

Conference Epistle

“God Troubles the Waters”: Educating for Peace and Justice in Stormy Times

In the wake of September 11th, the Friends’ Association for Higher Education brought faculty, students, campus ministers, administrators, presidents, and activists to Wilmington College, where we asked with renewed urgency how we may serve as instruments of peace in what one Friend described as a “distraught world.” We were buoyed by the community at Wilmington, who worked so hard to craft a soothing place in which we could engage difficult questions. They welcomed us with warmth transcending the literal heat of Ohio—a loving care reflected in myriad thoughtful details, from our welcome of carnations and Cadbury chocolates to our Saturday evening’s entertainment of cool jazz played by a Wilmington trio.

It seemed peculiarly appropriate that Wilmington was the community to welcome FAHE for this, our 23rd annual conference: it was Wilmington that, in 1980, hosted concerned Friends seeking ways to help Quaker faculty infuse their teaching practice with their faith. In our opening session, Canby Jones, Sterling Olmsted, and Earl Redding, three of these seekers, recalled for us their questions and concerns. Ron Rembert prefaced their remarks by closely reading George Fox’s account of his revelation on Pendle Hill—that of a “great people to be gathered.” Noting that when we revisit primary texts, we often see new meaning surrounding the information we sought, Ron observed Fox’s pedagogical imagery of the “inward teacher” as central to FAHE’s mission. How could Friends “bring all students to the teacher within”? Could our role be “to bring others into the presence of God—and leave them there”?

Canby Jones noted that Quakers are “compulsive educators,” singing out “Gotta teach!”—followed by his irrepressible (and contagious) giggle. In worship sharing, we reflected on how our joy in learning can be translated into expression in diverse disciplines, not only through text-based teaching, but in disciplines ranging from performance arts to laboratory studies. This rich spectrum bears witness, as Canby noted, that his late co-founder Charles Browning’s “baby is alive and well.”

FAHE has, in fact, come of age, and its growth has been fed by its inclusion not only of Friends teaching in non-Quaker colleges, but of ministers, administrators, staff, and like-minded friends of other faiths. At FAHE, we transcend traditional tensions of institutional structures in spirit-led, joyous collaboration: collaboration that strengthens us as we face

challenges within ourselves, our colleges, and from the world beyond.

How we help our students prepare to engage that world beyond was frankly, and movingly, addressed by Don McNemar, Doug Bennett, and Dan DiBiasio during their presidents’ panel. Our students, fed in part by our ideals, yearn to create “the city on the hill,” struggling to understand why, as Doug Bennett noted, we can’t fix its flaws “*right now!*” How can we make our campuses working models of the true, hard challenges of peacemaking so that our student can learn to address those challenges effectively and with compassion? Sometimes students wonder “how can I respect diversity when I *know* I’m right?”—and we struggle to teach them tolerance for, and patience with, the time it takes to learn about the complex truths of this entangled world. How can we help

of and ethical queries about plagiarism, Friends showed ways to draw students into moral inquiry by engaging them with the lives of others, both represented and real. We discussed teaching justice in science classes and how to build nourishing learning communities for and through our ministry in education. Educating for peace is a continuum of lifelong learning, as witnessed in a plenary session by colleagues in elementary, middle, and high schools through their programs for mediating conflict and positive, empowering self-discipline and responsibility. From Jennifer Barraclough, director of Woodbrooke, we learned about nurture of adult learners in their continuing quest to learn, and seek to create, peace and justice at Europe’s only Quaker study center.

Through these powerful witnesses, we are reminded that “when we walk into a room with others, we are entering the possibility of transformation.” That possibility was highlighted by the participation of Friends from our Quaker peace-making organizations: the Quaker United Nations Organization, the American Friends Service Committee, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, and Friends in Unity with Nature, as well as related programs sponsored by the Church of the Brethren. These groups have called us to make their mission visible in our colleges, “building rungs on a ladder” leading from classroom studies to internships to a lifetime of engagement. In communities of spirit-led action, we can show them the way, in the words of FCNL’s mission statement, to “seek a world restored.”

At FAHE, we come together to be restored, to go on with our work replenished by fellowship at the place where intellect and spirit meet. Our workshops and worship sharing help us avert burnout through care of each other, and this is crucial not only for ourselves, but for those we serve. Stephanie Crumley-Effinger reflected that “our interruptions *are* our work”—and we need to create space enough in our lives that when they come, we are not too worn to meet the needs that prompted them. On whatever scale, from the knocking of a student on an office door to the devastating crash of planes into the Twin Towers, we must learn to see our interruptions as challenges to serve. “God troubles the waters”: we are called to navigate those waters, and to help our students learn to navigate them too, not only along with us, but for the rest of their lives. FAHE has, once again, helped us launch our vessels into loving, spirit-led action.

Respectfully submitted,

Doug Burks, Susan McNaught, and Susanne Weil
FAHE 2002 Epistle Committee

FAHE

23rd Annual Conference
June 20 -23, 2002
Wilmington College

Educating
for
Peace
and
Social Justice



them learn “to make good things come out of awful situations,” as Don McNemar framed it? How shall, in short, we put our faith into practice?

One answer, suggested by Dan DiBiasio, is that “good evangelism is not proselytizing, but witnessing.” We may never feel that we know enough to act, yet we know that we are called to act from our “informed confusion.” Throughout this meeting of FAHE, we gained concrete inspiration from the witness of work Friends are doing to meet these challenges. Again and again, sessions demonstrated how sharing narratives can bring people together, creating the possibility of reconciliation by developing empathy. From collaborations on stories of peacemaking in Burundi and Haiti to case studies

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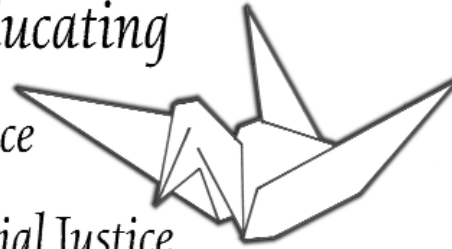
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23rd Annual Conference
hosted by Wilmington College
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*Minute of Appreciation for the
Wilmington College
Community*

FAHE offers thanks to Wilmington College for opening its doors and hearts to us. The hard work of the local arrangements committee was lovingly given and everywhere evident. No detail of care was omitted and the abundance of many small touches was deeply appreciated, as were the contributions of the Wilmington Peace Resource Center and local educators. Wilmington's gracious hosting grounded us for a productive and joyous meeting. Many Thanks!

*Approved at the FAHE annual Meeting for
Worship on the occasion of business
June 23, 2002*



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**Friends Association
for Higher Education**



2002

Annual Conference

*hosted by
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