



Yearly Meetinghouse, McNabb, Illinois

Illinois Yearly Meeting *of the Religious Society of Friends*

Consisting of 23 Quaker Meetings and Worship Groups
in Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin

Dear Friends Everywhere,

Sometimes there are mirages on the prairie to confuse one. Heat waves of summer reflecting places miles distant. Sounds carried far on the prairie. A gun shot could be heard three miles away; a "Halllllooo!" Could be heard a mile or more distant, while two people could converse one half miles apart.

The pioneer settlers soon learned that they owed a social as well as a material debt to to the community. They realized it was completely rural. There was no nearby town with any entertainment or culture that the community could take advantage of. So, some of the better educated of the community started all kinds of projects for local people of all ages; literary society, singing school, spelling bees and and writing schools in which young and old took part; there was no generation gap; from the baby in his basket to the teenager in school, each participated in whatever was offered.

The longer I live the more I realize how much I owe to that heritage that nourished me during all my years.

From *Reflections* written by Lucretia Mott Franklin for her 1969 ILYM Plummer Lecture, talking about the late 1800's. She was born in 1874, the same year that ILYM was formed. She was a member of the yearly meeting.

Two years ago, under the banner of *Joy: Still a Gift of the Spirit* we focused our hearts and minds on becoming more inclusive. We sought information and determined actions challenging ourselves to become more inclusive around gender, sexual identity, race, and personal preferences and styles.

Last year, under the banner of *From Mystic Voice to Active Voice* we focused our hearts and minds on actualizing our spiritual concerns for those both far and near. We sought information and determined actions, challenging ourselves to walk the talk.

The joyful stories told during this year have been about our strides with inclusion, our strides with actualizing our spiritual concerns. Certainly, we are a work in progress; for, we are not always able to speak frankly about uncomfortable issues. We acknowledge this and continue on, ever more willing to risk asking, "So do you want to be my friend or do you want to be careful?"

In this way we laid the ground for this year's theme, *Nurturing the Seed of Love*, which has been focused on re-capturing the days described by Lucretia Franklin and becoming a yearly meeting where "...there was no generation gap; from the baby in his basket to the teenager in school, each participated in whatever was offered." Today we call this being an intergenerational meeting.

We lovingly embraced consideration that the seeds we cast on soil that we hoped would be fertile will require nurturance. And, we are ever more mindful that too many seeds, if spread over too large an area, can not be tended properly.

Our children and our young adults are our seeds and our beloved and beautiful Illinois Yearly Meeting campus our fertile ground. And if we accept this we must nurture both.

To that end, both during our Annual Sessions and in our monthly meetings, we have begun to design our programming to be intergenerational. We are organizing our fiscal and people resources to take care of both our younger Friends and our yearly meeting campus.

We note our younger friends are often our examples, offering a pattern for that which we fervently hope to become.

An eleven year old seeks Noel, a member of our Environmental Concerns committee, a seed in her hand, asking him to identify it. Why? Because he and his wife had offered that child's age group an introduction to plant nurturance. She was delighted with his response and set off on an adventure to talk to others, spreading her new knowledge. This indicated a change, we are more deliberate about intentionally celebrating our intergenerational interactions.

An Adult Young Friend reports that while on a hike through prairie grasses she and her friends discussed making choices about fostering community and they plan to stay in touch when they return to their widely dispersed communities. This indicates a change, for this group is composed of 18–35 year olds, individuals who are often in different places in their lives with different needs and interests.

Many Friends have shared stories about their children spending time at our ILYM Campus. And stories about how they came to our campus as children. One friend talked about how his grandfather and father spent time on our property.

We are eager to increase usage of what we have at times called our Peace House on the Prairie.

We sense early signs of what we hope will become a groundswell and have evidence that in our committees' work an intergenerational focus is often included. We seek ways to hire someone to work on programming with our young children and already have someone to work with our high school Friends.

We are deeply excited about our vision—an intergenerational faith community linked geographically to place we have loved and owned since 1874. We note a sense of trust among one another, a vulnerable willingness to share in a safe place, even for those who are first-timers, both young and old. This was especially evident during a folk dancing session on our lawn: most everyone was willing to let themselves dance enthusiastically—without self consciousness.

Of course, as our Field Secretary and our Peace Resources committee noted, we will continue to also do work around prison reform, confronting issues of torture, social inequality, acknowledgement and appreciation of differences, the numerous social tensions confronting middle class Americans and, importantly, connecting with the Light of those across the oceans.

