

Closing Minute - 2023

At this, our 146th annual sessions, we gathered with at least 75 attending in person on the campus of Scattergood Friends School, including nine children. At least 20 participated via videoconference.

We joined other regions of the world in feeling the effects of what science affirms is climate change that we helped create, when dangerous heat and humidity arrived in Iowa just in time for our annual sessions. We had the luxury, or necessity, of being able to retreat to air-conditioned spaces when needed.

An evening session on the spiritual roots of the climate crisis, led by Marshall Massey, included a sobering look at a not-too-distant future climate that will be hostile to ourselves and other beings. Marshall asked whether our human abilities to form communities, communicate, solve problems, and attend to the promptings of the Spirit, can help us respond rightly to the crisis. We were reminded that the Alternatives to Violence Project, which was built by Friends and is practiced by several in our meetings, teaches participants to rely on these same abilities.

An evening program with Paula Palmer informed us about Quaker boarding schools that were part of the movement to separate indigenous children from their families, causing untold trauma, loss of life and health, and damage to cultural identity. Though many Friends who worked for boarding schools did so in obedience to their discernment of God's will, and their efforts may indeed have reduced harm, the hurt has persisted through the generations and healing is needed all around. A discussion the next day helped us along the path of healing.

On First Day morning a member of Des Moines Valley Friends will help us re-focus on the topic of unrelenting racism against Black people in America, that continues to inflict harm. There was a time when Friends believed slavery was acceptable. What are we closing our eyes to? We must continue to search for "the seeds of war" in our way of life and the choices we make.

We were much cheered by news about our beloved school. Unexpected income is helping them not only maintain a balanced budget but invest in areas that will help them grow. This means making necessary repairs and improvements to buildings, but even more important, allowing them to increase staff compensation and student enrollment. We affirm the importance of the school's increasing role as a safe harbor for young people who are not well accepted at their own public schools because of issues such as gender identity. We are exercised by the fact that the school will derive benefit from a new Iowa law that will harm public schools by providing taxpayer funds for students attending private schools.

Despite our keen awareness of troubles, we are surprisingly joy filled. We daily experience the power of Love in our time together at Yearly Meeting. The children remind us how much fun it is to run and play. We have lost dear Friends, yet new people have appeared on the scene, to take up the work. We shelter one another from the storm. We have faith that we will be given what we need. Everywhere we look there are gifts.

We adjourn planning to reconvene for our 147th annual sessions on seventh month 24-28, 2024.

Carol Gilbert, Clerk