

Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) 143rd Annual Session

Epistle to Friends Everywhere

7/25/2020

"I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the gospel, period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned with the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, 'Now is that political or social?' He said, 'I feed you.' Because the good news to a hungry person is bread." - Desmond Tutu

In recent years past, we have held our annual gathering on the campus of Scattergood School and Farm. This year, because of the pandemic Covid 19, we met for a much shorter session of only 2 1/2 days. For the very first time, we also met not in person, but completely online.

The theme of our gathering was *Finding Hope in Troubled Times*. Our program schedule recreated online many of our favorite activities and practices. The very first opening worship was deeply settled and rich in its vocal ministry. There was early morning Bible Study to feed our spiritual lives. The two evening presentations were designed to challenge and encourage us. In the first one we learned how to do worship sharing and discovered a joy that occurs when we listen to each other without the need to respond. There is community to be found inside the silences between us. The second evening was set aside to introduce us to our new Head of Scattergood School and Farm, John Zimmerman. We join with school faculty, staff and students to enter a new stage of many exciting changes including a newly added middle school, headed by Jamie Newton.

We had times to visit and catch up with old Friends and meet new ones, only now it was all scheduled and done online instead of sitting on the benches in front of the Main. We washed our own dishes at home instead of together after sharing a meal of food harvested from the Scattergood Farm.

Our committees met online and finished most of their reports before sessions began, instead of sitting together and sweltering in small hot rooms while they hashed out details. There was no late night singing in the meeting house, and also missed, perhaps most of all, were the voices of children playing outside our windows while we labored to find the words that spoke for all of us.

We found that in all our the monthly meetings across the large geographic area that is IYMC, Friends grapple with how best to join the work of healing the pain of violence, racism, greed and the economic exploitation so prevalent in our country.

These are uncertain times, and yet the discovery of many gifts this turbulence also offers came up over and over during our time together:

*the pleasure of welcoming so many new Friends to our monthly meetings and this gathering.

*the opportunity to stretch ourselves and adapt to new ways of doing that we never knew existed.

*the opportunity to reflect on what we miss, what is good, what we can let go and what we need to hold onto.

In this year 2020, Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) held its 143rd annual sessions, which means we have been gathering (at least) since the year 1877, or even earlier.

It doesn't take a historian to realize that some of those annual sessions were held in times of rejoicing and gratitude for prosperity, good harvests and good health.

In other years, Friends met during times of war, drought, civil unrest, and pandemics. And many of those years, like this one, were times of uncertainty.

Our theme was *Finding Hope in Troubled Times*, and we spent these days together exploring how to do this. Being together reminded us that in both good times and bad, what we are called to never changes: to Love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds and all our strength; and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

This love gives us seeds to sow in the world... and so doing we join others in good work that started long before we were born, and will continue long after we are gone as we accompany each other along the way.

We will continue to work in our uncertain times, our troubled times, finding comfort in the words of poet Czeslaw Milosz,

*" Early we receive a call, yet it remains incomprehensible.
and only late do we discover how obedient we were."*

We hope you will be able to join us when we plan to meet again, God willing, at Scattergood Friends School and Farm, near West Branch, Iowa, from 7th month, 21 to 7th month 25, 2021.

Deborah Dakin, clerk,
Carol Gilbert, assistant clerk