

*Epistle of the Friends Association for Higher Education,
from our meeting, June 26-29, 2003,
Pendle Hill and Swarthmore College*

Dear Friends Everywhere,

Our 2003 theme, “Seeking a Praxis of Peace: the Sacred and the Secular,” was cosponsored by FAHE and Friends Council on Education. From many homes and schools, we came together at Pendle Hill and Swarthmore College. In our scavenger hunt around these beautiful campuses, we found inspiration, hospitality, peace, quiet, and deadly heat. We came as Friends, and as friends of Friends, as educators from “pre-natal” to college and beyond. We came to share our distinctive Quaker values and our universal human values, for renewed strength and vision in one another’s company, to form our own “Beloved Community” for a weekend, celebrating old friendships and forming new ones. We came to hear each other’s voices and to settle in the silence of worship. We came Seeking a Praxis of Peace.

From Paula Green on Thursday evening and the TOVA theater group Friday, we learned about the healing that can come from telling one’s story, and also saw how much is still left to heal. We were touched by the images of children “with eyes too old for their faces” and reached to touch one another in a circle of song. We saw that the most powerful works come from bringing people together, then getting out of the way of the Spirit, letting go of plans and obeying leadings. We heard the wisdom to “trust the universe,” whether drawing names out of a hat for collaborative math groups to reduce competition, or bringing together men imprisoned for life, football players and anti-rape activists, liberal and evangelical Friends, or college students and staff.

We heard the wisdom that our responsibility as teachers and peace makers is to create a space that is safe enough for the truth to emerge, where people are able to tell difficult stories, to remember and forgive. At times the greatest gift we can offer is deep listening, whether in our classrooms or in a war-torn city in Bosnia. Attention is a reverential act.

In each of these encounters, we were reminded to “answer that of God in everyone,” or to follow John Woolman’s example of “appealing to the pure witness” in others with whom we might disagree or from whom we might seem very different. Our Quaker ancestors showed us different ways to draw

out the inward teacher, and to speak prophetically in a world of oppression and violence. We searched for wisdom to know how to respond to the world's values of greed and fear that press in upon our students from all sides. We pondered how we are led at this moment in our country's history with its actions in Iraq and around the world. We pondered how we might be led to change systems of war to cultures of peace, tending seeds of which we might not see the fruit.

On our last evening together, we were inspired by the voices of Swarthmore faculty, staff, and students, working together to create a community on their own campus where groups of people traditionally divided and valued differently may instead come together in general wellbeing and mutual respect and care. We leave our time together with a new clarity and renewed hope for the work of peace that lies ahead.

Approved by the members attending the FAHE annual meeting for worship on the occasion of business, Pendle Hill, June 29, 2003

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