



Epistle, June 18-21, 2015

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To Friends Everywhere.

The Friends Association for Higher Education gathered for its annual conference from June 18-21, 2015, on the campus of George Fox University, in Newburg, OR, neatly snuggled amongst the vineyards and fields of the Willamette Valley. The planning committee, led by Paul Anderson, arranged a variety of stimulating field trips to local sites and points of historical interest for those who arrived Thursday afternoon.

We were grateful to greet the 62 Friends who attended the conference from across the United States, Canada, and England. We were overjoyed to welcome and re-welcome Friends working at Quaker K-12 institutions who had encountered our joint gathering with Friends Council on Education at Haverford College last year.

We felt particularly blessed by our gathering in light of concerns by some of our membership over recent controversial issues regarding gender diversity on the campus of George Fox University. FAHE Executive Committee clerk Jeff Dudiak played an important role in encouraging us to stay in loving relationship and open and loving dialogue.

The conference theme "Truth and Transformation" spoke to our condition repeatedly throughout the conference.

The first evening Quaker author Haven Kimmel reminded us of the transformative power of our particular lived experience and the lure of God. George Fox Professor, Bill Jolliff spoke to us about practicing our craft with rigor. Like the poet, we may only reach a small audience, but none the less, they are worth the very best that we have to give.

The second night we met Lou Hoover, America's first modern First Lady, through the theatrical talents of local actor, Jane Fellows and her one woman show *First Lady Lou*. Wife of Newburg's own Quaker President of the United States Herbert Hoover, Lou told us stories from her life and encouraged us again and again to have the courage to do the right thing despite public sanction and popular criticism.

During the days we gathered in small workshops. We shared our experiences of nurturing young people into adulthood in Quaker settings. We explored the words of early Quakers, learning from past tradition, adding the truth of our present understanding, and living into a faithful future. Friends shared their current scholarship, advances in pedagogy, and new practices for meaningful evaluations. We discussed the relevance and importance of figs and pigs, breathing in mindfulness, and tasting truth.

One workshop in particular addressed strategies so that each of our institutions could better understand the needs and provide support for transgender students. It was a tender, listening, and learning session, opening up new and unfamiliar issues for many from across the diverse theological spectrum represented at the conference.

On the second morning, Jon Kershner spoke intimately of the life and thought of his friend John Woolman, the reluctant 18th century Quaker prophet who showed a singular willingness to return faithfully again and again to the motion of love in his work for the abolition of enslavement and his prophetic witness against the British imperial economy in the American colonies.

We proudly announced the publication of the second volume of our book series *Quakers and the Disciplines: Befriending Truth*. We look forward to the third volume next year which will focus on Quakers and literature.

During the Saturday afternoon President's Panel Discussion we heard from Robin Baker, President of George Fox University/host, Jane Fernandes President of Guilford College, Royce Frazier, President of Barclay College, and Donald Tucker, Provost of Malone University. They spoke to the challenges facing our Quaker institutions of Higher Education, including: finances, enrollment, innovation, and renewal.

Saturday evening, the plenary session opened with worship in song, led by Bill Jolliff and his banjo:

But we make God's love too narrow
By false limits of our own:
And we magnify God's strictness
With a zeal God will not own.

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in God's justice,
Which is more than liberty.

Released Friend Margery Post Abbott spoke to the question "How do Quakers today articulate foundations of Quaker ministry and develop communities that nurture prophetic ministry among Friends?"

As we leave the conference we ask ourselves, How do we seek a way to be in relationship when our understandings of Truth seem at times to be in contradiction with each other? We know that our shared commitment to teaching is a touchstone for all of us. We are grateful for the work of FAHE and the bridge it provides in stimulating open dialogue, connecting Friends across the spectrum of Quakerism, and supporting our endeavor to educate and nurture our students.

We are challenged to bring our prophetic truths home to our institutions and into our everyday lives and look forward to gathering together again in June 2016 at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham England. Join us.