



ILYM Meetinghouse, McNabb, Illinois

Illinois Yearly Meeting *of the Religious Society of Friends*

Consisting of 22 Quaker Meetings and Worship Groups
in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin

2022 Illinois Yearly Meeting Epistle

Dear Friends Everywhere,

We send you love from amidst the cornfields and soybean of Illinois. Rejoicing in our in-person reunion for yearly meeting this year, we welcomed Friends to our 148-year-old meeting house and even met some babies who had not been born the last time we were together.

Great wind and great heat greeted us and we felt the abundant energy infused into our pores. That energy continued covering our sessions, evident in gathered meetings for worship, the children's happy shouts, and smiles while dancing on the lawn. We felt something of a resurrection from the anxiety of the past two years and recharged to face the future.

Today we celebrate Juneteenth, the anniversary of the order, at the end of the Civil War, freeing the last enslaved people in Texas, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation. In our meeting for business, we approved moving an ad hoc committee on anti-racism to a standing committee, the Racial Equity and Education Committee, reflecting a new commitment to continue to work on these issues for as long as the leading is given.

Our theme for the annual sessions was Creating Unity Despite Separation. We had kept our yearly meeting alive and active for two years by meeting on Zoom because of threats from COVID. This year we appreciated coming together in-person all the more. Here we have a strong sense of belonging. The richness of the soil surrounding us seems to ground and center us. The trees provide a cover for our activities and a shelter from the heat. The old meeting house itself with its history, its architecture, and the care that it needs, seem to tie us together as the Spirit ties us in our worship.

We found a new sense of being present was also possible. Using technology, several Friends unable to come to the meetinghouse, joined us for worship, business, and speakers. Those on Zoom were glad that they were able to see the meetinghouse as those on campus were glad see the faces on Zoom. We will continue to work on finding ways in which the technology can serve us.

Unity, we learned, does not need to be static. Building relationships to find a new unity was a theme expanded by our speakers, Gretchen Castle, Bobby Trice, and Karen Tibbals. Offering spiritual hospitality can break down prophetic resistance. Using storytelling to tell our own truths help others to understand us. Living out Jesus words, "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you" [Matthew 5:44] softens and opens our hearts.

Unity can be solemn. At the end of sessions, the heat wave broke and the wind quieted, just in time for our memorial meeting. We gave thanks for the lives of many pillars of our community this year. We continue to feel very close to them as we look around the campus.

Unity can be beautiful. The Environmental Concerns Committee planted a native pollinator garden on our property. It is a place of contemplation, hope, and renewed stewardship of the earth.

Unity can be active. Being in-person revitalized our children and teen programs. The high school bunk house, with air conditioning, became a refuge during the heat. Mixed ages made crafts together and created colorful peace wheels.

Mostly we found that unity is joyful. Over and over at our sessions this year, we felt a sense of joy. We understand many issues in the world seem insurmountable and yet we feel joy in searching for God's order. Perhaps the rustling that we hear in the corn fields and the trees is like "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind" [Acts 2:2] and has inspired us like it inspired the early Apostles of Christ.

Illinois Yearly Meeting, Sixth Month, 19, 2022