

Epistle from the 1985 World Gathering of Young Friends

To all Friends everywhere,

Over 300 Young Friends from 34 countries, 57 Yearly Meetings, and 8 Monthly Meetings under the care of Friends World Committee for Consultation, met at Guilford College, Greensboro, North Carolina, 19-26, Seventh Month 1985, to envisage the future of the Religious Society of Friends and to see how our lives should speak within that vision.

We have come together from every continent, separated by language, race, culture, ways we worship God, and beliefs about Christ and God. By visiting local Friends Meetings, we tasted the diversity of North Carolina Quakerism and this led us into exploring our worldwide diversity: We have been challenged, shaken up, at times even enraged, intimidated, and offended by these differences in each other. We have grown from this struggle and have felt the Holy Spirit in programmed worship, singing, Bible study, open times of worship and sharing and silent waiting upon God.

Our differences are our richness, but also our problem. One of our key differences is the different names we give our Inward Teacher. Some of us name that Teacher Lord; others of us use the name Spirit, Inner Light, Inward Christ, or Jesus Christ. It is important to acknowledge that these names involve more than language; they involve basic differences in our understanding of who God is, and how God enters our lives. We urge Friends to wrestle, as many of us have here, with the conviction and experience of many Friends that this Inward Teacher is in fact Christ himself. We have been struck this week, however, with the experience of being forced to recognise this same God at work in others who call that Voice by different names, or who understand differently who that Voice is.

We have often wondered whether there is anything Quakers today can say as one. **After much struggle we have discovered that we can proclaim this: there is a living God at the centre of all, who is available to each of us as a Present Teacher at the very heart of our lives. We seek as people of God to be worthy vessels to deliver the Lord's transforming word, to be prophets of joy who know from experience and can testify to the world, as George Fox did, "that the Lord God is at work in this thick night." Our priority is to be receptive and responsive to the life-giving Word of God, whether it comes through the written Word — the Scriptures, the Incarnate Word — Jesus Christ, the Corporate Word — as discerned by the gathered meeting, or the Inward Word of God in our hearts which is available to each of us who seek the Truth.**

This can be made easier if we face the truth within ourselves, embrace the pain, and lay down our differences before God for the Holy Spirit to forgive, thus transforming us into instruments of healing. This priority is not merely an abstract idea, but something we have experienced powerfully at work among us this week.

Our five invited speakers presented vivid pictures of economic, ecological, and military crises in this world today. We acknowledge that these crises are in fact only a reflection of the great spiritual crisis which underlies them all. Our peace testimony inspires us, yet we move beyond it to challenge our world with the call for justice. We are called to be peacemakers, not protesters.

It is our desire to work cooperatively on unifying these points. The challenges of this time are almost too great to be faced, but we must let our lives mirror what is written on our hearts — to be so full of God's love that we can do no other than to live out our corporate testimonies to the world of honesty, simplicity, equality, and peace, whatever the consequences.

We pray for both the personal and inner strength as well as the corporate strength of a shared calling struggle that will empower us to face all the trials that we will necessarily encounter. We have no illusions about the fact that to truly live a Christian life in these cataclysmic times means to live a life of great risk.

We call on Friends to rediscover our own roots in the vision and lives of early Friends whose own transformed lives shook the unjust social and economic structures of their day. They treasured the records of God's encounters with humanity found in the Bible, and above all, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. And we call upon Friends across the earth to heed the voice of God and let it send us out in truth and power to rise up to the immense challenge of our world today.

A reunion of those who took part in this gathering was held in June 2025.