

Penn Notes

William Penn House

Spring, 2011

EMBRACING CHANGE AS OPPORTUNITY

In these challenging times, it seems many people are waiting for a return to something familiar. It is our observation that, while it is fully understandable that we all try to fit future needs into the comfortable context of what we know, our future will actually require us to live very differently. Systems and institutions are inherently slow to adapt to change (not that dissimilar from Quaker process, actually) but there are some realities that cannot wait for change and others that are more harmful the longer we take.

In this edition of our newsletter, we will share some stories of how we are witnessing this phenomenon and how we are embracing the challenges they present as opportunities to work towards a better world, and to do so from a centered place that we can identify as an expression of Quakerism.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The seasons change, our bodies change, and when we were young we embraced change, but it seems we resist change as we age. But do we? Those who were parents and grandparents following World War II embraced change more than any 2 generations ever. They built a new America with fully funded public schools, a transportation network unexcelled, a commitment to science and technology that was world renowned and they paid for it with taxes. They improved their standard of living and with the help of unions, standardized the 5 day week, corporate and government retirement systems and better health care. But the next generations that were blessed with this commitment to the welfare of the entire community have reneged on the promise that they received. Greed, selfishness and failure to live within our means are the legacy that we are passing forward.

So how do we as a small faith community live up to the legacy of the WWII generation? We go back to the basics: the Quaker Testimonies. How do we live in community if saving a buck is more important than supporting our neighbors? How do we live in simplicity if we must acquire that which we do not need? How do we value integrity with others if our word is no longer good? How do we have equality when there is gross economic injustice? And how do we have peace when these first four testimonies are valued so little?

For many organizations, leadership is shared based on ability not age. By being open to the gifts of others we are enriched and challenged to be more than the sum of our parts. We cannot assume that age, education, or traditions are precursors of wisdom. If our Quaker faith is to grow and survive, our youth must be engaged at all levels. They must be given roles in leadership and in the challenges inherent in a vital faith. We must ask the younger Friends to serve and then give them meaningful work and respect their decisions and approaches. We must recognize that with young people, the past informs but does not dictate. We must accept that we will be challenged. And do not discount the value spending time with youth at their gatherings and youth programs. It's a great way to learn to embrace the challenges.

Change can be scary, invigorating and a blessing. If we truly believe in continuing revelations, how do we know that the change that challenges us is not the way opening? If we live our lives quoting the past, quoting those who are deceased or ancient tomes, how do we live into our gifts and our leadings? The world has changed over the years and so should our faith.

My goal, my dream is that Quakers once again become the agents of change, that we challenge the status quo and that the change can start here at home and that we will truly live our faith through action, through commitment and through sacrifice. For Quakers, how we live our lives is the true test of our faith.

Byron Sandford

HIV/AIDS: A LESSON IN CAPITALISM IN THE WRONG ARENA - Brad Ogilvie

When I was diagnosed with HIV in the early 1990's, all of us with HIV were being told that our time was limited. If anyone had told us back then that there would be a day when there were treatments available that could make HIV a chronic condition, that we would have technology that would allow people to screen themselves for HIV and get the results within 20 minutes, and that there would be such things as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and SKYPE so that we could communicate, educate and support each other, we would have definitely felt we could get a good grip on the pandemic. Now, twenty years later, we have all these things, but instead of utilizing them to their fullest potential, we are entering into a fourth decade of the pandemic with trends going the wrong direction.

What happened? In a nutshell, a huge bureaucracy developed that cannot easily adapt to change. As a result, despite new technology that allows for self-testing, the laws remain that self-testing is illegal. The common refrain is that people need counseling, but the counseling profession does not have adequate training, so people have to go to a health department or medical facility. In addition, marketing campaigns for who should be tested continue to show faces of gay men or people with dark skin. Have you ever seen an ad with a white heterosexual couple? And yet, the AIDS world continues to bemoan the "stigma" of society—the very one that is perpetuated by the system. It's a paradigm all too common and not exclusive to HIV/AIDS. How many environmental groups, for example, in the massive amounts of e-mails following the Gulf Coast oil disaster last year, called for changes in consumption of energy in the midst of blame and funding campaigns? Not many.

What seems to have happened is that we have bought in to the corporate capitalism mindset that looks at corporate greed as the problem and corporate accountability as the solution. These are just pieces of the puzzle, but we also need community capital to get involved. This means turning to each other for support and for action that is driven by a concern not just for self but for others as well.

In the summer of 2012, the HIV/AIDS world will be focused on Washington DC as the Biennial International AIDS Conference gathers here. Big names, immense power and untold wealth will converge to congratulate each other and share stories of dread. There will be protests and plenty of blame. All of these are already in the works. What's not being discussed is what we can do now so that we have much to celebrate rather than lament in 2012. Throughout this upcoming year, we will be actively engaging the people in DC to be a model of action, not blame. It's an expression of the Quaker Testimonies in action that we will be bringing forth, and we invite you to join us in demonstrating what we can do together.

What Quaker Workcamps can show us about Quaker Process

Recently, we held a few Workcamps with 8th grade students from different schools. Both groups were looking at hunger and homelessness issues. In one Workcamp, the youth were handing out sandwiches to people in a city park. The youth quickly ran out of the sandwiches they made to hand out, looked at their own food, and with barely a few words, all agreed to hand their own out. In the other Workcamp, the kids were asked how they could make the greatest use of their allotted dinner budget. They quickly agreed, again with few words, to buy a simple dinner for themselves and cook it, and use the rest of the funds to support a grassroots youth-oriented community program. Both of these exemplify Quaker process at its best: few words and no vote but a clear sense of what they were being led to do. With the second group, the youth continued to engage in a Quaker process to decide what wanted for dinner. Twenty minutes later, they were still undecided about whether to have spaghetti or macaroni and cheese. They were so focused on trying to discern what "we" want for dinner that they easily lost sight of the fact that what they choose matters little. I think we have all seen this in our Meeting.

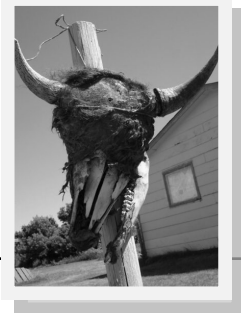
Quaker process can be wonderful when it is truly led by the spirit and is grounded in the testimonies. It also has limited us in application. It had us questioning: to what extent do Friends hold the Quaker process so reverently—insistent on not taking votes, for example— that we are over-reliant on the process or even misuse it and subsequently think that anything that comes from it is more meaningful than it really is? In these two examples, for the issues that really mattered to the larger world—feeding and supporting others—the kids knew exactly what to do. When the ego is to be considered, however—such as "what do you want" and it makes little difference to the world—the process can get bogged down, feelings get hurt, and people even leave. Those of us who have been active among Friends have all seen it—what color to paint the walls, whether to install a dishwasher—all questions about us, and at times engaging in seemingly endless and pointless conversations that have no impact on the larger world.

Perhaps we can hold these as models for how to consider our process in the future and that our future (not just Friends, but humanity) is in good hands. And perhaps we can also explore ways that we can share the gifts of this process with the world, by getting out there to as many places as possible and nurturing a process that is always caring for the greater world.

PINE RIDGE WORKCAMP: AIR MILES NEEDED

For the 3rd year summer in a row, we are returning to Pine Ridge, SD to run a Workcamp. As with last summer, this will be a 2-week Workcamp (from August 25-July 7), and is being offered as a multi-generational Workcamp. As a result of the continuity (and as a validation of the importance of continuity) this year we will be working more closely with a youth group on the "Rez", giving participants an opportunity to break down many of the barriers that often exist despite best intents. By working together, rather than having one group provide a service to another, we establish greater equality which is the bedrock for any long-lasting justice. In addition to working together in South Dakota, we also have an opportunity for some youth from that region to join us back here in DC for a week and to learn more about where we live as well as to visit the government that makes the laws that effect all people and has a long-history of mistreating the Indians.

We have received a commitment from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Indian Committee to help underwrite the costs of travel for these youth and their chaperones, but we have a special request: If any of you reading this newsletter have airmiles that you can donate (Delta, American, United) that would greatly help reduce the costs of this venture. Please consider donating your extra miles to a very worthwhile cause. Contact Brad Ogilvie at brad@williampennhouse.org for more information or to arrange this contribution.



STAFF TRANSITIONS

Harry Caterson, a member of Middletown Friends Meeting of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, has completed his internship with William Penn house and will be returning to his home near Philadelphia where he will continue creating music. Joining us is Jacob Kelley of Shiloh Chapel of Evangelical Friends Church-Eastern Region. Jacob will serve as an intern for the summer. Towards the end of Summer, we will also be saying good-bye to long-term intern and future counselor Kelli Mansure. In addition, we have had the great fortune to have some outstanding fellows from George Washington University's School on Non-Profit Management. Kula Koenig and Karen Berry, and intern Carolyn Williams from American University's International Conflict Resolution program working with us throughout the Spring. Each has contributed greatly to our work in very exciting ways. Thanks to all of you and welcome, Jacob.



GOING GREEN: SEEKING SHORT-TERM INVESTMENTS FOR LONG-RANGE GOOD

Over the past few years, we have committed ourselves to being good stewards of the William Penn House legacy and this wonderful property that is the heart of what we are. We have repainted the interior, refinished the floors, upgraded the bathrooms, installed central heat and cooling, installed an energy efficient boiler, weatherized the building, replaced all of the beds, created a peace garden in front and a rain garden in the rear. We are now committed to further improve the property by installing a vegetated roof on the Carriage House. The Carriage House predates the main structure by nearly 40 years. It is two stories with space on the lower level for the Workcamps workshop and hopefully office and meeting space upstairs.

We are committed to reduce our ecological footprint. We have significantly reduced the run off from the House with the rain garden. We have received a grant for \$21,000 from the District of Columbia to install a green or vegetated roof on the Carriage House. Through our engineer, we learned that the Carriage House like many of the 1870's structures on Capitol Hill does not have a foundation. The engineered reports address this but add to the cost of reinforcing and strengthening the building. At this point, our costs have increased from \$21,000 to \$28,000 plus the plants that will be planted on the roof.

The building will need most of the work whether we install a vegetated roof or not. As good stewards we are committed to preserving this historic structure and to mitigating the run off into the Anacostia River. As with all of our activities, the greening of the Carriage House will be an educational and workcamp project for our young friends who visit us from around the world.

To complete our project within a reasonable time, we need at least \$9,000 more than our budget which includes fees for service, donations and grants. To preserve, to renovate, to reduce our ecological footprint are expensive especially when the structure is 135 years old.

CHANGE

Every few decades throughout history, it seems there are significant upheavals that produce chaos and can often be violent in the short-term, but ultimately seem to produce positive results in the long-term. The pattern seems to be that we go through periods of significant change (most recently in terms of technology and economy), but our society and institutions do not transform easily to the new changes. The upheaval seems to be what brings about the transformation needed to move to the future.

Pianist Caroline Schoeder said “Some people change when they see the light; others when they feel the heat”. It is this distinction that can mean the difference between embracing change and resisting change. It is far easier for people to look forward than it is for institutions, but we live in a time where our visions are often limited by the institutions and corporations that influence our thoughts and action for their own survival. There are those who say that many of the problems that we face today (energy, economy, environment, health) were unforeseen, and many people continue to study these things but not implement change. And yet, really, many of these things we now face had been foreseen, but to address them means we have to deconstruct and dismantle much of what we know.

At William Penn House, we have been embracing the challenge of change, not as a result of “heat” but by observing and hearing the constant calls for change. People who have been doing service work for years, for example, are now wondering whether these efforts have really transformed society or merely further entrenched divisions. We are exploring ways to think and act more collaboratively both internally and externally, believing that we are all greater than the sum of our parts. This attitude has opened doors recently to sharing meals and ideas with people from very diverse economic, theological and cultural backgrounds. To be fully present and open, we have worked to ground ourselves in the oft-stated core belief of Quakerism that “there is that of God in all”.

As we move forward, we are continuing to explore, learn and create ways to connect this to all that we do in our hospitality, programs, and outreach. As Stephen Covey said, “the key to the ability to change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about and what you value.” We are asking people, including ourselves, to explore what is it at their core that matters most, and to use this anchor to weather the storms of change so we all come out better. We welcome you on this journey.

