

The Yearly Meeting

A yearly meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is an association of monthly meetings, preparative meetings, worship groups and quarterly meetings. Its constituent meetings are usually located in the same general geographic region, and share a similar perspective on faith and practice. As the name indicates, a yearly meeting gathers annually to conduct its business, which may include consideration of spiritual concerns of its members and calls to witness to the wider world, as well as such organizational matters as care of property, budgeting and finances, selection of officers and committee members, planning for future events, and other concerns brought forward by monthly meetings, quarterly meetings, or ILYM committees.

Illinois Yearly Meeting was established in 1875 when two quarterly meetings joined to form the new yearly meeting: one with monthly meetings in Iowa originally under the care of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, and the other consisting of monthly meetings in Illinois and Indiana under the care of Indiana Yearly Meeting, now known as Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting. Throughout its history, Illinois Yearly Meeting has included local meetings across a wide region, centered on Illinois but never limited to it. The section of this chapter on Monthly Meetings (p. xx) describes the processes by which a monthly meeting joins or leaves Illinois Yearly Meeting.

Functions of a yearly meeting

A yearly meeting, like any Friends meeting, is a community in which Friends worship together, care for each other, seek together the leadings of the Spirit, and support one another's spiritual growth. Yearly meetings serve their membership by furthering connections between Friends, fostering a more expansive and fuller sense of Quaker community than Friends might attain from their local meetings alone. These connections form as Friends come together for the annual sessions of the yearly meeting, through intervisitation, and by participation in the common work of the yearly meeting through committee meetings or other gatherings throughout the year. Much of the work of the yearly meeting is grounded in its care and concern for the spiritual growth and well-being of its constituent meetings and individual members.

Yearly meetings also help to advance the cause of Quaker witness to the world. Every monthly meeting undertakes such witness; but a yearly meeting, especially one that serves as large a geographical area as ILYM, is in a position to embark on collective action more effectively and with a more powerful voice than any individual meeting. This sort of activity can take a number of forms. It might involve charitable or relief work. It might take the form of peace and reconciliation work or draft counseling. It might involve using our collective voice to urge a civic policy consistent with Quaker values. It might be for the purpose of involvement in the wider Quaker world or any other expression of Friends testimonies.

The yearly meeting writes and promulgates its own Faith and Practice, which articulates the guiding principles, organizational processes, and collected expressions of faith of Friends it serves. In doing so it provides a structure that serves to affirm what it means to be a Quaker in general and an ILYM Quaker in particular.

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Relationship of the yearly meeting to individual members, monthly meetings and other regional meetings

Individuals are members of the yearly meeting by virtue of their membership in one of its constituent monthly meetings. In the case of Illinois Yearly Meeting, the authority of the yearly meeting is not over the monthly meetings individually but rather through them collectively. Monthly meetings are independent financial entities from Illinois Yearly Meeting. They control their own finances and own their own property.

As described in “Setting up, laying down, and re-affiliation of monthly meetings” (pp. xx–xx), the quarterly and yearly meetings have a role in the establishment and laying down of monthly meetings. In addition, the yearly meeting has a responsibility to nurture the spiritual health and growth of monthly meetings and individual members of all ages. The ILYM Field Secretary, the Youth Coordinator, the Ministry and Advancement Committee, the Religious Education Committee and other positions and committees have been put in place to support the spiritual care of the monthly meetings and their members.

Relationship of ILYM and Clear Creek Monthly Meeting

Illinois Yearly Meeting has a longstanding close relationship with Clear Creek Monthly Meeting. Clear Creek Monthly Meeting has met in the vicinity of McNabb, Illinois since before the establishment of Illinois Yearly Meeting. In recent history, Clear Creek Friends have met for worship at the Yearly Meeting House or at the Clear Creek House of Illinois Yearly Meeting. The yearly meeting and monthly meeting therefore have a unique relationship, and both seek to be continually mindful to communicate and clarify their respective needs and responsibilities with regard to the buildings and grounds.

Relationship of ILYM with the wider Quaker world

Illinois Yearly Meeting benefits from association with national and international Quaker organizations that support the yearly meeting in various ways and help further its witness to the world. Illinois Yearly Meeting is affiliated with Friends General Conference and sends representatives to serve on FGC’s Central Committee, its governing board. Illinois Yearly Meeting also sends representatives to the American Friends Service Committee Corporation and to the Friends Committee on National Legislation General Committee. Illinois Yearly Meeting is affiliated with Friends World Committee for Consultation, and sends representatives to the Section of the Americas. As the yearly meeting is moved, and Friends agree to serve, ILYM sends representatives to other Quaker organizations such as Quaker Earthcare Witness; Friends for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns; Friends Peace Teams; and others.

Illinois Yearly Meeting communicates with other Yearly Meetings around the world through the tradition of sending and receiving epistles, or letters, composed at annual sessions. Excerpts of selected epistles from other yearly meetings are read aloud during annual sessions, and ILYM’s epistle is sent to yearly meetings around the world to share spiritual concerns, challenges, leadings, and accomplishments of ILYM.

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Organization and Structure of ILYM

The Corporation

In 2004, Illinois Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends was incorporated in the State of Illinois under the Illinois General Not For Profit Corporation Act as a regional church. (Previously, Illinois Yearly Meeting had been organized in 1875 as a trust under 1872 enabling legislation.) Our incorporation bylaws were approved by the yearly meeting in 2007, stressing the continuity of operation of Illinois Yearly Meeting and its Quaker business principles and practices. Incorporation provides protection of individual officers or stewards of the yearly meeting from legal liability by shifting such liability to the corporation. The clerk, assistant clerk, and two stewards act as the Board of Directors for the corporation, and a treasurer serves as the Registered Agent for ILYM, the liaison between the State of Illinois and Illinois Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. The Board of Directors represents Illinois Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in matters that require legal authority.

Ownership of property

The yearly meeting may purchase and own property. The Illinois Yearly Meetinghouse, now on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1874 near what is now McNabb, Illinois in anticipation of the first sessions of the Yearly Meeting. Over the years, additional land has been purchased and various changes have been made to land owned on both the south and north sides of “Quaker Lane” or County Road 350 North adjacent to the 1874 Meetinghouse grounds: construction of a dining hall later converted to the Junior Yearly Meetinghouse, construction of a dormitory, construction of a campground with bathhouse, the re-location of the Junior Yearly Meetinghouse to the north property, the disassembly of the dormitory, and the repurposing of its materials to build six cabins on the north property. In 2009 the Yearly Meeting purchased approximately six acres immediately to the west of the Meetinghouse property, including a farmhouse that was subsequently renovated and is now known as Clear Creek House of ILYM.

Officers of the Yearly Meeting

Officers of the Yearly Meeting are nominated by committee and approved by the assembled yearly meeting. The following are descriptions of officers that have been of service to Illinois Yearly Meeting, but this list does not limit or prescribe the possibilities. The yearly meeting may create officers and assign responsibilities to best serve its circumstances and needs at a given time.

The work of the *presiding clerk* is to prepare the agenda for the business meeting, to help set the worshipful tone of the gathering, to recognize those who wish to speak, to collect and articulate the sense of the meeting, and to help maintain right order in the proceedings. He or she should keep informed of ongoing activities of the Yearly Meeting during the year so as to be responsive to issues as they arise. The clerk also carries on correspondence relating to the business of the yearly meeting. A clerk’s committee is appointed to assist him or her in this role. The *assistant presiding clerk*, who is ordinarily an incoming or outgoing presiding clerk, assists with the clerk’s duties and may substitute for the clerk if needed.

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The *recording clerk* composes minutes to be read back to the assembled body for approval, thus recording the decisions and actions of the yearly meeting. The *assistant recording clerk*, ordinarily an incoming or outgoing recording clerk, assists as needed.

The *reading clerk* reviews incoming epistles from other yearly meetings, and selects portions of these to be read at the start of business sessions. He or she may also be asked to read other items before the yearly meeting, and he or she serves on the committee that drafts the annual outgoing epistle from Illinois Yearly Meeting to the wider Quaker world.

The financial transactions of the yearly meeting are entrusted to a *treasurer* or *co-treasurers*, who receive contributions to the yearly meeting and pay out obligations or contributions as directed by the yearly meeting. The treasurer makes reports on the financial status of the yearly meeting, and works closely with the finance committee, the stewards, and committee clerks as needed.

The *stewards* of Illinois Yearly Meeting have the responsibility and authority to manage the real estate and tangible property of Illinois Yearly Meeting, at the direction of the annual sessions. They may appoint and/or engage persons or companies as required for these purposes. Stewards will represent the Yearly Meeting in renovating the buildings and grounds; in securing insurance; and in handling easements, leases and other management needs as they arise. Among these may be planning, zoning, and building permit issues, and property tax matters. Illinois Yearly Meeting may direct others to assist the stewards in specific matters.

Other positions

In addition to the positions listed above, the yearly meeting may appoint Friends to new or existing positions as needed to accomplish the work of the yearly meeting. Examples of such positions are editor(s) of a yearly meeting publication, a records librarian to oversee the collection and archiving of yearly meeting records, and a website coordinator to oversee and update a yearly meeting website.

Yearly Meeting employees

Illinois Yearly Meeting may employ individuals to serve the yearly meeting as the need arises and funds are available. The yearly meeting in annual sessions minutes the desire and financial ability to hire an employee. The yearly meeting may delegate the work of writing a position description, posting announcements, and interviewing and selecting a candidate to a committee which is given oversight for a particular position. The final approval for hiring is given by the yearly meeting in its annual sessions, unless delegated to the Continuing Committee. A Personnel Manual sets forth guidelines for hiring, compensation, and oversight of the yearly meeting's employees. The number of employees and their position descriptions are at the discretion of the yearly meeting. The following paragraphs give brief descriptions of employee positions that are serving identified needs of Illinois Yearly Meeting at the time of this writing. Detailed descriptions of the qualifications, responsibilities, and expectations for each position are maintained in ILYM's Personnel Manual.

The many duties of the *Administrative Coordinator* include keeping a calendar of ILYM-related events, sending out yearly meeting news and announcements, and posting relevant information on the yearly meeting website. He or she collects and records data on membership from ILYM's constituent monthly meetings, assists in the preparation of ILYM publications, and

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facilitates the distribution of logbooks and other materials to committees and planning groups. Certain duties of the administrative coordinator are associated with annual sessions, such as collecting and making available reports and other documents in advance of the meetings, overseeing registration, and coordinating many logistic details that are necessary for the sessions to run smoothly.

The work of the *Field Secretary* is to focus on the spiritual nurture of ILYM's constituent meetings and worship groups. The Ministry and Advancement Committee has oversight of the Field Secretary, and may work closely with him or her to identify needs within the yearly meeting. It is understood that each person who fills the role of Field Secretary brings different gifts to the work, and that person is trusted to discern how to best use his or her gifts while working among Friends. That work may include visitation; offering workshops, retreats, or meetings for reconciliation; responding to needs brought forward; and encouraging the work of the Spirit in local or regional meetings.

ILYM's *Youth Coordinator* works closely with the Youth Oversight Committee and the clerks of the high school young friends to plan and carry out their gatherings, both at the annual sessions and throughout the year. In addition to meeting at the annual sessions, high school age Friends typically gather for three "Quakes", at least one of which has traditionally involved young Friends from other yearly meetings. The Youth Coordinator also serves as a resource person for monthly meetings and encourages youth participation in yearly meeting activities and service.

Yearly Meeting committees

Much of the work of the yearly meeting is carried out by committees that meet as needed during and between ILYM's annual sessions to accomplish their work. A committee is often where Friends first bring concerns for corporate discernment, where proposals for actions are drafted and seasoned, where minutes are composed, where the budget is drafted, and where Friends work together on maintenance or other tasks related to the buildings and grounds. Committees bring forward proposals for the yearly meeting's consideration, and they need its approval before taking action, for example, before committing funds or speaking on behalf of the yearly meeting.

Standing committees, in general, include committees that address ongoing needs and concerns of the yearly meeting, including spiritual support of its members, support for the organizational and fiscal well-being of the yearly meeting, maintenance of its property, and support for the service and witness of the yearly meeting.

Matching the gifts and talents of individual Friends with the needs of the yearly meeting and its work is the concern of the *Nominating Committee*. Nominating committee members seek out Friends to serve as yearly meeting officers, committee members, committee clerks, and representatives from ILYM to wider Quaker organizations, and the committee brings their names to the yearly meeting for consideration.

The *Finance Committee* is responsible for preparing the proposed annual budget for Illinois Yearly Meeting, for providing guidance and support to the treasurer(s), and for putting into place procedures that serve the yearly meeting in receiving, maintaining, and disbursing funds.

Among the responsibilities of the *Ministry and Advancement Committee* is care for the spiritual life of monthly meetings and worship groups in the yearly meeting. It undertakes this in

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conjunction with the ILYM Field Secretary, for whom it is the committee of oversight. Members of the committee have often undertaken visitation among meetings and organized activities to promote spiritual development among Friends. The committee may be called upon to assist meetings who are struggling with conflict or other internal issues.

While standing committees are generally expected to exist long-term, the yearly meeting may from time to time decide to alter the configuration of its committees to adapt to changing circumstances. Whatever the particular configuration of committees at a given time, the yearly meeting is advised to consider making provisions for committee oversight of such matters as:

- Maintenance of buildings and grounds
- Policies and practices regarding yearly meeting employees
- Support for religious education at the monthly meeting and yearly meeting levels
- Support for high school aged Young Friends
- Editing and distribution of yearly meeting publications, both paper and electronic
- Provision for the long-term well-being of the yearly meeting, both materially and spiritually
- Maintenance of a yearly meeting handbook of current policies and practices
- Advancement of Friends' testimonies

Up-to-date descriptions of the composition and responsibilities of ILYM committees is maintained in the Illinois Yearly Meeting Handbook (see pp xx – xx).

Ad hoc committees may be appointed by the yearly meeting to address a specific concern which is relatively short-lived, which lies outside the scope of any standing committee, and/or which requires input from several existing committees. The members of the committee, the expected tenure of the committee, and the body to which the committee will report are decided at the time it is formed. When the specific concern has been addressed to the satisfaction of the yearly meeting, the committee is laid down.

The annual sessions

Illinois Yearly Meeting gathers for several days of annual sessions each summer at the historic Illinois Yearly Meetinghouse near McNabb, Illinois. Members and attenders of constituent monthly meetings, preparative meetings, and worship groups, members of other yearly meetings, representatives from wider Quaker organizations, and individual seekers are all welcome and encouraged to attend the annual sessions. In addition to daily sessions to consider the business of the Yearly Meeting, the annual gathering ordinarily includes invited speakers, worship sharing groups, workshops, programs for children and teens, time for committee meetings, time for worship, and opportunities for recreation and fellowship.

For many Friends, the annual gathering is a time of spiritual refreshment and renewal, as they encounter or renew relationships with Friends from other meetings and engage together in worship and in the work of the Spirit. Speakers from within the yearly meeting and beyond it share their work and bring insight and inspiration. Joy may be found in singing, in shared work, in the beauty of the landscape, in watching the children grow from year to year.

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Bringing Business to the Yearly Meeting

Most of the business at yearly meeting annual sessions comes by way of its committees, whose representatives report on the committee's work and bring proposals for action by the yearly meeting as needed.

An individual Friend with a concern or leading should ordinarily take it first to their monthly meeting or to an appropriate yearly meeting committee. If a monthly meeting decides that a concern should be raised to a wider group, the next step is for the monthly meeting clerk or representative to take the concern to a quarterly meeting, if available, or to the continuing committee of the yearly meeting. From a quarterly meeting or the continuing committee, a concern may be placed on the agenda for consideration at the yearly meeting annual sessions, or it may be referred to a yearly meeting committee for further discernment.

A concern brought forward by a yearly meeting committee would similarly be brought to the yearly meeting continuing committee, which would proceed as described above. While such a process is not mandated, it allows leadings and concerns to be examined and held in the Light by smaller groups, so that by the time a recommendation or call for action comes to the yearly meeting it has been well "seasoned".

Decision-making at the yearly meeting level

Friends in attendance at the business meeting during annual sessions are welcome to speak as recognized by the clerk. Decisions are made through discernment of the sense of the gathered body of Illinois Yearly Meeting at the annual sessions and need not be ratified by its constituent monthly meetings.

There may be situations in which the yearly meeting cannot reach unity or for some other reason may not be able to make a decision during the annual sessions. The yearly meeting at annual sessions can choose to minute that Continuing Committee has authority to act on specific items during the year.

Decisions and actions of the yearly meeting are articulated and approved during the session and are recorded as written minutes. The recorded minutes of the Yearly Meeting make up the record of its actions and are published in booklet form each year after annual sessions and also made available to all on the Yearly meeting website.

Epistles and Exercises

During the annual sessions a committee is appointed to write an epistle, or letter, to Friends in other yearly meetings and organizations. The epistle conveys the yearly meeting's spiritual message, based on the concerns, actions, and insights arising during the yearly meeting sessions. After approval by the yearly meeting body the epistle is communicated to Friends world-wide.

It has been the practice of Illinois Yearly Meeting to have a separate committee write a summary of "exercises" of the yearly meeting sessions, reflecting that which has inspired or moved the meeting during their gathering. The exercises may record events or significant ministry that would not appear in the business session minutes. Both the exercises and epistle are recorded in the yearly meeting minute book, but, ordinarily, only the epistle is sent to other groups of Friends.

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The Jonathan W. Plummer Lecture

Beginning with the 1961 sessions, Illinois Yearly Meeting has followed a tradition of having one of its members present at the annual sessions an address named in honor of ILYM's first clerk and "father" of Friends General Conference, Jonathan W. Plummer. The original minute simply named the lecture as an opportunity "to hear from a member of the Yearly Meeting," without restricting the content. Friends have typically chosen to share their spiritual journey or to share spiritual insights or concerns from their lives. After presentation at the annual sessions, the Plummer Lecture is published and disseminated.

Children, High School Young Friends and Adult Young Friends

The young people of Illinois Yearly Meeting are a treasured part of the community. At annual sessions, the children participate in a religious education program planned by yearly meeting Friends. There are opportunities for organized recreation, crafts, service projects, and free play.

The *High School age Young Friends*, under the supervision of the Youth Oversight Committee and Youth Coordinator, help to plan their own yearly meeting experience, and they appoint their own clerks to oversee their business meetings and to record minutes. They write an epistle to share their experiences with the wider Quaker world. Throughout the year Young Friends and their adult advisers plan additional gatherings for ILYM high school Friends, or host or participate in gatherings with Young Friends from neighboring Yearly Meetings.

Adult Young Friends, from ages about 18 to about 35, may plan gatherings, outings, business meetings, or other activities specifically for Adult Young Friends in addition to participating in the scheduled yearly meeting proceedings. Adult Young Friends may appoint their own clerks and write an epistle describing their particular experiences and concerns. They may plan activities and gatherings throughout the year as time and energy permits.

Planning and carrying out the work of the annual sessions

Planning for the annual sessions has typically been divided into different areas of responsibility which are delegated on a rotating basis among planning groups, each composed of members of monthly meetings from a designated geographic region of the yearly meeting. The planning and preparation tasks include choosing a theme, inviting evening speakers, inviting an ILYM Friend to give the Plummer Lecture, organizing workshops and worship sharing groups, securing kitchen staff to provide meals, preparing the site, planning for the children's program, and organizing any other special events during the week. The yearly meeting's administrative coordinator has generally taken responsibility for publicity, registration, coordination of housing, and certain logistics of preparing for the annual sessions.

Much of the daily work during the annual sessions, such as serving food, cleaning common areas, and making sure consumable supplies are replenished, is done by those who sign up for volunteer jobs each day. The ILYM handbook and regularly updated logbooks provide specific details about the tasks of the planning groups and the distribution of work during the sessions.

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Continuing the work of the yearly meeting between sessions – Continuing Committee

The Continuing Committee of Illinois Yearly Meeting generally meets once each fall and once each spring to consider the work of Illinois Yearly Meeting between annual sessions. Membership of the Continuing Committee includes all ILYM Friends, who are encouraged to attend its meetings and participate in its business. Effective functioning of the Continuing Committee is best accomplished if those in attendance include at least officers of the yearly meeting, an appointed representative from each monthly meeting and worship group, representatives from the High School Young Friends group and the Young Adult Friends group, clerks of all ILYM standing committees and ad hoc committees, and clerks of constituent regional groups. The yearly meeting clerk presides over the proceedings and the recording clerk prepares minutes.

The main functions of Illinois Yearly Meeting's Continuing Committee are to move forward business that has been initiated by the sense of the business meeting at the previous annual sessions and to prepare new business that will come before the next annual sessions. Continuing Committee hears progress reports from committees working on yearly meeting business and from the planning groups working to prepare for the next annual sessions, allowing committees to respond to one another's work and to coordinate as needed. Committees and monthly meetings are encouraged to bring new business to continuing committee meetings where Friends help to discern whether a particular concern or request for action is ready to come before the yearly meeting as a whole or whether it would benefit from further study or action within a smaller group, such as one of the committees.

On occasion, Continuing Committee may be called upon to take action that would ordinarily occur during annual sessions. The business meeting at annual sessions may delegate a decision or action on a particular item of business to the Continuing Committee by approving a minute specifying the decision or action to be taken. In addition, there are some circumstances in which the Continuing Committee may need to take action that has not been anticipated ahead of time, such as dealing with sudden personnel vacancies, emergency repairs to property, and the like.

The Handbook

Illinois Yearly Meeting maintains a Handbook, to provide an up-to-date compilation of policies, procedures, practices and organization of the Yearly Meeting. The document is under the care of the Handbook Committee which reviews minutes from the annual session for decisions that represent changes to current practice. They may bring the changes to the Handbook to the annual session or Continuing Committee to ensure they have accurately reflected the intent of the minutes or to seek clarification of proposed text.

ILYM Faith and Practice

While the ILYM Handbook records details of procedures and practices of the yearly meeting that may change with particular circumstances, ILYM's Faith and Practice intends to reflect the enduring elements of our faith and our practice that provide the foundation of our identity as Friends, and as Friends of Illinois Yearly Meeting. Changes to the ILYM Faith and Practice should be undertaken with caution and only after careful discernment. Should Illinois

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Yearly Meeting decide that revisions are in order, the yearly meeting shall appoint a committee to propose such revisions and bring their recommendations to the yearly meeting for consideration.