

# FGC Consultation of Affiliated Yearly Meetings “Calling Forth and Nurturing Gifts of Ministry of Health Services” by Rachael Maxcy

I was chosen in October by HMAAC (Home Mission and Advancement Committee) to attend this Friends General Conference (a group of un-programmed North American meetings) consultation as the representative of Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM). It was held in Bethany Hills, Tennessee, from 15 to 17 November 2002.

Twenty-eight yearly meeting representatives gathered there to discuss: discernment, accountability, eldering, support, and ministry in both monthly meetings and yearly meetings.

Before I went, I did a lot of reading and talking to people about what was going to be discussed at the consultation. I still felt like I was going in way over my head, but pretty comfortable with it. However, by the second day of the consultation I realized that I was more confused after listening and discussing these concepts, then I was originally when I arrived in Tennessee. Growing up within a Quaker household, I am used to the language and meanings of eldering, discernment, and ministry. At first, I thought it might be because of age (I was the youngest person there), but it became abundantly clear that I was not the only one at the consultation having difficulties about the practicalities of spiritual nourishment.

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There were a lot of similarities between all yearly meeting representatives regarding the lack of support of ministry, the negative connotations of words like ‘ministry’ and ‘eldering’, and the sense of loss of traditional Quaker knowledge and practice. As was pointed out by one Friend “We live in a broken world and our meetings reflect that brokenness.” Perhaps somewhere the communication and knowledge of Quakerism is getting lost within monthly meetings and yearly meetings as we get further away from practicing Quaker traditions and more immersed in popular culture.

The seeming loss of tradition, and in turn a need to either return to tradition or change with our current age leads me to the following questions:

- How do new attendees learn about Quaker process and tradition?
- How do meetings educate their members on the ‘fundamentals’ of Friends’ Society?
- How do meetings become spiritually enriching places?
- How do meeting recognize and support gifts of ministry?
- How do Friends reclaim or change Quaker language such as ‘eldering’ or ‘holding in the Light’ and communicate the meanings of the language?

I think participants left the consultation with no definitive answers (quite Quakerly that way) and went back to their monthly meetings and yearly meetings to carry on the dialogue. I hope that Vancouver Monthly Meeting members will be willing to explore what was discussed at the consultation in the hope of more discernment and concrete action. □

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