

FWCC Meeting Stony Point NY March 23-26, 2017
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Gathering Theme “Living Peace”

FWCC was a life changing and eye opening event for me in more than one ways. Meeting and engaging with people from throughout Americas was one of the highlight for me. But let me start from the beginning. I have divided the report into two sections; one, the events and two my personal reflections. Each day we had worship with a prepared message, business meeting, home group and workshops.

THURSDAY

We were greeted with the song, “We are the boat, we are the sea, I sail in you, you sail in me.” The gathering theme was introduced along with highlights of NYYM history. Some messages that touched my heart were “Not conformity but unity” and “Unity in us is deeper than our division”.

Kitty Ufford-Chase, co-director at the Stony Point center, spoke about “radical hospitality” as a practice of not only welcoming a person but also all they are, including their practices, their thoughts and ways of being.

Reflections: The messages opened my heart and helped me realize that all of us are on the same journey. The idea of “radical hospitality” gave me perspective on accepting people at a deeper level than I had ever considered.

FRIDAY

Carl Magruder of Pacific YM introduced “Vision of Shalom” which is not just absence of war, but a supernatural vision. He related that his work as a hospice chaplain helped him to see how each new birth is preceded by death or destruction. He said that because humans and earth at this time are dying organisms, we have possibilities we never had before. We now have the possibility of experiencing living peace or Shalom.

In the evening I chose to attend a workshop by Lucy Duncan on Quaker Social Change Ministry. Some of the ideas shared were, we are here to bring heaven on earth and in order to do so we must create new systems that support this vision and way of being.

Reflections: As a former hospice nurse and also with my current work focusing on healing, peace and creating new systems that support our vision of “heaven on earth”, this day gave me incredible hope. I realized that I have partners all over the world who also hold these aspirations and visions. I felt understood and supported in my vision for peace.

SATURDAY

Krienia Criado from Cuba shared a different perspective on the parable of talents. The main question she posed was what if the servant with one talent was not lazy but someone who refused to participate in the system of exploitation. She also shared a number of deep queries and observations.

During our home group, one of the Friends shared that having money meant God was rewarding their good work. The conversation then shifted to how people are exploited for money, stealing of indigenous land, slavery, raping of earth in the name of progress and the doctrine of discovery that gave the European people license to kill, convert and assimilate indigenous people. Several Friends of European decent justified the above as “nothing different from what happens all over the world”. The group leader than used the Quaker process to silence a Friend of color who was unable to share her opinion until the end.

Reflections: To me, days 1&2 were about building hope. But, on day 3 the reality of fear, prejudice, self righteousness and process violence became painfully obvious. Here I came face to face with oppression that is not only dignified, justified but also romanticized.

This experience taught me that unless we become radically aware of our own inner processes, we will always preserve and defend systems of oppression, unless we get past denial of our painful past and actively work on healing wounds oppression has carved on our spirit; we will always live in a world that is divided by race, color, religion etc. This experience made me dig deep. It made me angry and in the end it helped me get in touch with a deeper level of compassion for myself and others.

SUNDAY

We had the home group meeting first on Sunday. We were given the scriptures we were going to focus on during worship.

The verses from Jeremiah focused on the fact that just saying peace peace is not enough when “my people” are dying. Micah focused on doing good and walking humbly. And George Fox’s quote included “preach among all sorts of people and to them.” I noticed that everyone in our home group was focusing on Micah and the quote from QFP but no one commented on the first quote from Jeremiah.

During Worship Jonathan Vogel-Borne talked about normalization of oppression. He also gave a framework for peace work. The stages he shared were 1. Blessed assurance: “knowing that I am loved for all that I am including my shadow”. 2. Divine disquiet: Learning about one’s own hypocrisy and a call to change. 3. Righteous rage: being outraged at the status quo that only serves the privileged. 4. Holy Obedience: walking the path of peace.

Several interesting discussions were brought up during the worship too. One person shared that an African American, the only POC in that meeting, was read out of her meeting that day. Another person responded to the outrage over this incident by reminding the worship group to not judge others.

Reflections: This again was a tough day for me. Jonathan’s sharing really touched my heart. But the way my home group turned a blind eye, once again, to oppression mentioned in the verse from Jeremiah was mind boggling to me. I also found the QFP quote to strangely resemble the text in the doctrine of discovery. I felt that the comment by one of the Friends about not judging was an example of how we tend to weaponize love and use the Quaker process as a way to not only avoid challenging systems of oppression but shaming others who have the courage to speak up.

CONCLUSION

Lessons I learned from FWCC are too many to put in a short report. This experience made me aware of the deep love so many of us carry and also the deep fear that holds us hostage to the chaotic patterns of oppressive systems that are no longer sustainable. I understand this is not a linear path and that we often oscillate between different points depending on what is happening for us in that moment. Deep in my heart I feel there is still hope for humanity. I am happy to be a part of this journey of hope to living peace.