what sorts of creatures are about!

-Mark dancing to ipod-

Guide 1: How rare! If you look carefully, you can see the elusive Portlandius Markus.

Guide 2: And what lovely plumage! While it usually is an albino, it seems to have grown many colorful Mark-ings

Tourist: Ooh! Otters! -all walk away from guides-

Saturday #2- Sacred Sexuality PSA

1: Quinn 2: Mason 3: Sean

1: This is a Public Service Announcement:

2: Approach relationships in a way that makes YOU feel good- as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else.

3: Think things through- look before you leap

2: Make sure that all are felt with your spirit and not just your body.

3: And last but definitely not least: always check for consent!

1: This has been a public service announcement from the ILYM HSF.

Saturday #3- Epistle

Narrator: Mason Candyland:Mark Candy-we-ate: Quinn OITNB: Christina Changing channels: Kayla Ensembles: All else

Narrator: Behind the scenes of the making of the creating of the writing of The Epistle: A Quaker Journey

General: "What about Candyland?" "I don't want anyone to know how much candy we ate!" "Orange is the New Black?" -a few yes's, Rose bellows NO, chaos ensues- "Hey! How about changing channels?" -everyone stares at the audience like we're on The Office-

Saturday #4- Bear Grills Midnight Hike and Pizza

1: Liam 2: Mark 3: Amal 4: Christina

1: If you are ever lost in rural Illinois, there are a few things to keep in mind before help arrives.

2: First thing is to find shelter.

3: In this Instance, in the form of a graveyard.

4: We must cuddle puddle for warmth.

3: After exposure, our next greatest danger is starvation.

2: This is the pizza's natural habitat! They must have gone extinct!

1: Or changed their number!

4: Now we're going to starve!

-sadly eat from a bag of chips-

Saturday #5- Staying Awake Olympics

1: Marly 2: Mason Ensemble: All

1: Welcome back to the 2014 Olympic Awake-a-thon.

2: This event features high school friends at ILYM and is sponsored by meetinghouse coffee and Power-aid.

1: We are halfway through this event and tensions are high as people are dropping left and right Lets take a closer look at the Olympians. _____ is on his third Power-aid, _____ is following closely with her second cup at coffee.

2: And ____ taking the lead! I can't believe it! Yes! This is incredible, _____ ahead by a wide margin, all the others have fallen asleep, and _____ won the gold!

Closing- Goodbye to Seniors

-Don't you forget about me plays-

Mason Astill

Quinn McGavin

Sean Robey

Claire Goode

Christina Harrington

all fist pump

Illinois Yearly Meeting 11-13 Year Old Friends Epistle

Greetings from the Illinois Yearly Meeting middle school age 11-13 group. Our program centered on the theme of Community: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Fitting In. We filled a wall in the Fox Hole with cards describing our experiences of including others and of being included, excluding others (unintentionally—of course) and of being excluded, and ways we have found to help us fit into communities.

We had a rhythm circle in which we took turns leading the group. We found early on that having a leader helped us sound better. Playing rhythms together gave us the experience of inclusion, exclusion, and choosing when to be part of the community within the rhythm circle.

Margaret Nelson taught us to make jingle sticks—also called sanctuary shakers and sistrums.

We practiced circus arts, finding community in interests and skill-building. We learned to stilt-walk, to balance peacock feathers, to spin plates, to juggle scarves and balls, and to balance on the rola bola board. We were very encouraging to each other. Mason George taught us diablo.

We read Drama, a graphic novel by Raina Telgemeier, about a group of middle schoolers producing a play, becoming closer, and understanding other people. We were brought closer as a community while reading aloud the parts of middle school students coming together as a community to produce a play. One of our boys read the part of the lead girl character. One of our girls read the part of a boy character who was acting the part of a girl in the book's play. We ignored the fact that many of the kids in the story were gay.

We also read the book Weslandia, about a boy who does not fit into his community, but develops his own civilization and becomes a leader of the other kids. We discussed our common feeling about writing epistles. Surprisingly we shared the same feeling about them.

We are Jad, Kaitlyn, Kiva, Mia, Nathan, Quinn, and Ryan, and adults: Mark, Elizabeth, and Meredith.

Illinois Yearly Meeting 9-10 Year Old Friends Epistle

Dear Meeting,

We had a lot of fun in the 9-10 year old group. We saw a baby deer cross the road. We were worried because we couldn't see its mother. Also we talked about inclusion, made a skit for the talent show,

created stories about different potatoes, and talked, sung and played with visitor including Vanessa Julye, Nancy Jordan, and Adrian Nelson.

In the Light,

The group from Tent Two: Jasmine, Riona, Tiegan, Heidi, Anna, Faith, Anya, Lily and Sandra

Illinois Yearly Meeting 6-8 Year Old Friends Epistle

Peaceful greeting from McNabb, IL and ILYM.

This week we decorated and made a poster for the Variety Show sign up sheets. We tie-dyed t-shirts as symbols of peace. We painted pots for flowers. We planted flower seeds, gave them water and placed them in the sun. We came up with ideas about how we can “plant” peace. We enjoyed taking our snackcups to the kitchen on a “field Trip.” we had two special guest share their gifts with us. Joy told us a story about the desert and showed us the story using sand. Paulette taught us three songs with sign language. Gaby shared a story as well. We made and gave away “Warm Fuzzies.” We also created a Tree of Peace and Thanks. We read books and had “recess.” We missed Katie on Saturday and loved meeting Signe on Thursday. We are all thankful for Zach and Kelly’s gifts in the kitchen , for those who brought snacks and those who worked hard to prepare the site.

Love,

Lorelie, Gwen, Signe, Zara, Jack, Niall, Gaby, Barb, Don