Seventh Month 25, 2015

To Friends Everywhere:

The unlocking of cosmic power and love can be accomplished if you will become utterly, completely obedient to the Light within you.

<div align="right">Cecil Hinshaw</div>

Greetings from Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) which gathered at Scattergood Friends School on Seventh Month, 22-26, for the 138th annual session of our yearly meeting. During our week together we explored our theme, "Growing in the Light," through worship, Bible study, evening programs, fellowship, service, and play.

We seek to be transformed in the Light, to be changed in our relationships, and to be startled by the miracles that surround us. Hannah Evans, an FCNL program assistant, spoke about the importance of moving out of our comfort zones and seeking our challenge zones where growth occurs. Brant Rosen, head of the Chicago AFSC office, spoke to the imperative of a radical inclusivity, in Israel/Palestine and elsewhere, building upon the common ground among religious traditions. Young Friends discussed gender issues and another Friend asked us to consider language that is more inclusive than the male/female gender binary to which we are accustomed.

Kevin Rutledge, Grassroots Education Coordinator of the Des Moines AFSC office, spoke to us about their "Governing Under the Influence" program, which includes "bird-dogging" the presidential candidates that descend on Iowa and asking questions in order to increase the scope and inclusivity of campaign dialogs. Trish and Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan shared music with us one evening and, in a workshop, asked us to deeply consider some key moments in our lives, using those insights to deepen our relationship to God and to those around us.

Scattergood School is our experiment to manifest Love in the world. We are excited to see the increased integration of the farm and academics with a new program in which freshmen and sophomores will spend an academic quarter in project-based learning entirely on the farm in 93 preparation for future engagement in agricultural research projects. Having enjoyed delicious meals, produced by Scattergood Farm and prepared by Scattergood students, we can attest to the tastiness of this labor. This week we discussed our relationship to the school, an extension of a year-long dialog that took place in our monthly meetings. As a yearly meeting, we are decreasing in size and have fewer families with generational ties to the school. Thus we are challenged to transform our support from an assumed to a chosen relationship with this beloved and amazing institution.

Seeking Divine guidance on how to live sustainably is an ongoing challenge. Our Junior Yearly Meeting made and sold beautiful bouquets from the Scattergood Prairie to benefit FCNL's climate change initiatives as they discussed stewardship of the earth. Jim Kessler, of Grinnell Friends Church, gave us instructions on building native plant and pollinator gardens. We hold our annual session on this idyllic and green campus, and yet we are continually aware of the noise of I-80 just beyond the campus. This juxtaposition seems to exemplify our challenge in right living.

During our Bible study we explored the stories of how God led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt through the wilderness to redemption and reconciliation. We were invited to share our own Exodus journeys. As God sent a pillar of Light to guide the Israelites, there is the Inward Light of Christ within each of us and the Presence in the midst that can guide us on our journey toward a Beloved Community.

We might consider, however, whether that Presence could come in a form that leads us outside our comfort zone. Is the highway noise a pillar of light that guides us to God? Might it be our relationship with the stranger, the refugee, a child, a person who desires gender-fluid pronouns, the prairie with its wild and "untidy" growth patterns, or reevaluation of an internal life-script that fosters our growth in the Light? We must listen deeply.

In love,

Deborah Dakin, clerk
On behalf of Iowa Yearly Meeting Conservative