

LATE REPORT

Committee on Conflict Transformation

“We used to have more problems, when, in our politeness, we swept things under the carpet. Walking on it became lumpy and uncomfortable. So we rolled it up and put it away. Sometimes the dust flies around a little more obviously now, but it settles.” This quote from the May issue of *Spark* about Hudson Monthly Meeting shows a new, more realistic attitude toward conflict that we sense is becoming more widespread in our Yearly Meeting. Our committee’s primary emphasis is to help meetings find ways in which to respond affirmatively to conflict from their own resources and to strengthen those resources, while remaining ready to provide particular assistance whenever requested. The first step in this process is to recognize that conflict is inevitable in human communities, but often need not be destructive if we can acknowledge it at an early stage and address it in a spirit of love and reconciliation.

During the past year, the Committee on Conflict Transformation has continued to engage in its primary work of assisting meetings in finding ways to respond to conflict that are affirming and support reconciliation and spiritual growth, both for those directly involved and for the meeting as a whole. We also offer assistance to those involved in conflict during all Yearly Meeting sessions; at 2008 Summer Sessions, as in the past, there were several instances in which we were called upon to assist. The work of the committee is confidential, so our reports do not include details of particular conflicts for which we have been called upon.

During 2009 Summer Sessions, the committee is providing something new: At every meal, a table will be set aside for those who wish to speak to a member of the committee. This may be to discuss a situation in which the person is directly involved, or something that one has heard about or observed. It is also an opportunity to learn about the work of the committee and explore the work of the committee and ways the committee might be of assistance to a meeting or another committee. Confidentiality is important in this as in all aspects of our work, so if the matter requires greater confidentiality, we will find an appropriate place where the discussion can be continued privately.

During 2008 summer sessions, the committee did engage in one public project, in which we assisted a group interested in a discussion about drugs and alcohol and how their use affects our community, particularly during our time together during Summer Sessions. This discussion seemed well received and appreciated by all the participants.

During the past year, we also assisted two Friends who had become estranged for some years as the result of a personal conflict growing out of a conflict within their meeting. One of them reported to us afterward, “I found that through some mysterious process all that hard, painful work really did transform the conflict between us and me and the meeting into something new and different. I attended worship; I did not have the same queasy fear I had felt every time since the conflict.”

The committee is now six years old. We are in a time of self-examination as the membership changes, so that the ways we approach our mission can be adapted to the changing needs of the Yearly Meeting as well as the gifts of the current committee membership. We have included in this process our two co-opted members whom we anticipate will be appointed to the committee during the 2009 summer sessions. This is a natural and continuing process, and we believe that this will result in a committee that continues to provide important assistance in times of conflict and training in practical skills and approaches for our monthly and regional meetings and for our Yearly Meeting as a whole.

Tom Rothschild, clerk