



Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative)

7/25/2026

Epistle To Friends Everywhere

Dearest Friends:

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

- 13 Corinthians

Love is the Center.

- Source uncertain, often cited in our yearly meeting.

Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) sends our greetings to Friends across the world. We have gathered for our 149th annual sessions at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa, instead of our usual meeting place, Scattergood School, which is undergoing major construction this summer. The College has been warmly welcoming and the challenges of the new site for our Caretaker and Entertainment committees and technology team have all been met with good humor and grace. “Strengthening and Sustaining a Community of Hope” was our theme. We have felt the urgency of issues in the wider world, and in the condition of Scattergood School, which is under our care. But we have also gathered in worship, in Bible study, in business sessions, in evening collections, and as we walk around campus and eat together, reaffirming the sacred presence we are held up by and the joy and love we feel for one another and this gathered community of seekers.

Our host has been generous with their time with us: Our opening evening collection on Fourth Day was by two Grinnell faculty and staff and two graduates of Grinnell’s *Liberal Arts in Prison* program, giving testimony to the power of generous, real, well-built opportunities to engage in the hard work of creating meaning, and how that inspires re-engagement and hope in an environment that encourages despair. In our Fifth Day evening collection, Grinnell’s Dean of Religious Life and Chaplain/Rabbi Sarah Brammer-Shlay presented a workshop “Obligation, Hope and Community” in which she spoke out of her experience in Reconstructionist Judaism, seeking for justice and transformation, and how hope and obligation are part of that work. A deep discussion amongst Friends and with Rabbi Brammer-Shlay revealed a variety of ways that hope and obligation—and love—intersect in our experience and understanding. And after this collection, many of us went to the Grinnell observatory to view the night sky!

The Sixth Day evening collection welcomed Mary Klein from Palo Alto Meeting in California, who spoke with us and encouraged us to consider the ways that love can gather us, challenge us, change us, and pull us into changing the world for the better. She also presented the pre-meeting on First Day. Other presentations

include AFSC and FCNL updates, and Des Moines Friend Billie Wade's presentation and discussion of her QuakerSpeak video "Are Quaker Meetings Safe for Black People?"

Our daily Bible study was led by Angelika Shafer, who led us through reflections on often difficult passages from Revelations, and asked us to seek truths within scripture that does not so easily meet our understanding of God's love and the values we understand as God's will.

Reports from committees dealing with our yearly meeting's internal function showed us to be in good order, but as always wondering about change, as our membership cycles through generations. The lives of Friends who have died are celebrated alongside marriages, births, and new members. In our seventh year of adapting to online and hybrid meetings, we have gotten more used to the idea that meeting online—both at Annual and Midyear sessions, and in smaller groups, adds to our connections between one another, between monthly meetings, with national and international Quaker groups, and with the gathered sense of the Divine we all seek. We are grateful for the Friends gathered with us this week online.

The biggest and hardest issue we are dealing with within IYM(C) this year has to do with our formal, structural relationship with our deeply beloved Scattergood School, that is a core part of this yearly meeting's ministry. It has been a legally undifferentiated part of this Meeting since its founding, and the lack of clear distinction has caused legal and financial handicaps. The school itself has been engaged in a multi-year "Roots and Wings" comprehensive fund-raising campaign, and enrollment in both its high school and its newer middle school continues to rise. We feel hope about what was a tenuous situation only a few years ago. We are committed to finding a structure within which the school maintains its deeply felt connection to the meeting, and has a solid basis to grow, flourish, and spread the Light it nurtures in its students.

Every year, the actions of our government present challenges to our conscience and the testimonies God has given us to speak out of that conscience. This year, as armed government agents have assaulted the neighborhoods members live and worship in, the basic need to care for our neighbors and each other was tried and tested. Our Peace and Social Concerns committee carried forward action and advocacy around the war with Iran, genocide in Gaza, erosion of democratic norms in this country, treatment of transgender citizens (including actions by the Iowa state government), and Indigenous Americans' fight for justice. A minute condemning the American attack on Iran was approved by the meeting, and its wide distribution was encouraged. A display about justice for Gaza and Palestine provided by AFSC gave us much to consider. We seek in our small but persistent way to help shift our government's actions and national consensus towards the peace and justice we understand to be part of God's intended Right Order. Our involvement in a variety of regional and national Quaker and justice organizations continues to connect our small community to the work we believe is needed to bring about a better world.

Our time at annual sessions can feel like "drinking from the fire hose," an intense experience. But the love we feel for each other and our community, and the blessings and divine love we feel through that, make the work lighter, and continue to bind us together.

With you in the Light

On behalf of Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative)

Carol Gilbert
Carol Gilbert, clerk