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# A Concern for a World Gathering of Young Friends

BY PAUL ANDERSON

At the Kaimosi World Conference in 1982 some hopes and dreams of another world gathering emerged. Young adults met together often for discussion and prayer about this matter. Subsequently, two committees were formed: a European group and an American group. Each would have representation from major bodies of Friends.

Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina, was chosen as the site (July 19-26, 1985), and "Let Our Lives Speak!" was adopted as the theme.

Yearly meetings are being asked to appoint up to five delegates (prorated, depending on size) this summer so they will have a year to prepare for the gathering. Yearly meetings are also being



asked to help raise some of the financial means by which their delegates might attend.

There are also applications available for attenders at large if a yearly meeting has already filled its quota. Those attending should be roughly between the ages of 18 and 35(+); and they should be men and women who have an interest in the future directions that Quakerism may take, an ability to share clearly and humbly regarding their religious experience, and a willingness to listen openly and acceptingly to the experiences of other Friends. Paul Anderson represents the EFA on the American committee. He has served as pastor at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon, and plans to pursue doctoral studies in the near future.

**T**HE SPIRIT of God moves within the chapters of time, uniting the inward seasons of the soul with the outward measures of calendar time. After much prayer and deliberation, it is the feeling of many that the time is right for a world gathering of young Friends. A world gathering of any sort is a gigantic undertaking! The expenses in terms of travel, time, and coordinative efforts are immense. However, in light of the values of such a gathering, the expenses seem minimal. The following are but a few values that could result from such a gathering.

1. *The Cultivation of New Leadership.* The task of cultivating future generations of leadership is a never-ending task. If ever a society fails to equip its young to carry on the vision of that society, its future vitality will be severely crippled. So it will be for Friends if we do not actively cultivate forthcoming generations. Jesus spent 30 years preparing for 3 years of ministry, and it is hoped that such a gathering would at least play some role in the encouraging of young Friends in their emerging ministries.

2. *The Gaining of Valuable Insight from One Another.* The Society of Friends may be one of the most theologically diverse groups for its size, and this has been a great source of both joy and pain. We often find it difficult to appreciate the experiences of

others that are different from our own. Yet through these very differences, more people are reached by God's love than would have been reached otherwise. What is needed is prayerful and tender interaction among Friends who are mature enough to listen to another's sojourn, and then to offer humbly one's own learnings about the life of the Spirit.

The greatest temptation is to assume that God will work in others the same way God has worked in our lives. But the Scriptures remind us to be mindful of our limitations as well as our certainties. While in one breath we affirm the bold statement that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8) we must in the next breath agree with the same Scriptures, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us." (2 Corinthians 4:7)

Indeed, one of the greatest values of such a conference would be the enriching insights we could learn from one another. Our greatest source of pain is also our greatest source of joy. We can react against our diversity, considering it a foe; or we can respond to it as a friend, seeking to gain enrichment through loving interaction. As different parts of the body, there is a lot to be gained through appreciating one another. In doing so we will experience

the freedom that comes with being "humble learners together in the school of Christ."

3. *The Empowering of Quaker Witness and Ministry in the World.* Upon reflecting over world gatherings of Friends earlier this century, one Friend has well said that "the Society of Friends . . . has rediscovered, neither easily nor quickly, the truth that it exists not for itself, but for the world's healing."<sup>1</sup>

While the strengthening of future leadership and mutual appreciation could indeed result from such a gathering, the greatest value will be measured in terms of the furthering of ministry: the meeting of human needs, energized and empowered by the transforming love of God. Young adults are not only the church of tomorrow, they are also the church of *today*. Consider, for instance, the witness of the "Valiant Sixty." Many Quaker martyrs and missionaries in the first generation of Friends were young adults in their teens and twenties. Past gatherings of young adult Quakers have also produced great dividends in terms of added vitality and renewed vision for the rest of the society.

**Q**UAKERISM has a good deal to offer the rest of the world. But, no tradition, no matter how memorable or quaint, deserves to exist in and of itself. Only as Friends are active and effective in the healing, redeeming, and transforming work of God is their existence justified. Such a movement cannot rest on its past laurels or learnings. Just as the manna in the wilderness had to be gathered daily, so must each generation of Friends be cultivated anew to carry on the ministry of Christ. Our prayer is that our lives might indeed become healing love for others . . . and that such a gathering would further that process.

1. A. Neave Brayshaw, *The Quakers*. (William Sessions Ltd., London, 1969) p. 348.