

Field Secretary Final Report to I.Y.M. Annual Session
June 2008

My dear Friends,

Before I leave you I feel moved to share lessons I have learned along the path as your Field Secretary. Some of these messages are gentle and some will fall hard on your ears and hearts. You know that I have always tried to be truthful even when the truth is not what you prefer to hear. The very future of our Religious Society of Friends rests on the bedrock of speaking Truth to ourselves.

First, I will send you a love letter of gratitude for allowing my service among Illinois Yearly Meeting Friends. What my service as your Field Secretary has meant to me is...

- open hearts and hearths to welcome me
- intimate visits with Quaker families in their meetings and homes
- being treated as a trusted friend to hear secret wounds and sorrows never revealed
- hands-on healing of communities and individuals
- supporting leaders as they try their wings
- stepping back and allowing issues to rise and fall without interfering unduly
- walking beside people on their pathway to joy
- befriending and being befriended by children
- welcoming newcomers
- modeling Quaker values and practices
- attending clearness committees and ministry committees as a helper and listener
- witnessing to the lives of our members and helping them discern their gifts
- receiving generous financial support from family and friends when my personal budget got too tight
- appreciating the courage of my guidance committee at Lake Forest Meeting in their struggle to seek support for my ministry from the meeting as a whole
- and a special thank you to David Shiner, our M&A clerk, who stayed faithfully engaged as my elder throughout my three year walk as your field secretary.

Now here are some difficult observations that I feel the need to share with you honestly and which you may not wish to hear. Please remember that I am the *only person* who has been regularly visiting the entire yearly meeting community.

My assessment is that most of our monthly meetings are not strong. Out of a total number of 21 meetings and worship groups, there are only 11 meetings which currently have more than 10 regular attenders. I hope you are taking this number in. In recent years we have lost Decatur, Thorn Creek, DeKalb and Macomb through attrition. If we plan to become a more vital yearly meeting, we must increase the attendance at our smallest groups.

Let us take a look at what makes for a thriving Quaker community.

- Welcomes newcomers and teaches them the basics of Quaker faith and practice.
- Holds a monthly meeting for worship for business on a regular basis.
- Has a First Day School.
- Visible to the wider community through ongoing outreach efforts.
- Has a ministry committee to support the pastoral needs of its members, such as death, divorce, mental illness and economic need.
- Has a balanced membership of experienced and inexperienced Friends
- Has a program (formal or mentorship) for training people how to serve as elders.
- Does not avoid conflicts in the community and asks for outside assistance when needed to resolve deep disagreements.
- Welcomes people of all faith paths, ethnicities and gender identification.
- Offers spiritual nurture and oversight for the vocal ministry.
- Holds a value of being accessible to the hearing impaired and otherwise disabled attenders or members.
- Understands that the monthly meeting is part of a larger system called the yearly meeting and sends money, messages and members to fulfill that obligation.

Here is my final word to you who are entrusted with the care of the whole community. Many of the meetings in Illinois Yearly Meeting are actually isolated worship groups which are functioning at a minimal level of capacity. Some meetings may be small but they are striving to grow. Others are isolating by choice and will decline. A death or a family moving away means that these meetings will soon be closing. We are called the Religious Society of Friends. We are a Spirit-led People of God. This has been our heritage from 350 years. What will be our gift to the children who are following us?

I have been honored to serve you,

Maurine Pyle