

Exercises from the 145th Annual Sessions.

The 145th Annual Sessions of Illinois Yearly Meeting can be characterized as electric. From our morning contemplative meetings for worship to calls for activism throughout the day, these yearly meeting sessions exploded with enthusiasm. We embraced the theme, Facing Fear with Faith, with gusto.

On Wednesday night we joined in the vortex created by an animated sermon from Amelia Kegan, the Legislative Director on Domestic Policy for Friends Committee on National Legislation. “Fear Not” she told us, one of many Biblical references. “Act out of love” because we are wired to be activists. And we, just ordinary people, responded. We were not just nudged but caught up in her words.

Even the children’s program was lively, energetic, active. These young Friends explored nature up close, very up close. They found a live toad. Made butterflies. And the swings never seemed to stop swinging.

Last winter, the water pipes at Clear Creek House were bursting with enthusiasm with help from the polar vortex. But as always, Dick Ashdown was here to take care of it and then to call the other Stewards along with Maintenance, Planning, and Envisioning into action. We have been so grateful for Dick’s presence, over fifty years of faithful service as Steward. We gave him a cake.

We were disappointed but understanding that our Clerk Cathy Garra was unable to attend the sessions. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief that David Shiner was able to sit in the clerk’s chair and guide us through our business. We appreciated one last year of Joy Duncan’s work as our Children’s Religious Education Coordinator.

We again welcomed visiting Friend, David Eley, from Ohio Conservative Meeting who felt led to our gathering. We felt enriched by his vocal ministry in meeting for worship. In Thursday’s centered worship, the word “open” arose among us and continued to come up the rest of the weekend. Friday morning’s worship in the ministry and silence brought forward themes of exploring our sense of Inward Light and being led by God. Saturday, our memorial worship reminded us of how important we are to each other in this community.

Our worship queries explored fear and faith. As often happens, these queries helped us to tell our stories, had us going in unexpected ways, and opened our hearts. The workshops, on varied subjects, had a similar effect. We came away with new direction.

Thursday night, Aaron Fowler and Laura Dungan showed how singing can overcome our fears. Towards the end of the evening, we all sang out, shook our rattles, bells, and waved our scarves to *This Little Light of Mine* and other songs. The next night, we danced on the lawn, all ages, tiny to tall, not only participating but were treated equally as partners.

Saturday night speaker, Eileen Flanagan, started her talk with the song “I am open. I am willing.” She affirmed that Quakers are a perfect fit to face the problems in the world today. Her message given extemporaneously from the silence, involved us as participants in our own understanding of hearing a leading. Perhaps we could be inspired like the first Quaker in the area, whose gravestone in the Quaker cemetery down the road, tells of his work bringing the Quaker message to this part of Illinois.

Our business proceeded in a Friendly manner all leading to our fourth session when we approved the complete written version of Faith and Practice at Illinois Yearly Meeting. After 27 years of committee discernment and loving consideration, the yearly meeting is now moving into the final stages of having a bound book

Today we anticipate the Plummer Lecture given by Gwen Weaver, “What Canst Thou Say?”

Annual Sessions is a time we come together to understand the sense of the meeting in our business, to take care of our campus and put things in order, and to nurture each other in our spiritual paths. This year we take home to our local meetings the energy we felt here together and give it to whatever action we are led to take.

Respectfully submitted by
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