

Gathering for People of Color and Their Families

11th month 2014 at Mountain View Friends Meeting, Denver, CO.

Nine Friends of Color and seven Friends of European Descent from Denver, CO gathered at Mountain View Friends Meeting on a beautiful November weekend to enjoy fellowship and to seek Spirit together. They were supported by five members of Friends General Conference. This was the fifth regional gathering for Friends of Color and their families sponsored by the Committee for Nurturing Ministries of Friends General Conference as part of the Ministry on Racism Program.

Regional gatherings serve the function of bringing people together for support with the expectation that there would be ongoing connections after the gathering was done. In discussions, those gathered shared the hope that those present from various areas might serve as a seed group in those local areas when they returned home.

On Friday evening, we enjoyed cooking and eating a wonderful supper of chili together. Afterwards, we gathered to participate in worship sharing with stories of important people, mementos, and events in our lives. Examples of things people shared included books, a small lamp, ghungroos (musical anklets used by many Indian dancers), and a rug. These items and stories helped us learn about the people we would be spending the weekend with as well as learn about their cultures and histories. The stories served as conversation starters in the following days, as everyone had questions about Friends' stories.

On Saturday morning, we began with silent worship, and then started our discussion: "The Gifts and Challenges of Raising Children of Color in Quaker Meeting." The conversation was rich and filled with love and emotion as many participants shared honest thoughts which had not yet been shared with members of the meeting. The diversity of races and cultures present made each perspective valuable, and we all learned from and supported each other in this discussion.

After lunch, we carpoled to the History Colorado Center, where we explored the R.A.C.E exhibit. We then viewed a presentation: "How to talk to your kids about race" which included a group discussion in the museum. The children in our group participated in their own discussion in another area in the museum with museum staff.

After dinner on Saturday evening, we shared our experiences at the museum. Some said the experience was useful because it gave them information and tools to use when talking to friends about race and racism.

On Sunday morning before worship, we gathered in the small groups, which had been randomly assigned, to discuss the questions generated in the discussion from the previous morning.

To conclude the retreat, we joined the rest of Mountain View Friends in Meeting for

Worship.

The challenges Friends raised in the discussion:

- Addressing racism in the larger culture
- The meeting doesn't always embrace cultures and acknowledge people for who they are
- Reflecting and framing the pervasive cultural messages telling us who to play with, what we should look like, and what we should value
- Children who are adopted are treated differently from other children
- Discomfort with difference
- How do we address assumptions people in Meeting make of us?
- The biological family vs. family of the heart
- Children's voices are not always valued, and their behavior is criticized, even when it is age-appropriate
- The Meeting is not always kid-friendly, and does not value preferences and personalities of different children (e.g. Some like to be more active, while others prefer to sit)
- Many of these topics are difficult to talk about
- European American parents have not lived in the country from which their children were adopted, and do not feel adequately prepared to celebrate the culture with them
- How do we address/combat the idea of "the victim"?

Some steps toward improvement Friends offered:

- Having access to multiple adult voices to present to children
- Create a culture of curiosity and openness
- Note minorities within minorities
- Find places where your child is in the majority culture
- Support committees for children, families, and adults

These discussions left many unanswered questions. We were happy to be able to plant the seed to start the discussions, since they have just begun.

In attendance: Susan Bailey, Jean-Marie Barch, Frank Barch, Carol Clinkenbeard, Anna Clinton, Jim Clinton, Janice Domanik, Marilyn Gilmore, Tom Gilmore, Camryn Graves, Sue Hobza, Mateo Hobza, Vanessa Julye, Sonali Kumar, Kedar Lutter, Joe Moran, Rachel Moran, Shruti Moran, Paula Rhodes, Regina Ward, Kathryn White