No Easy Solutions

By Vince Buscemi, clerk of Committee for Ministry on Racism

There is a Spirit spreading out to the Religious Society of Friends. Five years ago, Friends General Conference (FGC) formulated a long term plan for the entire organization with inclusiveness of people of color as a stated objective. An ad hoc committee on racism was formed to raise awareness and educate Central Committee (the governing board). In 2001 the ad hoc committee became the standing Committee for Ministry on Racism charged "to enhance racial and ethnic diversity and eradicate racism within FGC and its affiliated yearly and monthly meetings." Only with God's guidance can we-Friends of Color and white Friends-work together to make this dream a reality. Our committee formation includes parity among its membership.

In March 2001 we spent most of our committee meeting under the guidance of the Spirit in discerning a corporate vision for our work. What emerged as bedrock guides are:

1. FGC's work against racism will be a ministry to Friends and meetings.

2. At the center of our vision is Divine love.

3. Our work will be healing and transforming in the deepest spiritual sense.

4. Our work will be characterized by empowerment, not guilt.

5. Increasing racial diversity arises out of a sense of continuing revelation.

6. An understanding that racism hurts both the oppressed and the oppressor.
Our purpose will be met by working with FGC program committees; supporting individual Friends, monthly and yearly meetings; promoting education of Friends; and insuring welcome and safety at FGC events. An epistle to Friends everywhere described our mission and invited every Friend to be a willing witness to being an agent of change around racism. Other initiatives include making the annual Gathering of Friends more welcoming, incorporating the viewpoints of People of Color in religious education curricula and materials, considering a weekend workshop by the Ministry and Nurture committee and promoting inclusiveness in our advancement and outreach materials. We are clear that the Spirit will be present with us as a nurturing and guiding presence as we continue to seek and feel the Lord's blessing in our endeavors.

Openings in the approach to our yearly and monthly meetings are beginning to emerge and be implemented. Some of the general directions we can pursue, and in some cases have initiated, are:

- making presentations to adult groups (already done at Kennett Square (PA) Monthly Meeting, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Poplar Ridge [NY] Monthly Meeting, New York Yearly Meeting),
- studying "what works" from the experience of the more diverse monthly meetings,
- preparing leaflets on "achieving diversity" and "eradicating racism" for inclusion in packets to be distributed by monthly meetings,
- conducting listening sessions at the Annual Gathering of Friends and creating space to bring issues of racist behavior forward for discussion,
- offering workshops at yearly meetings.

Friends, there are no easy solutions! Eradicating racism is hard work. We all know that God will not give us a calling that is beyond our abilities to carry out. We must pray, seek guidance and co-create with God the world God intended with deep respect for all creation.