

Report on the FGC Young Adult Friends Consultation

2/24-26/2012, Written by Jean Marie Barch, clerk, and Deborah Fisch, staff

At the invitation of Friends General Conference, 26 Friends from 11 yearly meetings and one independent monthly meeting from the US and Canada gathered at Burlington Meeting House and Conference Center 2/24-26 /2012 for a consultation on *Visioning Youth Ministries and Friends General Conference*. During worship, fellowship, preparation of meals, in small groups, during individual contemplation, and in play young adult Friends explored their current understanding of who Friends are called to be, the role of young adult Friends in that vision, and how Friends General Conference and Quaker meetings might support young adult Friends in their ministries.

F/friends recognized that although they came from a broad variety of backgrounds, not all voices were represented among them at this consultation. Invitations had been sent across the U.S. and Canada but conflicts of dates, time, and to some degree financial needs kept some from attending. (A scholarship fund and support from monthly, quarterly, or yearly meetings assisted some Friends; for some the available funds were not sufficient to address their needs.) During times of sharing, YAFs tried to be careful to speak from their own experience and to listen deeply. Each agreed to come into the room as fully as they could, to risk being open and honest, and to deal tenderly with one another. Grounded in that intention, as a first step, they shared their personal visions for the Religious Society of Friends.

Common threads of Truth were woven through individual visions. YAFs gathered at the consultation feel called to know and Love one another deeply. They share a belief that Quakers need to step more fully into the work they have been given to do in the world as a people called to radical Love and with practices of deep listening, respect for all living things, and a passion for justice. It is clear to YAFs that if Quakers are to step faithfully into that work, they must be more intentional in strengthening and deepening their own faith communities. They feel the need to be better educated about their own Quaker roots and grow spiritually deeper as individuals and faith communities, challenging one another and being accountable to one another in their life choices. They also feel called to help all Friends better engage with them in that work. Their visions were tender and filled with hope and passion, but they realized that simply stating their hopes and visions is not enough.

Therefore, they turned their attention to specific behaviors and practices that might help them participate in bringing the vision to be more fully realized. This report was drawn from the

vision statements and from notes created during small and large group discussions among the YAFs at the consultation.

Mentoring

Friends would benefit from partnering between seasoned Friends and those just coming into their gifts. YAFs seek to create opportunities both to be mentored and to mentor others. For example, within a meeting young adult Friends might agree to an eight week project where they are in regular contact with one or two younger Friends on a weekly basis, listening to questions and building closer ties. Those with seasoned gifts of eldering could similarly mentor young adult Friends helping them take up roles of leadership within the faith community.

Opportunities for sharing and education

YAFs want to seek and find creative ways to deepen spiritual community. New media and electronic resources should be chosen when face-to-face interaction isn't an option. This sharing would include creating training opportunities for both members and attenders to strengthen their ability to talk about personal faith both to one another and to seekers who come to their meeting.

Friends in Transition

YAFs seek to help meetings find ways to speak to the needs of Friends who are in transition, helping them to stay connected and supported during times of change. This would include, but not be limited to young adult Friends attending college or those who are moving frequently as they pursue careers.

Sharing good practices and opportunities

YAFs also realized that meetings and individual young adult Friends are already doing many things of value and they benefited from hearing from each other about these activities:

Intentional care of college students

Some meetings have well developed and intentional systems of outreach to students who are away at college, including letters of introduction to the local meetings in their new region, care packages of goodies during finals week, and occasional cards to keep in touch. How can more meetings become aware of the benefits of this kind of nurturing ministry?

Intentional mentoring of gifts of servant leadership and ministry

There is a meeting in the North Pacific region where a couple of Friends more seasoned in ministry intentionally mentor a small group of Friends younger in the ministry by holding

regular meetings to discuss topics of interest. Again, how can young adult Friends and FGC help these kinds of opportunities become common place in meetings?

New YAF Website

There is a Web project being undertaken by two YAFs to develop www.youngadultquakers.com, an interactive site for connecting young adult Quakers from all branches. (Contact Greg Woods or Steven Dodson for more information.) QVS – Quaker Voluntary Services Project will launch its first site in Atlanta, Georgia this fall. QVS will provide opportunities for young adult Friends to live in intentional community while they participate in intern service projects for one year.

(Go to <http://www.quakervoluntaryservice.org/> for more information.)

Continuing Rev_1_tion

A six-day intensive workshop is being held at Pendle Hill, and cosponsored by Quaker Earth Care Witness 6/15-20/ 2012. (For more information go to www.pendlehill.org/yald.)

FGC's role

And finally, YAFs talked about ways FGC might able to provide resources and continued support of young adult Friends and meetings:

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends

There are two concerns around membership that FGC could help F/friends explore. Currently membership in the Religious Society of Friends comes only through monthly meetings. Is there a way to better serve people who identify as Quakers but cannot find a spiritual community near them (either because they live in a region where meetings are too far away for regular participation, the available meetings aren't a good spiritual fit, or because they are in times of transition in their lives)? A second concern is a need for dialogue about what exactly membership in a meeting entails. There are many people who remain attenders for several years, but don't join for different reason. What is the relationship between membership and participation in the business of the meeting for example? Can meetings help members and attenders to be more accountable to the beliefs and practices they claim for themselves? **YAFs suggested that FGC consider how it might help initiate a national consideration of these questions.** They would hope this discussion could be creative and open, discerning and maintaining the crucial elements of membership, such as accountability and support, while also acknowledging that the monthly and yearly meetings do not always provide a site of connection that is conducive for all Friends.

Continuing Consultations and Gatherings for Friends interested in specific topics

YAFs believe that face-to-face opportunities are preferable, but acknowledge gatherings are not always possible. **They hope FGC will explore on-line education courses and interactive on-line opportunities while continuing to promote local and regional gatherings and the FGC Summer Gathering.** Face to face local and regional gatherings have the advantage of creating networks of Friends closer to home, while large gatherings deepen and broaden Quaker identity.

Support and nurturing of leadership

Support for leadership, the development of gifts and creating different kinds of networks in which Friends can learn from one another, seems a crucial role for FGC as well. **Could there be workshops on developing Quaker leadership for younger Friends and Friends of all ages? Could FGC develop programs to help Friends called to ministry get paired with others who have more experience?**

Mentorship programs

The development of a mentorship program that can be adapted for meetings could help evoke and teach those with gifts of leadership. Mentoring programs could also be created to provide assistance and training in leading workshops, as well as training in Quaker parenting, support for First Day schools and helping young people claim their Quaker identity. Could FGC develop a workshop and a template meetings could use to help recognize, name and nurture gifts of ministry within the meetings?

Development of resources

FGC also could also create more templates and toolkits for things such as: planning consultations, conferences and regional gatherings; religious education models and materials; materials for new attenders. Some **e-courses might specifically support young Friends away at college in exploring our faith more deeply.** Friends note that having consultations come to the region is useful as is bringing Friends together from across multiple regions. YAFs seek ways to share their spiritual journeys and stories and to offer one another support and accountability with each other and with their meetings. YAFs lifted up the need to re-conceptualize the way we think of regions. For example, sometimes a meeting in Canada can be geographically closer to one in the US than to other Canadian meetings.

Accessibility of resources

YAFs raised a concern that some of the resources they and meetings would like to have, are available but not known about in the meetings or not as accessible to some meetings as to others. For example, there are workshops on many topics at the Summer Gathering. But the Gathering is not financially or geographically accessible to many Quakers. There are various

resources through other programs such as Traveling Ministries and QuakerFinder, but many meetings do not know about them. **There is not a broad enough knowledge about or easy enough access to these materials and programs. Also, the location of the FGC office on the East coast means some resources are more financially accessible for East coast Friends than those in other regions of the US and Canada. How can this be better addressed by FGC?**

Gifts that YAFs bring

The young adult Friends also began to consider their own responsibilities to take this work forward. They want to strengthen vehicles for accountability. Toward that end, some have made a commitment to form a virtual spiritual nurture group. All will look for opportunities to share and love and continue to risk being wholly who they are called to be. They want to use their gifts in meetings where they are clearly welcomed and valued. Members of the FGC Consultation Planning Group appreciated the opportunity to bring together and to join with YAFs, to create space for us to encourage each other and seek the Divine in community. Friends worshiped deeply, shared tenderly, and listened with Love. As our time together drew to a close and we prepared to return to our homes, we all (FGC planning group and YAFs) affirmed our desire to be faithful to the vision we have been given; a vision for *right now, today*.

From the visioning session

We seek a faith community that begins and ends with God. It is dynamic, prophetic, and fire filled; balanced between acts and stillness, between speaking and waiting. We seek a faith community that is strong, efficient, measured and grounded in Love and faith; that equips us to listen deeply to the Divine and to each other, that is willing to be humble, to be vulnerable, and to be raw and real. We seek a faith community that supports us as we are made uncomfortable, that celebrates its diversity and is able to grow, to change, to be focused on Listening, and is led by Truth.

This document was downloaded from the website of Friends General Conference. Explore the many resources and opportunities we offer for Quakers, Quaker meetings, and all interested individuals. Go to www.fgcquaker.org.

