

A Diverse Community Speaks Truth Into My Life

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This summer, during worship sharing at Yearly Meeting I became acutely aware of just how little Young Friends in Canada feel they have received regarding to religious education and understanding of the diversity of Friends worldwide. The tears in my fellow Young Adult Friend's eyes connected me deeply to the same feelings I have had in the past regarding Friends. This feeling of being unaware of the spiritual Truths that bind us together as a Society of Friends despite our vast differences, was with me as I prepared to attend the World Gathering of Young Friends in 2005. It was in preparation for this gathering that I first became truly aware of our great diversity. This diversity and the language used to address our differences, as well as our similarities, were so foreign to me, that I became unsure if I was a Quaker. In those months prior to the Gathering, I would say that "I grew up Quaker", never saying, "I am a Quaker".

At the World Gathering all the many branches of the Quaker family tree joined together in Lancaster, England. We had representatives from Yearly Meetings who are affiliated with Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, Conservative Friends, and Evangelical Friends International, as well as Yearly Meetings who were unaffiliated, or simply connected to the wider Quaker community through Friends World Committee on Consultation. Over the week we shared our styles of worship, gathered in small base-groups, went on out-trips into '1652 country', and listened to the teachings of four elders. Every day we had at least two of the speakers talk so that we had different views and language expressed for similar topics. One speech that spoke to me most deeply was when the elder said, that in order to bear fruit you must first have experienced the Spirit and loved the Spirit, and that a community is needed for this to happen. A community is needed to help point you in the right direction, to spur you on, and to hold you accountable. We all need a community which will speak the truth into our lives.

At the Gathering I was able to be a part of a community where each of us was committed to seeing the Light in each other and each other's faith and practice, regardless of our own. We came together to learn from each other, to explore new ways of thinking and of sharing Truth. What united us at the Gathering was our deep seeking to have a relationship with the Divine. We found that we did not have a unity of doctrine, nor of things seen, but one of Spirit. We learned not to listen to words but to the Spirit behind the words.

As our community formed, we asked ourselves "What fruit shall we bear?" We came to an understanding that our fruits are our lives, our witness and our love for one another. The 2005 World Gathering inspired among many of us a hunger to carry forward the bonds of love and friendship born there. These bonds nurtured our spirits as they challenged us to broaden and deepen our faith. Since the gathering, Young Adult Friends have sought to establish connections between Quaker communities from different branches of the Quaker tradition and/or geographical regions, for the purposes of learning, growing, nurturing, and being nurtured in our spiritual lives.

As you may remember, as part of the planning for this World Gathering, a twinning initiative was started to help participants prepare. Canadian Yearly Meeting was twined with Junta Anual Amigos de Santidad (Friends of Holiness Yearly Meeting, Guatemala). This created dialogue and sharing between Young Friends of diverse backgrounds before the Gathering, and an opportunity to fundraise together. As part of the fundraising we had a big dinner and silent auction at Friends House in Toronto. All the recipes we used for our meal came from my new friends Karen and Edith. Because of this twinning I have formed strong friendships with a number of wonderful people in Chiquimula, Guatemala.

When I traveled through Central America in 2007 with Katrina McQuail, Aden Spurr, and David Purkis, we stayed with Jose Luis, whom Katrina and I had met at the World Gathering. Our friends Karen and Edith (also met at the World Gathering) came to join us as well. During our time in Chiquimula, we were taken on a