



Yearly Meetinghouse, McNabb, Illinois

Illinois Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

Consisting of 24 Quaker Meetings and Worship Groups
in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin

Illinois Yearly Meeting Epistle

24th day of Sixth month, 2017

To Friends Everywhere,

As Charles Dickens memorably wrote, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Historians view history as a basic model or paradigm to see the past as a process of continuity versus change. Many of us are challenged to understand the change in our lives and in our culture on a local, regional, national, and international level. Aspects of this concern are pulsating within meetings throughout Illinois Yearly Meeting (ILYM) especially recently. In part, this epistle is based on active listening to Friends within our meetings, following ILYM Announcements, and reading meeting newsletters. The communities of conversation, among old friends and new friends, cultivated connections among us. During the last year, Friends shared concerns of racism and connecting with Muslim communities.

Four decades ago, during an interview James Baldwin, the author and social activist replied to television personality, Dick Cavett’s query, “Why aren’t Negroes more optimistic? It’s getting so much better.” Baldwin replied “It’s not a question of what happens to the Negro. The real question is what is going to happen to this country.” His answer still seems relevant today. What could we do to help the country move forward to make it better for black lives? What was the need and what will we do about it? There was a need for more information about being a good ally. This started with active listening and increasing engagement. Many Friends individually viewed the recent documentary, “I am Not Your Negro” based on the writings of Baldwin. Several meetings have acted by engaging with black communities and learning about black culture. St. Louis Meeting hosted a movie night where they showed *13th*. This movie was directed by Ava Duvernay and is about the thirteenth amendment and the prison system. Friends in Urbana and Champaign also watched this film in a community-wide event. Further north, Friends in Evanston engaged in a weekly program entitled DAR (Discussion About Racism) where they attend events, showed films, and had talks about racism in their community.

What other needs do we have as a community? How do we adapt to the rapid changes in newsfeeds and media? Friends across ILYM assessed this need and began to take action. Evanston, Urbana-Champaign, and Northside meetings worked with leaders in Muslim community centers and mosques to arrange times for Friends to visit these places. This was another example of increasing communication and being an active listener. By visiting new places and having new experiences with

an open mind and open heart, Friends can increase their empathy with others whom they may not typically engage with.

How have these actions reflected our Quaker principles and actions of the past? Historically, Friends have a strong history taking social action to begin to break the frequent pattern of being a passive members in their community, such as going to prison for not attending the required Church of England. By 1700, 7,000 were imprisoned for their Quaker beliefs and practices. Here in ILYM, during the past year, meetings have enacted change within their own meeting and beyond. In the coming year, Friends can continue to create change by assessing their meetings needs, discovering why that need is there, then using Quaker process to make social change a reality.

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

-I'm Nobody! Who are you? by Emily Dickinson