

The Kindlers

Visioning New Fire

Weekend conference 10/11-10/13 2013

Report from Participants Sent on Behalf of Concord Quarterly Meeting

Brigitte Burger (Concord Meeting), Todd Krasnai (West Chester Meeting), and Zachary Dutton (Wilmington Meeting)

From Friday October 11 to October 13 2013, 91 Friends from three continents gathered for a conference at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham, England titled "Visioning New Fire." The conference was led by the Kindlers, a project of N.W. London Area Meeting of Britain Yearly Meeting. Three Friends from Concord Quarterly Meeting were nominated to attend the conference, Brigitte Burger, Zachary Dutton, and Todd Krasnai.

The Kindlers were created by a small group of Friends seeking to rekindle the power of Quaker worship by renewing and deepening our spiritual practices. Many of the Friends who founded the Kindlers were also founders and organizers of Quaker Quest. This group of Friends discerned to cease their "whinging" and seek concrete solutions to renew and deepen Quakerism now. Everyone attending the conference was sent four queries to contemplate before the conference commenced. These queries were:

- What is needed to deepen the worshiping life of our meetings?
- How do we nourish our own spiritual lives more fruitfully?
- Are the times now urging us to look again at the roles of traveling Friends, elders, teachers and spiritual enablers?
- Is there a way for us to come to terms with contemporary religious insights and to share these more widely though out our Society?

Attendees of the conference were treated to talks by five different speakers, who spoke to the themes of "Where we are now", "Visioning where we could go" and "Visioning how the Society can move forward given our current resources".

Geoffrey Durham, one of the founders of the Kindlers, identified a shift in thinking as a result of a collective spiritual hunch. He spoke of the importance of outreach and how it can lead to inreach. He also commented that mistakes made through experimentation are a vital source of growth for our spiritual enrichment.

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting, reminded us that we cannot continue as a church of retired middle class people run by retired middle class people; we need to cultivate an inclusive religious community across class, race and age boundaries. He challenged us to discern and articulate not only our own ministry, but also that of our wider Quaker communities.

Richard Summers, General Secretary of Quaker Life at Britain Yearly Meeting, asserted that for Quakerism to flourish we need to become wholly ourselves and share from the depths of our beings with each other. We need leadership that empowers, facilitates and encourages rather than instructs.

Helen Rowlands, Head of Education at Woodbrooke, shared with us the vision and the study schedule of Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre.

Simon Best, Woodbrooke tutor Nurturing Friends and Meetings, said that we are all ministers fulfilling

ministry and not just filling jobs. He suggested that present structures be reevaluated to meet the needs of our current fellowship.

A series of workshops were held dealing with the Fruits of the Spirit and Experimenting with Light. Following these workshops Friends participated in a "Lucky Dip" that divided everyone into threshing groups. These threshing groups were the crux of the conference. Each group observed a formal business practice with a clerk and supporting elders. In these groups Friends firstly threshed ways in which Quaker renewal might happen and the forms it might take. Secondly, each group discerned a minute of their vision for a new fire within Quakerism.

At the conclusion of the conference, the writers of this report wondered why there are no groups similar to the Kindlers in the United States. This conference energized and excited us, and we have a sincere hope that something like this can be implemented and light a fire within the American Quaker community.

The three of us who participated are very grateful that Concord Quarter enabled us to attend the conference and bring home fresh ideas and inspiration. We are also grateful for the British Friends for welcoming us so warmly into their community.

Respectfully submitted:

Brigitte Burger
Zachary Dutton
Todd Krasnai