

FWCC Committee report to Summer Sessions 2015

Grab your copy of *Faith and Practice* and join us on a journey of spiritual discovery across cultures, languages, theological divides, and varied spiritual experiences.

Our Mission is: “Answering God's call to universal love, the Friends’ World Committee for Consultation brings Friends of varying traditions and cultural experiences together in worship, communications and consultation, to express our common heritage and our Quaker message to the world.”

We want to share our FWCC experiences since the last summer sessions, starting with the 2014 Quaker Youth Pilgrimage that traveled for a month among the Evangelical Quakers in Bolivia and Peru. Isabella Aguirre, Purchase Meeting, was the NYYM representative in a group of 26 youth pilgrims from Bolivia, Cuba, Guatemala, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Mexico, Peru, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Quaker Youth Pilgrimage

July 22- August 21, 2014

(reported by Isabella Aguirre)

The Youth Pilgrimage was my eye opener to Quakerism and a reawakening to my faith with trials and tribulations along with adventure and friendships. “You do not really know what you have till you lose it.” What they say is true. I missed hot water, I missed sleeping in a real bed instead of on hay or sleeping bags. I missed the feeling of a heater when the day was just too cold to bear. But most of all I missed being treated equally. That was the most difficult to bite my teeth into. The funny thing is in this time of trials it seems to be the time you see the most clearly, find the best of friends, meet people who will change your life.

So, one part of my experience of evangelical Quakerism in the Andes was women sitting on floors separate from the men who sat on benches, people telling you what to believe as if they are the only passage to which you can hear the voice of God, not being able to look into elders' eyes because if you do that means you disrespect them, and not being able to be yourself, dressing the way you want or even walking the way you want just because you are a woman.

The other part of my experience of evangelical Quakerism was experiencing the many ways that we are the same: we care about each other, see the good in one another, want to see better days, and believe that we are the change. I saw how much we need

to hold each other up by seeing the way the Peruvians and Bolivians live, wondering if there will be enough money for the next meal, some people living without roofs above their head to protect them from the severe mother nature with rain and snow falling on the child's faces as they sleep. If you ever heard the song *Ojala Que Llueve Cafe en El Campo*, a song about how if only it would rain coffee no one would have the pain they have, this would be the place that song is talking about.

The funny part is maybe some may think “yes, that is what poor is.” I am not quite sure because everyone there is family. There is trust like no other. I remember one time we were going into the city after meeting for worship and a mother let her children on their own go into town with us. They share whatever it is they have even though it is all they have. Everyone says hi to each other on the street. I wonder if the fact that we do not have that makes us poor.

I never knew how strong people could be though they had been through tough times. Now I do. I never knew how devoted to god a quaker could be, now I am starting to get an idea. I never knew how much one could give, now I am starting to give that way. I think traveling as a young Quaker has made my roots to Quakerism all that much stronger and my soul all that more devoted.

I am so grateful I had the chance to experience such a great place.

And here is the epistle on the pilgrimage

<http://www.fwccemes.org/emes/quaker-youth-pilgrimage>

**Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas gathering:
Friends Woven Together in God's love
March 12-15, 2015. Mexico City, Mexico.**

(Reported by Sylke Jackson)

Friends gathered from across the Americas to meet in Atizapan de Zaragoza, just north of Mexico city, for the Section of the Americas gathering. Friends from 31 yearly meetings across 5 branches of Quakerism met to prayerfully consider the future leadings of the committee.

Quakers worshipped together in many different styles—for some a first experience of programmed, unprogrammed, evangelical, silent, or singing communion with the divine. All messages were either simultaneously or consecutively translated which created an atmosphere of listening, respect, and the understanding that no culture or language was primary. A diverse people shared their relationships with God and the callings that they receive in that relationship.

We approved a restructuring of FWCC which involves representatives taking over some of the duties previously fulfilled by staff. This allows the committee to continue to do its work even though funding for the organization has dropped considerably. The Quaker youth pilgrimage was laid down and a working group will consider how to offer young people other spiritual leadership opportunities. Structural changes, appointments, and initiatives that were approved can be viewed in detail at:

http://fwccamericas.org/events/2015_SectionMeeting/index.shtml,

One of the most moving parts of the gathering was a daily meeting with our home groups. In these groups of 10 to 15 people, we became closer and considered queries that deepened our connections to each other and our faith.

In my bilingual home group I got to know a couple from LA that is actively working to partner with poor communities to create housing. Even their own home is witness to their faith: it has a front yard that is like a little park with benches, a water fountain, and mini library for neighbors to enjoy. They have constructed a "back house" in the yard where they are able to offer a local homeless man a place to live.

Another in my group was a former director of the Casa de los Amigos, a Quaker founded center for peace and international understanding in Mexico city. Visiting the Casa after the conference opened up a new vision for me of how people can live in community. The atmosphere of mutual respect and commitment to social justice were palpable. Sitting in the called meeting there with others from the conference, I had a deep sense of the wild flowering of goodness on the planet and how people in their corners of the earth harness the power of love to bring great beauty to the world and each other. In the meeting I felt something like what Thomas Kelly talked about in *Holy Obedience* when he described being

"blown by a tempest of unbelievable power which leaves one's old proud self utterly, utterly defenseless, until one cries, "All Thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Ps. 42:7). Then is the soul swept into a Loving Center of ineffable sweetness, where calm and unspeakable peace and ravishing joy steal over one." (Thomas Kelly, "Holy Obedience", 1939)

I had a taste of that release from the old self and a sense the sweetness and freedom of being immersed in visionary Quaker community.

Another Quaker I got to know was from Chiquimula, Guatemala. I had heard the story of how she hid under a table while everyone else in the restaurant was shot dead in a drug

gang related massacre. She was waiting to meet her husband and give him a birthday cake. I was amazed by her faith and poise when she spoke about her experience as a plenary speaker in Kenya at the FWCC World gathering. At the section gathering in Mexico we became friends and looked after each other a bit, as friends do. I came to understand that after traumatic experiences, going out in the world takes a lot of courage. And she has that courage. It feels like an honor to know these Friends and witness their contributions and be inspired and changed by how they live their lives. The communion with these Quakers and many others gave me a glimpse of a life that I would like to live. A life that is actively contributing to the creation of a transformed world and that is freer from concerns that seem so important now. Being at the conference revolutionized my internal sense of what is possible.

The gathering in Mexico revealed the power of connecting and communicating within a faith whose divisions and branches are numerous and complex. One road to solving problems is to split off and part paths, but another is to affirm our connections and our value to each other. FWCC strengthens our witness by encouraging mutual understanding and helping us love each other as a world body of Quakers.

We are looking forward to future FWCC events.

At these summer sessions, the New York Yearly Meeting approved four representatives to the **International Representatives World Plenary Meeting in Peru in January, 2016**. In keeping with the FWCC focus on youthful leadership, two of our reps will be under 35 years old. The theme of that world-wide gathering will be “Living the Transformation.” The objectives of the world gathering correlate nicely with the NYYM priorities:

- 1) Developing the young leaders we need - a Pilgrimage for Quaker Youth in all Sections of the world. (Our focus on nurturing the youth and young adults.)
- 2) Creating a living ministry - Encouraging membership and spiritual growth for young Friends and seekers. Deepening our traditional spiritual practices by sharing and explaining them to other branches of Quakers, while also experiencing new spiritual practices and language.
- 3) Sustaining life on Earth - Inspired by the Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice, working for Quaker worldwide collaboration through the ongoing environmental, economic and spiritual changes.

4) Equipping the Friends World Committee for Consultation as an organization to face these challenges and support this work going forward. (Our priorities of supporting and amplifying our witness in the world and of becoming more transparent and accountable.)

More information about the world-wide gathering in Peru is available on-line (at <http://fwcc.world/peru/index.html>). There are open positions available on a limited basis for those who wish to attend and have not been named as official representatives of their yearly meeting.

Please visit the FWCC table in the Inn for maps of Quaker Yearly Meetings around the world and more information. And feel free to check in with any FWCC committee members.