

Report of the Weaving Sacred Wholeness Conference
Exploring our Diversity as Friends



“People of all ages, races and other categories all want to be seen for who they are and have their real talents be recognized.” – Conference participant

What does it mean to weave sacred wholeness? What would a diverse, vibrant, intergenerational Quaker community look like? The organizers and participants wrestled with these questions at the Friends General Conference Weaving Sacred Wholeness conference that took place at the Penn Center, SC (March 6-8, 2009). FGC’s Youth Ministries and Ministry on Racism Committees jointly planned the conference. The gathering was intentionally diverse. Almost half of the total 63 participants were younger Friends and one quarter were Friends of Color. Friends came from 37 monthly meetings and 16 yearly meetings, including Friends from both North Carolina Yearly Meetings (FUM and Conservative). Together we explored our own diversity in all its many components (race, age, disability, theology, class, gender, sexual orientation and more).

We approached this work with the understanding that sacred wholeness comes by creating opportunities for Friends to share their personal experiences with the “isms” (racism, classism, sexism, etc) in a loving, safe space. In small groups, we reflected on our own experiences of feeling different or like an “outsider” among Quakers. Many Friends shared that having someone reach out to them after something hurtful was said or done was incredibly supportive.

*“(I felt) a ‘re-newed’ exploration of the universality of the sense of isolation/alienation-not singularly concerning race-and again, the universality of our human need of connection, love and healing.”**

Our experiences of feeling “different” helped us weave together ideas for how to create safe, welcoming spaces for all members or newcomers to Quaker communities. We split into working groups to brainstorm ways monthly meetings, yearly meetings, Quaker schools, national Quaker organizations, and convergent Friends could be more inclusive communities. Ideas included partnering with diversity centers, hosting activities in the community, and intentionally engaging about diversity issues on a regular basis as a way to raise awareness about the diversity we each bring to the table.

In our Saturday evening plenary, Niyonu Spann challenged us to look at how we recognize the diversity we have in our meetings. She pointed out that racial and age diversity are easier to see, but there is probably a lot more diversity in each of our monthly and yearly meetings of which we are unaware. *Do we truly know the Friends we worship with on Sunday mornings? How can we begin reaching out within our own monthly meetings to see the diversity among us?* By beginning to engage in these conversations, we may discover ways for us to be more inclusive to people who come through our doors or who we invite to worship with us.



“May I meet you where
you are
May I never lose my
center
Reaching back for Truth
Bringing forth the healing
Healing for the future
Born of living from the
heart- Right now!”

-Niyonu Spann



Individually and as a group, we looked at how we can support one another in weaving sacred wholeness in our own communities. One Friend offered that part of weaving sacred wholeness may include becoming whole ourselves. When we heal from our past hurts and feel secure in our own beliefs, we are not threatened by others. If we can come to the table in our own wholeness then we may be able to listen and engage without feeling attacked or threatened. What if we all begin looking within to see our own insecurities and wounds, so that we may begin to heal as a whole community? Our own healing may lead us to be more present to the pain of others. Both personal and communal healing are important parts of building a sacred and whole Religious Society of Friends.

*“I truly believe this is a step in the right direction. Our relationship to and worship of God IS deeply affected when these systems are at work in our hearts and in our Society. Addressing them is crucial to our testimony and witness. It is my hope that this is just the beginning. This could be one of our gifts to our community, as well as the larger justice community. People are hungering for the presence of Spirit in the midst of this work of renewal and rebirth, and I believe that this conference was a part of that work, though we must commit to going deeper and wider.”**

Although there may always be times when Friends intentionally or unintentionally hurt or offend one another, it is in how we respond in these instances that we have an opportunity to truly be vessels for God’s love. If we commit to holding each other accountable for our actions, being witnesses, advocates, listeners, and confronting one another in loving ways, then we move a little closer to weaving sacred, whole communities that support and nurture the diversity among us.

**conference participant*