

July 3, 2025

Western Yearly Meeting  
203 S. East Street  
Plainfield, IN 46168

Greetings to Friends Everywhere:

Western Yearly Meeting met at Quaker Haven Camp in Syracuse, Indiana from June 30 to July 3, 2025 for its 168th annual session. Held at the Camp to honor its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this change of location encouraged us to enjoy family-centered activities, recall the camping experiences of our youth, and involve the next generation in making memories. By considering the themes of Creation, Transformation, Renewal, and Celebration suggested by Romans 12:1-2, we entered into a fuller understanding of what it means to be a vital link in our meeting and secular communities.

Days began with devotional messages. Olivia Kessinger gave the first message on "To Know and Be Known." She encouraged us to show mercy and walk with others, especially holding in mercy and love those with whom we have had conflicts. Michael Sherman shared his beautiful art of hand carved wooden bowls as an illustration of examining our relationship with God and stepping out and accepting change and risk to be transformed. Tom Rockwell gave the final day's devotion. He presented on the situation of Friends and how Western Yearly Meeting can respond to the decline of Friends to bring new hope and growth. Tom's queries caused a Godly-covered Meeting as many Friends present rose to speak a wide variety of loving messages.

Meeting for business followed devotions. While most of the business was routine, there were a few areas of concern that received attention. One area of note concerned observation based on the annual statistics reports provided by the meetings. It was noted that the declining number of Junior resident members does not indicate a positive outlook for the future. The question becomes, "How can we engage the youth around us?" in meaningful ways. Another area of concern is the accuracy of the number of members reported. Meetings were encouraged to look seriously at their membership rolls and update them to reflect current active members. Although the truth may be difficult to accept, only an honest look at reality will let Meetings flourish in the future. We were encouraged to look beyond just Western Yearly Meeting to see how we can unite with other Friends groups to strengthen and grow our Friends community.

Early afternoon workshops on Tuesday were designed with fun in mind, incorporating art projects, games, and creative challenges as we explored each topic. These sessions included learning about creating change through legislation (Friends Committee on National Legislation, Sarah Johnson); Intercultural Community (Right Sharing of World Resources, Megan Fair); Quaker Testimonies/SPICES (Jim Fussel); Friends Journal projects (Renzo Carranza); Conflict Resolution (Shawn McConaughey); the importance of Women in Ministry (Marlene Pedigo); and the importance of estate planning (Everance, Steve Bustos). Wednesday afternoon started with a Memorial Service, rejoicing in the memories of those who have led the way for us. This was followed by a Friends United Meeting presentation. A new opportunity to work in service together was shared in painting the Quaker Haven chapel. It benefited the camp and benefited the painters in sharing an act of love together.

Late afternoons were used for a typical fun time at camp! Games, swimming, boating, hiking, and other traditional outside activities were encouraged. Enjoying these recreational activities as family and friends helped build the sense of community and strengthen bonds of faith. Building memories of shared times of fun and fellowship are the “glue” that hold us together in hard times.

Instead of a table of arts and crafts for sale this year, the Christian Outreach Board decided to publish a cookbook with the proceeds going to support the Mesquakie and Kickapoo Native American Centers. Marilyn Tucker and others worked hard to publish this Quaker cookbook. The cookbooks were available for sale and have many special connections to Western Yearly Meeting.

Two special minutes of appreciation were approved. The first was to Dale Graves who, before his death, made sure that the Friends Disaster Service trailer was stocked with good working tools. The trailer and tools were formally approved to be given to Quaker Haven Camp. A minute of appreciation was approved to honor Dale Graves for his foresight, devotion, stewardship and leadership in supporting Quaker Haven Camp. The second was to Brandon Dennis, Director of Quaker Haven Camp. Brandon is legendary for his decades of hard work at Quaker Haven. The camp has grown tremendously under his leadership and untold numbers of young campers have committed to Christ at camp.

Shawn McConaughey opened the sessions the first evening by asking us to consider the outreach, vitality, spiritual formation, and overall health of each of our Monthly Meetings. Shawn asked us to work on reconciliation for if God loves us and tells us to love our neighbors, how can we hang onto conflicts? Quakers have something to offer, and we may find the beginning of growth and transformation in our ability to reconcile and love each other.

Evan Wilkin, Executive Secretary of FWCC Section of Americas, gave the message on the remaining evenings. Evan shared meaningful times of his own transformation and learning to listen to the still, small voice of God. He asked each of us to consider how we started in our spiritual journey and where acts of transformation physically occurred for us. We were challenged to change our regular course and open ourselves to new encounters and new paths where we may find that God has been speaking to us.

Evening messages were followed by time around the campfire enjoying s'mores, popcorn, ice cream, and games and shared fun.

The outgoing epistle was presented following morning devotions on Thursday. After packing up and eating lunch, campers returned home, re-energized by the outdoor experiences and encouraged by the call to transformation that echoed through the activities and opportunities of the week.

Please pray for Western Yearly Meeting as it continues to look for ways to be a relevant transforming and renewing example to those in the troubled world around us.

In Christian Love,

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Sarabeth Marcinko, Presiding Clerk      Brenda Rodeheffer, Recording Clerk      John Heshelman, Ass't to the Clerk

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***Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)***

Summary: For use in Translations and/or digests

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Please pray for Western Yearly Meeting as it continues to look for ways to be a relevant transforming, and renewing example to those in the troubled world around us.

