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EVANGELICAL FRIENDS

WAYNE EVANS

The future of Friends—specifically that of Evangelical Friends—provides all of us the opportunity to evaluate our position along the line that began with the ministry of George Fox and extends to the close of the Church Age. In fact, the line begins and ends with Jesus...from his Great Commission to his return. We, as Evangelical Friends today, are grateful inheritors and intentional benefactors of the Christian faith within the context of—to paraphrase D. Elton Trueblood—“*The People Called Quakers.*”²¹

My own region (Evangelical Friends Church—Eastern Region, or EFC-ER) came into existence by action of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting in 1812 (now 202 years ago) as the first of many yearly meetings to be founded west of the Allegheny Mountains. Many yearly meetings sprang up in the following years. Some came about by further intentional planning, while others came about through painful splits. As a result, Friends across the United States fall into the four groupings of Friends today (independent yearly meetings, Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, and Evangelical Friends Church).

THE EVANGELICAL FRIENDS CHURCH TODAY

The family of Evangelical Friends amended its name and reaffirmed its mission in 2008. The six regions or yearly meetings in the United States and Canada are now known as the Evangelical Friends Church—North America (EFC-NA), led by Stan Leach (General Superintendent of EFCSW). These regions include: Eastern Region, Mid-America, Rocky Mountain, Northwest, Southwest, and Alaska. Beyond our shores, the five international regions are now known as the Evangelical Friends Church—International (EFCI), led by John P. Williams Jr. (former General Superintendent of EFC-ER and Regional Director of EFC-NA). These international regions include: North America, Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America. The regional directors from each of the five regions form the International Council.

In my role as the EFC-NA Treasurer, I am also the statistician. Our most recent figures show that Evangelical Friends in North America number just under 35,000 attenders in just over 300 churches. That represents a slight rate of growth over the past decade. Together those Friends donate approximately \$60,000,000 to the cause of Christ through the churches. Additionally the worldwide movement numbers well over 165,000 attenders in over 1,200 churches in over 30 countries. Those numbers are also increasing. No figures on donations are kept for EFCI.

The reaffirmed mission of EFC-NA, according to the organization's Constitution, is to work together in Christian ministry based on biblical principles to develop personnel and resources that will enable the member regions to fulfill the Great Commission.² In a recent iteration of that, John P. Williams Jr. presented frameable certificates of our strategic vision to individual mission field coordinators that reads, "In joyful obedience to Jesus' Great Commission—and in the spirit of His Great Commandment—our movement purposes to serve the church and the world in love, multiplying disciples and churches in the power of the Holy Spirit so that our children's grandchildren and generations of the un-reached will be compelled to join."³ That value flows through almost everything we do.

Earlier in this decade, all of the six regions participated in a five-year exercise on church health, church growth, and church planting under the banner of "Kingdom Goals."⁴ The regions spotlighted those three areas in a variety of ways within their churches. It called each one to stay focused on the ultimate issues of why we as churches exist. In the years since then and in a variety of settings, Williams taught leaders on the topic of "First Principles" as a way to disciple the movement. These "First Principles"⁵ include: 1) Christ: Jesus Christ is Supreme, 2) Priorities: People Matter More Than Things, 3) Purpose with Passion: Jesus Christ Calls us to Fulfill His Great Commission in the Spirit of His Great Commandment, 4) Attitude: Positive Problem-Solving is our God-given Privilege and our Goal, and 5) Speech: Talk to the Right People in the Right Spirit. Lessons and exercises like these continue to shape our movement.

More important than the statistics and the guiding principles are the ministries carried out through Evangelical Friends because that is where people meet people. Dr. Williams has long pointed out that we are "Great Commission driven in the spirit of the Great Commandment."⁶ He summarizes it with the symbol "GC²."⁷

That purpose compels us to plant new churches, send out medical missionaries, open house churches, teach through Christian schools, invest in Christian colleges within EFC-NA, hold church camps, host marriage retreats, form sports ministries, establish food pantries, build low income housing, and conduct many more creative outreaches. Evangelism and discipleship call for relational ministry that meets people where they are, accepts them for who they are, and shares with them the Lord's possibilities for who they can become.

In support of those local and regional efforts, EFC-NA offers several resources in keeping with its mission. Through the Communication Commission, the *Friends Connection* is published as a newsletter that is mailed to each home. It is more action-oriented than thought-provoking in the attempt to tell the ongoing story of the movement. Our Education Commission writes and publishes various curriculums for Sunday school, children's church, and mid-week programs for all ages. In 2009, the commission published a special piece—this one (*First Steps*) to help parents both to understand the conversions of and participate in the discipleship of their children when they open their hearts to Christ. The Leadership Commission provides the General Superintendents a venue for communication and coordination. They additionally host special gatherings. Later this winter, the Youth and Young Adults Commission in consultation with the Leadership Commission will host its second *Summit* retreat for young people aged 16-25. It will again challenge young people to give their lives in service of the Lord Jesus.

By far, the largest commission in EFC-NA is the Missions Commission, known as Evangelical Friends Mission (or EFM). They meet more often, raise more money, deploy more workers, and reach beyond North American shores more than the other commissions. Some regions have their own missions programs as well as EFM, while others conduct all of their missions efforts through EFM. It all depends upon what each region needs and desires. The total annual budget of EFC-NA exceeds \$2,000,000.

We intentionally—though not perfectly—aim to grow with people, not to give the air of having arrived ourselves. We know that we are all sinners saved by grace. Were it not for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we would all be lost in our sins and without hope for eternity. We take these timeless evangelical tenets to heart. By grace we submit ourselves to the Lord for his Holy Spirit to work through us what Galatians 5:22-23 calls the “fruit of the Spirit”—namely “...

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love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control....”⁸ This fruit formed the outline of the health side of the five-year plan referred to above.

As we understand it, our heritage is rooted in this (the fruit of the Spirit). Tradition is less about perpetuating a particular culture and more about living out a Bible-based and Christ-centered faith. If tradition is to teach us anything, it should teach us that Jesus and the Bible are central to our faith. We, as Friends, are traditional in this way. It is traditional for us to seek the Lord in prayer and worship, to elevate godly behavior, and to take risks for the sake of the Gospel. Paul Anderson, Professor of Quaker and Biblical Studies at George Fox University, has taught that, “Tradition is the living faith of those now dead (meaning that the *faith* lives on in others after earlier people are gone); traditionalism is the dead faith of those now living (meaning that the *faith* died with the people who had it and only their *behaviors* are carried on by others).”⁹ Evangelical Friends seek to be traditional, but not traditionalistic. Pass on the faith, not just the culture.

With that dynamic at work within us, Evangelical Friends launch into ministry with vigor. That is not to say that ALL of our Evangelical Friends share the same vigor, but the movement—as demonstrated by growth statistics—is moved by such pursuits. Dangerous qualities of pride and colonialism could overtake our zeal were it not for the adherence to the Great Commission and Great Commandment, plus the humility that comes with the fruit of the Spirit.

PERSONAL MINISTRY EXAMPLES

Two special areas of my particular responsibility are locally and internationally focused.

My local focus deals with church revitalization. In fact, that was the subject of my doctoral dissertation entitled, *Metanoic Adaptation: The Necessary Experience That Precedes Church Revitalization*. The basic thesis in that project is that a church’s self-image must undergo a periodic heartfelt spiritual realignment (often known as revival) before any methodologies can be adapted to help the church become more fruitful and faithful to the mission.

Among the churches who have suffered near closure and then revitalized is a church that I am currently helping, the Friends church in Tecumseh, Michigan. This church had a storied past that even had

a book and a movie made about its tithing campaign in the 1940s that involved Henry Ford and Dynamic Kernels. It was even covered by *Life* magazine. A new church building that seats over 400 was constructed in the late-1960s on a forty-acre piece of land. But by early 2008, its attendance of mostly 70-80 year-olds had dropped into the 30s. They had a committee study possible closure scenarios. By springtime, however, they accepted our offer to help them revitalize.

We provided the church with guidance and with \$25,000 seed money (pun intended). The new pastor, Andy Albertini, arrived in July. Quickly he built a revitalization approach utilizing the church's history. The tithing campaign of the 1940s was resurrected and recreated. John 12:24 was the basis for both campaigns—then and now—which reads, "...unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."¹⁰ Dying to self is integral to the church's future because it leads to greater fruitfulness. Many changes resulted from this.

The church grew in fresh outlook and in newfound desire to share the Gospel with new people around them, along with a new willingness to make changes. Even from the road, the whole appearance of the property changed. They trimmed bushes and trees; and they took down the dilapidated road sign. They adopted a new name, Riverbend Friends Church. Music styles began to change. The sanctuary was renovated. I could tell you about Arnold, Roger, Florence, and others—older people who got excited to believe that their church's best days were ahead of them. Even as the music was updated beyond their preferences, they testified to seeing God's hand at work in powerful ways. The latest report shows that they now average 113 in Sunday morning worship, an increase of more than 220% in one year! Stories abound of the people who have asked Jesus into their hearts, people who have said they can put up with the music because they see so many young families, people who have found new friends to know and love, and people in the community who have come to depend upon Riverbend as essential to the life of the town. And the revitalization continues!

My international focus deals with Haitians in three countries. In the middle-1990s Dr. Williams introduced me to William Bertrand, an Asbury College graduate from Haiti who started a small Haitian congregation at our Morningside church in Port St. Lucie, Florida. That relationship led to a time when the four churches in Haiti (founded and led by William Bertrand) invited me to speak at their

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annual convention. One thing led to another. By 1998, those four churches asked to become an official mission of the Evangelical Friends. We now have eight churches there.

William and I began to feel a call to reach out to Haitians in the Dominican Republic. So with the support of the Mission Board and the churches in Haiti, we made our first trek there in 2002. We, however, had no contacts in the Dominican Republic. On our first day there, however, William's glasses broke. An optometrist was within walking distance of our hotel, so we went there. Not only did William get his glasses fixed for free, but also we made our first contact with a Haitian man who led us to La Romana, a town where many Haitians lived.

William and I began a prayer walk in the city park, stopped at a juice stand that was run by a Haitian, asked if he knew of any Haitian pastors, and were shocked that at that very moment the son of a pastor who was trying to start a church in his home came by to bring lunch to the worker at the juice stand. That young man took us to his father who—providentially—had stayed home from work that day because he had a dream the night before informing him that the Lord was sending someone from Haiti to see him. Soon we had the beginnings of our first Evangelical Friends Church with the Haitians in the Dominican Republic. It was an astonishing experience for William and me to live out a modern-day example of Acts 10 where Peter was divinely and surprisingly led to Cornelius! There are now four churches in the Dominican Republic—all but one brought about by church planting. We also minister with four other Haitian churches in the United States and Canada.

Spiritual passion guided by spiritual wisdom seems to open doors of ministry and fruitfulness. In churches across EFC-NA, many examples of that exist. New churches have been planted. New and future missionaries are being identified, trained, and deployed. New mission fields have been opened. Some of the mission fields we work with have become self-supporting and even sent out their own missionaries to still further countries. EFM reports regularly to our conference meetings of EFC-NA delegates that missionaries from Burundi have gone to the Congo and Tanzania to spread the Gospel in those countries.¹¹ The same is true with missionaries going from Rwanda to Uganda; Taiwan to the Philippines, China, and Myanmar; Bhutan to India; Guatemala to Cambodia; Hungary to Albania,

Serbia, and Croatia; the Ukraine to Russia; and Bolivia to Argentina; among others.¹²

THE FUTURE OF THE EVANGELICAL FRIENDS CHURCH

Leonard Sweet defines semiotics as the art of foreseeing the future.¹³ It is not magical; rather it is the ability to observe current conditions in the light of a historical prospective, comprehend it, and project where that leads into the future. It is in keeping with I Chronicles 12:32 about the men of Issachar, "...who understood the times and knew what Israel should do..."¹⁴ This insight allows leaders to grasp the future's challenges and possibilities in order to take wise steps ahead. With the help of conversations with fellow leaders of EFC-NA, I humbly take this lay-semiotician's look into our future.

Fresh Faith and Passionate Action

The wide birth of the EFC-NA currently experiences an excitement for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This propels us beyond discussing the fine points of our theology and writing about the finest moments of our history into continuing our life-changing ministries. As long as we are able to have that freshness and passion, we will continue to be a movement that avoids the drift into monument-status that is so sociologically predictable. Our theology—anchored in a Bible-based and Christ-centered faith—will be a living theology, one that is more people-oriented and less academic-theorization. This metanoic adaptation (continued heart changes that lead to fruitful actions) will benefit our movement consistent with our history (I write of the Fox-Gurney-Malone-type of advances in our past.). That quality will enable us to maneuver the changes faced in a post-modern age. Creative energies will flow. Systems will adapt. New generations will take up the mission. The Lord Jesus will be praised and followed!

One of the founders of today's EFC-NA was Everett L. Cattell. He had served as a pastor within the EFC-ER, a missionary to India, EFC-ER's General Superintendent, and Malone College's (now Malone University) President. He also authored a book that gained worldwide acceptance in the mid-1960s and made him (according to author Ron Stansell in his book *Missions by the Spirit*) the most famous Friends missionary of the twentieth century. The book *The Spirit of Holiness* has now been re-edited by me and is now being published by Barclay Press. It will be known as *The Spirit of Holiness: Revisited*. With it will come a fresh call to holiness in the Friends churches.

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Global Developments

EFC-NA and EFCI have both grown significantly in the past decade. New pastors, missionaries, and leaders have deployed with quickness, but not always with a common and basic Friends training. Our Evangelical Friends schools (primarily George Fox University and Evangelical Seminary, Malone University and Graduate School, Barclay College, and other partner schools and institutions) have the capacity to train these leaders by way of electronic technology and available transportation. The time is fast approaching when church and school leaders will need to collaborate and generate multi-national and multi-language training programs utilizing our gifted personnel. They could elevate our whole leadership team—regardless of location, or of the low-to-high educational range of the team—so we as a team could better grapple with such things as the major lessons of the Bible, the identity and purpose of the Evangelical Friends Church, the principles of leadership and fruitful ministry, and the impact of supporting world missions. Such a pursuit would both develop leaders and invigorate further growth.

Yielded to the Lord Jesus

Above all of our hopes and dreams, Evangelical Friends must continue to seek the Lord for himself and for his purposes. We do not want to run ahead of—nor behind—the Lord. He is why we exist. He is the One who saves us. He is the Coming King. He is the One we serve. He decides how and when to bless. He is Sovereign to the Church universal and we will yield to him.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the people of EFC-NA, I believe I can express a profound gratitude for the Lord and all of his people. It is my prayer that we can all grow closer to the image of Jesus, that we can all be moved by the needs of people around us, and that we can all do more to make the Gospel more intelligible and inviting to those same people. For the privilege of participating in this movement, we in EFC-NA can say, “Praise the Lord!”

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