Being Salt and Light

Friends living the Kingdom of God in a Broken World

The Sixth World Conference of Friends
Kabaraka University
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Introduction

Dear Friends,

In this report we have brought together the reflections, workshops, reports and the epistle of the Sixth World Conference of Friends. It is our hope that these documents will continue and widen the conversations that started as we met together in the peaceful, green setting of Kabarak University – conversations both inspired and challenged us. In that place we took time to seriously discuss and meditate on the ways Friends are now and can become Salt and Light in a broken world.

Close to 850 Friends from 51 countries, with a wide variety of religious practices, cultures and backgrounds gathered that week. It was a beautiful rainbow – so many different styles of dress, so many languages, joyful music from around the world and vivid colours (as well as Quaker gray!). We worshiped together in many different ways – in programmed and unprogrammed sessions, in silent meditation and with spoken ministry, reflecting on the theme with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in many languages – even dancing drew us closer to God. We experienced our diversity deeply.

Both Thread and Home groups provided time for engaging new ideas, for sharing and fresh learning as we dove into topics such as Climate Change, Food Security and Deadly Conflict, Healing and Rebuilding our Community, Living out the Kingdom while living in the Empire, Friends Diversity and History, etc. Summaries of these sessions form part of this report.

The richness of the conference included a welcome address by the Chancellor of the University, business meetings of the Sections, a project fair showing how Friends are involved locally and globally in living out their testimonies and concerns and day trips mid-conference to sites such as Lake Nakuru, a Kericho tea plantation, Lake Baringo and Lake Bogoria – a break from the size and intensity of the gathering, and a chance to see something of the fascinating area in which we met.

We met for tea on the lawn and meals in the dining hall, talking together and coming to know one another in the Spirit. There was a talking wall where people expressed themselves spontaneously.

For those who attended the conference, we trust that this report will not only be a reminder of the experience, but will also cause you to celebrate once more what we share as Friends and to continue the work of being Salt and Light in a broken world.
For those who were not there, our prayer is that as you read this report, in particular the plenary addresses, you will have a glimpse of God's work among us and will be inspired to join the conversation.

For everyone, we pray that the words shared in this report will have life for you and will help to nourish the “new thing” that is growing even now within the Religious Society of Friends. We celebrate our unity in diversity. Let us continue in that path together.

— Editors

Doreen K. Aluda, Lugari Yearly Meeting
Helen Bayes, Australia Yearly Meeting
Elizabeth Gates, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Answering God’s Call to Universal Love . . .

FWCC has been bringing Friends together since its inception in 1932. It is what we do year round, day by day in the four Section Offices and in the World Office; we connect Friends, cross cultures, and change lives throughout the world.

Answering God’s call to universal love, FWCC brings Friends of varying traditions and cultural experiences together in worship, communications, and consultation to express our common heritage and our Quaker message to the world. This is the FWCC mission statement.

What is it about the Sixth World Conference that brings this into distinctive focus?

At the Conference, we sat together, we ate together, we fed each other and took in nourishment. It was a huge and glorious family reunion. We greeted our long lost cousins with open arms. We talked about what was essential for us, and we listened to each other with a longing to understand. We talked less from our heads about our differences, and instead, we engaged our hearts. We delighted in our ability for each of us to say “yes, I am a Quaker” even when that has different meanings for each one of us. We shared spiritual nourishment and drank deeply from the well.

Paul Parker, Britain Yearly Meeting, said, “Ultimately, all we really have is the quality of our relationship with God and with each other. It doesn’t matter which church, gender, culture, sexuality or language we claim. We all breathe with the same breath.”

In Mark 12:28–32, a teacher asked Jesus,

“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one” answered Jesus, “is this: Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these.”

Indeed. Somehow, we lived into this commandment in a way that for many of us (certainly for me) was transformational. God’s presence was palpable. I left wanting more.

This is an important time for Friends. There is energy to love one another. Friends have been through separation, through differences that have torn us
apart. It is still happening. Yet, the conference gave us the gift of spiritual depth in our relationships and the gift of saying, “We are ALL Friends.” At the conference disagreement was present, but we were not distracted by it. We listened. We talked. We opened ourselves to new understanding and healing. We valued relationships over our human need to be right. God’s grace poured over us like honey, and we were blessed by God’s abundant love.

One Friend from Bolivia expressed it this way: I am grateful to God. I know there are Friends that don’t know me, and I don’t know them, yet they offered funds so I could know you. It is the greatest gift of my life. This is much larger than all the money in the world. My heart has been waiting 28 years for this moment to get to know you. We were officially welcomed into FWCC last year. Friends considered this marvellous. You are great Friends, very generous Friends, noble, with large hearts. We all are One. One with my Father. From all five continents. He knows our sincere hearts. May God bless all Friends. This is my prayer.

_In love and gratitude,_

_Gretchen Castle, General Secretary, FWCC World Office_
Reflection on the theme
“Brokenness is in the eye of the beholder”

Friday 20 April 2012

Thomas Owen, Aotearoa/New Zealand Yearly Meeting

Mirembel Jambo marafiki!
Ngā mihi nui ki a Io, nāna te kore, nāna te pō, nāna hoki te ao i whakatinana.
E mihi ana, e mihi ana.
Ngā mihi nui ki te mana whenua o te rohe nei. E mihi ana, e mihi ana.
Ko Te Haahi Tuuhauwiri te iwi.
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

Greetings Friends. My name is Thomas Owen. I come from Aotearoa/New Zealand and I’ve been asked to complete the Asia/West Pacific Section talk today by reflecting on the last part of our theme: the “broken world.”

The official name of my country is New Zealand. However, many of us call it ‘Aotearoa’ in recognition of the indigenous people – the Māori – who lived there several hundred years before my first ancestors from Europe arrived. The greeting I began this talk with is in te reo – the Māori language. I began by greeting the Creator – “from you came potential, the night, and this world you have populated” – and by greeting our hosts, the Kenyans, the peoples who nurture the Spirit of this land.

I also greeted all of us gathered here today as one tribe, what I called Te Haahi Tuuhauwiri. This is the Māori name for Quakers in Aotearoa. It translates literally as “the faith community that stands shaking in the wind of the Spirit.” On behalf of Te Haahi Tuuhauwiri o Aotearoa, I greet you all, sisters and brothers of the Quaker world.

My country is a small land near the southern tip of the globe between Australia and Antarctica. Its geographic isolation meant that Aotearoa was the last significant inhabitable landmass to be colonised by people. Māori settled
Reflection on the theme during worship under the care of Latin American Friends

Sunday 22 April 2012

Ramon Gonzalez Longoria, Cuba Yearly Meeting

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

— Matthew 5:13-15

Large projects begin with small and simple things, the elements that are present but perhaps at the same time not visible, and yet they are essential. Today scientists pay more and more attention to the small things, because they recognize their importance (for example, DNA, neutrinos, etc.). This is happening in a world of globalization, where everything is macro and not micro. Comparing Quakers with other faith groups, we would be classified as micros, but this hasn’t daunted our testimony. We believe we have something to do and to share, and that we can contribute to this world of problems, necessities, catastrophes, anguish, and desperation (aspects that define our theme of a broken world).

In this text we will look at two references. One is salt, and the other is light. We would not argue the smallness of a single grain of salt, but we find ourselves with different dimensions of light. Jesus said, YOU are the salt of the earth, but we need to say, WE are the salt of the earth. This is not to be pretentious, but because each person is called by God to take responsibility in this world. Note that this expression, as much as the following one, “You are light,” has a clear and precise meaning: “We are the salt and Light of the World.” That is to say, to be salt and light is to be called to a ministry that is not intended only for our monthly meetings or our yearly meetings, or even the international community. It includes all these, but goes beyond that. We are called to live for others, being salt and light (note that we use a gerund because it notes a continuing action).
When Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth," he gave humanity an expression that can be used, in the right situation, as a compliment. When we want to place emphasis on the qualities of character and the usefulness of someone, we say, "People like this are the salt of the earth." In the time of Jesus, salt had three qualities that were especially important to people.

Salt was identified with purity. The whiteness probably suggested its connection with purity. One characteristic of our current world is that we've lowered our standards of honour, justice, equality, responsibility, morality, and much more. We need to maintain our integrity and truthfulness in the way we speak and the way we act. This is the most effective way to speak. We should continue emphasizing this Quaker testimony, and motivate others to do the same.

In the Ancient Near East, salt was the most common preservative for food. It was used to stop things from decomposing and putrefying because it has an antiseptic quality. Salt helps keep things pure. If we are to be salt of the earth, we need to have that same antiseptic influence on the world around us. We need to be the preservative that holds at bay the erosion of human values.

The most obvious quality of salt is that salt gives flavour to things. Food without salt is boring. It doesn't taste very good. The world has the right to discover the lost flavour of Christian faith, which is not boring at all. In a depressed world, we should live and communicate the joy of living, but too often, we go about as if we were in mourning. Wherever we are, if we are to be the salt of the earth, we should find and communicate joy (2 Corinthians 4:7-9).

A grain of salt sits in the centre of the saltshaker. He admires his fine, straight edges, and his immaculate whiteness. He is surrounded by an army of grains of salt just like himself. But there he sits on the kitchen shelf, pure and isolated, uncontaminated by the elements around him – he is convinced of his goodness. But he has no purpose or use. Safe in his saltshaker, he has no flavour. What is the use of salt without interaction? What purpose do we have if we are pure, but isolated within ourselves?

Jesus said if salt loses its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything. Uselessness invites disaster. If we're not living into our calling, we invite disaster. If the purpose of our lives is to be the salt of the earth – if we don't give life the pure, antiseptic quality that we should – we are not living into our calling. We are headed for disaster.

Salt dissolves itself in order to give flavour to food. In the process of giving itself away it loses its separateness, forgetting itself in order to be the servant.
Reflection on the theme during worship under the care of the Europe and Middle East Section

Monday 23 April 2012

Jocelyn Burnell, Britain Yearly Meeting

God grant that I may speak according to His will, and that my own thoughts may be worthy of His gifts.

— Wisdom of Solomon 7:14

Good Morning, Friends! My name is Jocelyn Burnell; I come from Britain, from the ‘unprogrammed’ tradition. As an ‘unprogrammed’ Friend, I would not normally prepare a message in advance – nor would I normally speak for 20 minutes! Here I have to do both, but all of us are doing things a bit differently this week in order to help the whole body.

My daytime job is as a scientist (an astronomer) – I study the stars and galaxies and black holes. I study the birth, life and death of our universe.

In my country I am a leader in my field, heavily involved in the secular world. So I live amongst the values and the trappings of secular society and try to be a Quaker presence in the secular world. I have a reputation for integrity, and I am proud of that.

I have been involved in some of the planning for this conference and know that at this stage of our week together, we are moving into the plenary sessions where we hope to pull things together; we are moving on from the Thread Groups to the stage where we work together in a large group. Those of us responsible for the matters to be considered will do our best to make it clear and manageable, but much patience and stamina will be required. Please also uphold the Clerks as they work to articulate what we have learned.

As we go into this stage I have been thinking about community. I also want to talk about brokenness, so there are two parts to this message. But first, community:
There are Friends among us who remind us of the importance of each of us individually accepting Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour, and it is right that they should so remind us. I have been wondering whether we can also think of a community being saved, and what this might mean and what this might look like.

In the Old Testament there is only a little talk of personal salvation and a lot of concern about the salvation of the community – the Tribes of Israel – the salvation of people collectively. People in Old Testament times understood that sin affected the health of the community; that if people were to be reunited with God then the covenant relationship with God had to be restored.

They developed a ritual, and elements of this can still be seen in Judaism today: once a year the High Priest, in fear and trembling, entered the Holy of Holies to ask for absolution for the sins of his tribe. He was not sure he was going to come out alive, and nobody else could enter the Holy of Holies to help him. So he left a corner of his shawl trailing out through the door, so that if he died his body could be retrieved by people outside the Holy of Holies pulling on that corner of the shawl.

He usually did come out alive, and then as described in Leviticus 16:21-22:

21 And Aaron [who was the High priest] shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.

22 And the goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

Goats are very valuable in many communities – I wonder if anyone thought this was a waste of a good goat!

Being able to get rid of sins like that sounds great, but I wonder . . . . just as I have learnt (along with others in the West) that you cannot throw rubbish ‘away,’ because there is no ‘away,’ I wonder if you can erase sin so simply – I suspect it may come back to you!

So if the world body of Friends, if our community is saved, what does it mean? And what are the marks of a community that is saved? I think it means the following:

We are united with God – we work in God’s strength.

We listen to God – follow God’s promptings.

We listen to each other, for God’s promptings may come through other people.
We respect the diversity amongst us – not everyone has the same gifts or the same callings and we know there are many ways to God.

I mentioned earlier that I am a scientist. I am also a woman, and there aren’t so many women scientists. A lot of my life is trying to make things easier for women to be scientists and to encourage those who already are. It has become clear that businesses, research groups, all sorts of organisations that have women as well as men in their senior positions are more flexible, more robust and more successful. Diversity is good. So I celebrate diversity in the Religious Society of Friends.

There will be disagreements in a diverse body, but we should see them as points of growth. And remember that creativity is often at the margins. We aim for justice for all, and a peaceable world. We live simply, not greedily, respecting the planet we live on. We make responsible use of the talents given us and the opportunities offered us. We have integrity and are honest. In short, we live as if the Kingdom of Heaven was here now; as if we were in the Kingdom of Heaven, making present God’s Kingdom here on earth.

We are the living sign of God and by our living will be prophetic.

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practise these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

The second part of my message about BROKENNESS, is much harder – harder for me and harder for you, and I ask that together we hold a moment of quiet, and in that quiet each to pray to God for the strength to be really honest.

Let us each pray silently to God for strength.

We live on a broken planet; in our communities there are broken people. We want to heal brokenness wherever we see it. It is uncomfortable for us as well as being uncomfortable for the person or thing that hurts. If somebody is grieving, for example, we ask kindly how they are, hoping that they will say they are fine, so we can go our way unperturbed. We encourage people to get over their problem and get back to normal. We are bad at sitting with pain.

Are we too keen to mend things, to have it all smooth again? Are we rushing so much to repair things? Are we so focused on making the future better,
that we miss some opportunities in the present? Here’s the part where I need your help and your honesty... Please think about your response to the following questions:

Do you carry feelings of grief, or sense of loss? Perhaps someone close to you died or went away?
Do you feel you have failed in some way?
Do you have a long-term illness or disability?
Are you in a body that shows serious signs of age?
Do you carry some hurt, some wound?

If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of these, know that you are not alone. I too stand with you.

I believe that those of us who are wounded have a special ministry, because we are wounded, because we are hurt. I cannot tell you what your ministry is; only you can find that, but I am sure that there are amongst us people who can speak to needs in this world because they know about hurt. Your ministry might be to help people who have been hurt like you have, but who are behind you on the road. The US author, Thornton Wilder said: In love’s service only the wounded can serve.

So do not rush to healing too fast; remember there may be a ministry for you in your woundedness - that I am sure about. Your wounds may heal some day and that piece of your ministry will be over for you and will be taken up by others.

But now I cannot see beyond my own questions, so I leave you with some thoughts to ponder.

Just as there is a ministry for the wounded in our communities, is there a role for a wounded community? Is the Religious Society of Friends a broken community?

Are we a broken community, a broken people, a broken society? Do we, through our brokenness have a role in God’s plan?

Just as there is a ministry for the wounded in our communities, is there a role for a wounded community? Is the Religious Society of Friends a broken community?
Keynote Address

Monday evening 23 April 2012

Nancy Irving, FWCC General Secretary

Remember the story that Noah told us last Thursday about second generation Friends Mary and Samuel? Mary realised that Samuel was coming to worship every Sunday like a good young man but he was just going through the motions. She challenged him with the question, “when you leave the Meeting, are you the same person who arrived at the beginning?” The clear implication is that we should be touched deeply in our souls by our worship.

So I ask you – are you the same as when we arrived here last week? How has God been working through you and within you? It is not always pleasant or pretty. Sometimes it takes some pain or some anger to crack us open like an egg, so that the work God has been doing inside of us can come out. That happened to me on Friday. I slipped and fell down hard and I cried in pain. Then I realised I needed to cry for other reasons, reasons that were not clear at the time. But those tears made it easier for me to prepare this talk. I didn’t intend to wait so long to write this but the words that came to me when I was still in England were not the right words.

So here we are – a people in the midst of change as we deepen our faith – we will always be changing if we are faithful to that Voice within us. Much as I am grateful for the changes and depth of my spiritual life, I still resist it. I want God to have me come to a nice place of comfort where I can stay awhile. I get scared of how I might be led to change. I get scared that God will ask me to do something I really don’t want to do. I sometimes turn off my ears to God’s voice – I go to the Meeting on Sunday and think about some committee work or how nice the weather is. I don’t want to be changed. I am often like Samuel Bownas from Noah’s story.

But then things happen, like falling down in pain, that crack me open. This has happened many times in my life and as I grow older and know how to listen better, I am aware of it more often – although I continue to resist listening.

We will always be changing if we are faithful to that Voice within us.
That is what I want to talk about this evening – empowerment – empowerment of yourself in your relationship with God, and then empowerment of us as Friends, as a family of God.

That relationship with God – and ultimately our relationship with each other as a family – is based on trust. Trust that God will provide, trust that what happens may be for some good, although that is often not clear.

I want to tell you about a four-year period in my life beginning in 1990. I had graduated from law school although I studied law because I wanted to know what lawyers know rather than out of a desire to be a lawyer. I worked five years as a lawyer in a bank in Oregon in the northwest of the United States. It did not nourish my soul although it paid my bills. Then another bank from far away bought my bank and simply to save money, they decided they did not need so many lawyers, so I lost my job. My boss was sorry to lose me and treated me kindly with salary for several months. I knew this was a God-given opportunity and I went into the mountains on retreat to listen deeply to what God wanted me to do. I fasted and prayed.

I had a lovely relaxing time but no great insight. Finally, I came to understand that my life message is 'There is another way.' I said, 'OK, God, I understand, but what am I supposed to do?' I heard nothing more. I went back to the city refreshed but disappointed that I had no idea what to do with myself.

But teachers appear – and many times they are an unexpected surprise. One morning, a wise friend of mine named Maria said, I think you are supposed to practice law for a few years and see what you learn. That was not an idea that I wanted to hear – I wanted to hear about something bigger, perhaps more important. I had lunch that day with two friends and told them what Maria had said. They said why not? I came up with all sorts of reasons which included practical things like not owning a computer or printer. One of those friends said he would bring them to me that evening and he did.

So now I'm getting nervous. In the next few days, three people came to me and said they would pay me to do some legal work for them. I saw God's hand in this and reluctantly said yes. I was feeling very vulnerable because I had never done this general type of law. In a couple weeks, I had to go to court in a suburban town where I had worked one month for a lawyer there while I was a student. I stopped by to say hello to her and she said she was retiring and selling her practice, did I want to buy it? Still reluctant, but seeing the hand of God in this, I said yes.

That is what God always wants us to do – to say yes!

So God gave me the tools, including an experienced legal secretary! I soon started to realise what God wanted me to learn by taking on this law practice.
– God wanted me to learn compassion. Unlike working in the bank, my clients now were people like you and me, who needed the knowledge and skills I had and they were trusting me to be their advocate, to be on their side. I did not have rich clients and for many, it was their first time talking to a lawyer. I helped them buy their homes, set up their businesses, write their wills, and also a lot of family law, including divorces which were very hard. I found that I was partly a social worker at times.

After two years, I felt a clear divine message that I had learned what I needed to learn and that I should close my practice. I heard that advice but didn’t trust it. It was not obvious what I should do next and I was still paying for my house and for my legal education – I needed to know I had an income. So again I resisted. I took mediation training and judges asked me to conduct arbitrations for them. But I was waiting for God to hand me my next assignment in a neat package.

That didn’t happen. So God got my attention by causing me pain in my bank account. Clients who owed me a lot of money broke their agreements and didn’t pay me. I was feeling desperate. I needed help. God gave me three friends who met with me weekly and we explored together life options, not just for me but for each of them too. Tax day came and I had the money to pay all the different taxes but one small tax – about $117 dollars. On tax day, I didn’t know what to do and I came to my office and there was an envelope under my door. It held a check for $125 dollars from a client. At that moment, I knew I was in God’s hands. I deepened my trust in God.

Up until then, I had been trying to negotiate with God and I said to God that I would do anything as long as I could stay in my house. I now realised that I could not put conditions on God. As soon as I released that condition, I learned of work that was suitable for me in another city 100 miles away. Within a matter of weeks, I had that job, I closed my law office, I sold my house and I had moved. It was incredibly fast – I thanked God profusely.

God wasn’t done – this was not the job of my dreams but it was a challenge and I could do it. A year later, it became more apparent how God was working in my life. I was diagnosed with cancer and needed surgery and chemotherapy. If I had been still working alone for myself, I would not have been able to pay the bills. I would have been bankrupt. As I was working for an organisation, I got paid time off and the medical bills were covered. Within months of completion of my treatment, I knew it was time to move on and I did. I left that job.

I now realised that I could not put conditions on God.
not knowing what was next. I could move on because I knew I could trust God to provide what I needed even if it wasn’t what I asked for or wanted.

Now you may be saying – cancer, that is terrible! For me it was another great teacher. I knew it was what I call a cosmic sledgehammer. I had to accept offers of help from others. I knew the lesson was to live my life differently. The differences were slow appearing, but in that time, I got involved with FWCC in my section, followed my dream of working and travelling overseas, and I found a way to serve that used all my skills – This job. And I got to meet you!

As you have listened to this story, I hope you have been able to see the hand of God guiding me as I stumbled through my own darkness. I call that Grace. The way I understand Grace is that it is the loving gift from God that is freely available and unmerited – we do not have to deserve it. We only need to accept it. It is in the little and big positive things that happen in our lives. Grace is a means of understanding how God works and for me it makes it simpler to avoid big theological words and concepts. Grace is simply given to us.

For me, Grace is important to understand as we talk about empowerment. Empowerment is very worldly, but it cannot happen without Grace. We may have the skills and means of doing something, but without Grace we probably will not be effective or make any impact.

That is an important part of the idea of empowerment – making a difference, having an impact. There are three concepts within empowerment I want to mention.

- Empowerment in the sense of your identity in the world and that includes our collective sense of identity as Friends and Quakers in the world.
- Empowerment involves giving ourselves permission to do things differently. Our world is constantly changing and if Grace is alive in us, we can respond in the present moment, with God-given life and awareness.
- Empowerment, together with Grace, connects us with others, both within and outside of the Society of Friends.

Every year I meet together with the general secretaries of the other Christian World Communions – my counterparts from the Anglicans, the Vatican, the various Orthodox, the Methodists, Reformed, Seventh Day Adventists, Mennonites and others. Usually there are about 25 of us. FWCC is by far the smallest – even the Mennonites have 1.4 million members and on a good day,
we may have $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million. We do not even have a reliable count. At one point I thanked them for continuing to include us as we are so small and the response from around the table was ‘we cannot imagine meeting without the Quakers.’

When the Nobel Peace Prize was presented in 1947, the presentation speech said, ‘this prize goes to the Quakers as represented by American Friends Service Committee and Quaker Peace and Service of London Yearly Meeting.’ The Quakers who earned that Nobel Prize were not just Americans or British, not just un-programmed Friends. But Quakers from all parts of our family were part of the relief efforts from the time of World War I all the way through World War II. Our small society was doing work that only a few others were also doing. We were the beginning of work that now other big organisations take on following disasters and wars. Since then, we Quakers have for the most part moved on from that type of peace work.

We have moved on, but we are scattered in our impact. Now there are others with more resources that take on that work. We have started non-Quaker groups such as Alternatives to Violence, Oxfam, and other organisations. Back in the early days of Friends, we were known for prison work. Elizabeth Fry’s picture is still on the 5 pound note in the UK in recognition of her work in prisons over 150 years ago.

But who knows us now? And even if we are known, what are we known for? Not much on a global or even a national scale. I think that on the local level, your work may be better known. I hope so.

So why is this on my mind? What does it matter that no one recognises the Religious Society of Friends or Quakers? My answer is that it is both inward and outward – not unlike Carmella Lao’s description of the Kingdom of God last Friday.

Our identity comes from within, both as individuals and as our churches and meetings and as a religious organisation. Our identity provides us with a sense of how to proceed, how to act, how to respond. It is a gift. A strong sense of identity as Friends can sustain us through challenges and difficult times. Our awareness of God’s grace can help us navigate the path which is rarely straight.

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However, often I see that sense of identity encumbered with many pronouncements like ‘Friends should . . .’ or ‘Quakers must . . .’ or Friends ought . . .’. We have heard these phrases during this conference.
I would like to see those pronouncements replaced with a sense of calling, and that comes from within, not from outside dictates. There are various Friends' processes that can assist us to own that sense of calling both as individuals and in our local worshipping communities. I am partial to two processes – threshing sessions and clearness committees.

A threshing session happens at the level of the worshipping community. It is a specially called meeting at which an issue is presented but no decision will be made at that time. But the meeting is used for everyone in the community to be able to express their views and to hear the ideas of others. Listening is very important and soliciting the views of those who are usually silent is also important. Often there are one or two benefits – an idea emerges that wasn't thought of before and/or by the time of the next business meeting when a decision may be taken, there is greater understanding within the congregation and the decision comes more clearly and quickly with the Grace of God. Hearts and minds may be touched as a result of a Threshing Session.

A clearness committee is a process that is used in several contexts. Some churches and meetings use them for membership discernment, or for those wishing to marry. I speak tonight of the use of a clearness committee to help an individual test a leading, that means to test an idea that has come to him or her for a course of action, to see if it is truly God's will for them to take this action. I used a clearness committee to help me discern whether to move overseas for a year in the year 2000 – it was not a Quaker position. A small group of people from my Meeting met with me. I had prepared for them by writing a brief introduction about my dilemma and decisions I thought were before me. They came together and asked me open-ended questions – questions that did not lead to a particular answer. Someone took notes of the questions that were asked – not notes of my answers! So I could continue to consider the questions at a later time. I found it a very helpful process to see if that opportunity was indeed a calling, a path God wanted me to take. It was, although it wasn't easy.

I mention these techniques to you tonight because I sense that many of you will be going home full of ideas about how to be helpful to others you have met here. This conference exists so you will make connections with your distant cousins. We want the connections to be lasting connections. To be a lasting connection – if more than simple friendship is involved – will require testing the leading. I encourage you to involve others and to not be led just by your well-intentioned impulses. The impact you will ultimately make will be greater if it is shared.

This goes back to the concept of our identity as Friends – we are more than just a collection of individuals. One great lesson that many of us from affluent
Reflection on the theme during worship under the care of the Africa Section

Tuesday 24th April 2012

Sizeli Marcellin, Rwanda Yearly Meeting

I am from Rwanda Yearly Meeting. I am one of those who have met Jesus and I am one of the peacemakers in my country.

This world and those who live in it experience horrible disasters. Earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions and other natural calamities strike the earth. Wars, disease, and epidemics attack people, and afterwards many people experience severe depression that causes them to long for death. The world is experiencing very difficult times, and it is worse for the countries in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Most of you probably know about what is happening in Congo and Burundi, and that in Rwanda, where I come from, we experienced genocide in 1994.

I am one of four survivors in my family. Of my extended family members, 92 died in the genocide, leaving only me and three of my children (one of whom is here with us – Silvie Umutoniwase). I survived, but for two months I didn’t know that my children had also survived. During that whole time I thought I was the only one. My heart, which was completely broken, was full of sadness and pain, full of hatred with desire for revenge, and full of other feelings that only a person who has lost 92 family members would feel.

When I fully realized that I had survived, I experienced the Light shining in all these areas in my heart. This power I experienced was not human power but power from God.

Fifteen days after the genocide began, in a place where we fled for refuge, I met others who had even worse wounds than my own. Some had lost every single member of the family. I comforted them and encouraged them to persevere. After a while, I returned to where I had lived. The houses had been destroyed and there was no food or clothing. But the hardest thing was hearing that those who had killed your relatives were now searching to find and kill you.

Nevertheless, I continued the ministry of helping, comforting and encouraging survivors to persevere. (Later, I also helped the killers not to be afraid and taught them that they needed to ask for forgiveness for what they did in the genocide.) Eventually, as people began coming out from where they had taken refuge, the Evangelical Friends Church of Rwanda resumed its ministry...
of preaching the gospel and helping cases with extreme problems. This helped me to see that I wasn’t alone and led me to continue the ministry of reconciling people to each other and helping to heal the wounds in people’s hearts.

I want to use this opportunity to thank Malesi Kinaro who, during that difficult time in Rwanda, came to teach us how to help our people who had experienced trauma. Her coming was very important to us.

In partnership with the Evangelical Friends Church, we continued the work of reconciliation. It was very difficult because some people did not understand, but we continued to comfort, teach and challenge them until they understood. In 1999, we saw a need to expand the ministry. With support from Friends in Norway and other places, we began the Friends Peace House, which has helped many Rwandese to reconcile and to be reintegrated into normal life. Christine and David Zarembka can witness to the work that the Friends Peace House is doing.

I worked not only in the church, but also in the traditional justice system of Rwanda called gacaca, which helped to solve problems caused by the genocide, such as reintegrating released prisoners and counselling genocide survivors.

All of this was done through God’s power and His unbelievable grace. But the work continues. In a place where more than one million people died, the journey to solve problems is still very long. The children of the perpetrators need help with their studies so that they do not fall behind other students. Also orphans and widows need support and places to live. At this time, eighteen years after the genocide, many perpetrators who received sentences of seventeen to nineteen years are being released from prison. If we do nothing for them they may return to their evil ways. As Friends we believe that these needs must be prayed for and a tangible response given to the perpetrators, not only in Rwanda, but also in many other countries experiencing similar problems.

Thank you for listening.

In a place where more than one million people died, the journey to solve problems is still very long.
Thread Groups
Introduction to Thread Groups

During the first three full days of the World Conference, over 40 different “Thread Groups” met for an hour and a half in the afternoon. Each group met three times, once each day, and delegates were asked to participate in one or two groups for all three days. The hope was that as Friends gathered and talked, different concerns might bubble up from these groups and be brought forward to the entire conference through a “weaving” process. Designated volunteer visitors attended and participated in thread groups, then reported back to a weaving committee charged with discerning what was emerging.

This process, something that had not been tried before, proved to be challenging and difficult. In the end, a minute of record about this experiment as well as a series of queries for Friends to consider emerged.

What follows here is that minute of record and the queries, then descriptions of each thread group and reports on the work of some, but not all of the thread groups. Follow-up reports from the thread groups were solicited; the editors worked with the responses they received.

Editors
Minute of Record on
Weaving the Threads

During this Conference Friends have met in forty-two “thread groups” (or “spinning groups”) to consider various aspects of the theme, “Being Salt and Light: Friends living the Kingdom of God in a Broken World.” Descriptions and reports from these thread groups will appear in the Conference Report. A “weaving committee” then took the strands that emerged from the Thread Group experience and reports and formulated some queries for consideration at three “weaving” plenary sessions. The queries, slightly edited, are also reproduced elsewhere in this report. We did not reach conclusions, but record a summary of the contributions during the plenaries.

Spiritual framework

Our work in the world rises from God’s calling. God speaks one Truth, but gives many instructions. God gives each one of us our particular tasks. We need to discern and test what God’s call is for each of us, today, knowing that as we are changed more into God’s likeness, more may be required of us.

Responses to violence and peace with justice

In many Thread Groups, and in many of the pre-conference activities, Friends have considered how we are called to respond to violence in our many societies, and to work for a just peace. Friends have lifted up transformative work such as the Alternatives to Violence Program, “Healing and Rebuilding our Communities” workshops, the Quaker United Nations Offices, and projects promoting peace through the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies.

Violence happens at many levels, from violence within homes and families to wars between nations. Friends in many countries are grieved by lynching and other forms of vigilante violence against criminals or those perceived of as unacceptable. All the levels are interconnected. Unless we model as Friends how to walk in peace, we have nothing to teach the world. We are called, as George Fox said, to live in the virtue of that Life and Power that takes away the occasion of all wars.

In order to achieve nonviolence, each of us needs to be transformed in our character and in our behaviour. When we get cross or brusque with someone,
or fail to ask forgiveness one of another, we are planting the seeds of violence. We need to model alternative methods for responding to injustice and violence so that we can work against injustice without using violence. We heard an account of a former criminal who said that all the reform programs that he had been assigned to did not do him any good or transform his life, and that “the only thing who has ever changed any member of our gang is the love of Jesus.”

Violence arises from injustice. All types of inequality, such as divisions of race or ethnicity, privilege, and social class, tend to lead to violence. Violence begins when we begin to define someone or some group as evil, as “them” or “the other,” when in reality they are persons just like ourselves struggling to live in the world. Our meetings and churches and Quaker institutions need to truly witness to equality.

Violence can take place in our thoughts and words as well as our actions. Silence can also be a kind of violence, if a person or group uses power to prevent others from expressing their ideas.

Economic justice

Our global economy includes both cooperation among peoples and exploitation of the people or natural resources of one region by entities elsewhere. Our Quaker organizations and contacts may enable Friends to share information about these systems of exploitation, to help us work more effectively in our local context and jointly.

Those among us with greater financial resources need to heed Jesus’ call not to lay up treasure on earth, and to be willing to give all we have to meet the needs of others, not just to give out of our surplus.

Faith in Action

We are grateful for the many diverse ways that Friends groups around the world are putting their faith into concrete action to heal the broken world. We rejoice in seeing an underlying consistency in how Friends approach issues and in the things we choose to do.

As a prophetic people, we have a message to deliver about the need for fundamental changes in the ways we live our lives, to achieve an economy and environment closer to what God intends. We must be willing to speak the truth, to speak the word of God. When we compromise our testimony to the Truth for the sake of popularity or convenience, we lose our “saltiness.”

We yearn for a radical and challenging transformation that forms the basis for our hope for the future. We wonder if there could be one or two projects in
which all Friends around the world could unite, each in our own context. What is our common project and how are we known as Friends?

The work of loving our neighbours, building peace, or creating something with our own hands can involve risks and require courage, but should also lead to great joy.

**Environment**

Several Thread Groups considered environmental aspects of God’s kingdom, and the need for justice and healing in the physical world. The whole of creation yearns for regeneration and wholeness (Rom. 8:22.). Many Friends are working in their communities to sow the seeds of environmental restoration. For example, a new type of inexpensive water filter, easy to produce locally, can supply essential clean water, saving thousands of lives. Following the 2011 earthquake/tsunami in Japan, Friends have worked with others to close nuclear power plants, and “green” the economy to use less electricity. In areas suffering from deforestation, planting trees restores ecological balance.

Addressing environmental issues also requires attention to economic fairness and power structures, and a willingness to confront those who oppose changes to the global economic system. Military activities are a major contributor to pollution and energy consumption, and environmental problems in turn cause conflicts that can turn violent.

**Healing**

Friends yearn for healing of divisions and conflicts among us, especially on the subjects of racism, human sexuality, gender equality, and other hidden unspoken inequalities.

Many Friends have participated in programs of truth and reconciliation within their countries, and with prison and criminal justice models that promote reconciliation and restoration of the offender to the community rather than just punishment and exclusion.

Healing and peace require that we acknowledge our sinfulness, the places where we are broken and have treated our neighbour badly. Otherwise we are lying to ourselves. When we ask for forgiveness, we will receive it. God loves us all. But love does not mean continuing in the same sinful ways. Like Jesus said to the adulteress (John 8:11), we have to “Go and sin no more.”

When we recognize and name our own brokenness, we may be able to offer that brokenness to others in God’s service, to contribute to the healing of others.
Sobre Ministerio Con Jovenes (Youth Ministries)

Rogelio Aro and Noe Alanguia (INELA Peru)

First Day: In Light of Daniel 1:6-21 and Matthew 5:48, What have you done in your Yearly Meeting? What are you doing now? What will you do in the future with the leading from God?

Second Day: In Light of Psalms 37:4-6, what has God done with the young people in your Yearly Meeting? What is God doing currently in your yearly meeting? What do you hope, with faith, that God will do with the youth in your yearly meeting?

Third Day: Sharing our hopes, desires and plans for the future of young people in each of our yearly meetings.

In this small group, Friends were invited to describe what they do with youth in their home meetings and churches and yearly meetings.

George Fox, the Second Paul

Marvin Hubbard (Aotearoa/New Zealand YM)

Saul of Tarsus, on the road to Damascus, experienced the living Christ and heard his voice within. Saul was transformed by this experience from a persecutor of the followers of Jesus and received his vocation as Paul an apostle of the Risen Christ to the Gentiles, claiming that the Gospel he proclaimed had been received through a revelation of Jesus Christ, (Galatians 1:11-12). George Fox, had similar experiences of the living Christ, which gave him his vocation. We would also explore Paul’s teaching that divine and human gifts place us under mutual obligation in a web of mutual dependence.

Friends from a wide variety of traditions took part in the group. The common need and wish of the groups members was to use the material on George Fox and Paul for personal and community renewal. The overarching theme became how we renew ourselves and our communities through the Spirit and love of God and for each other.
Opening the Scriptures

Tom Gates (Philadelphia YM)

There is diversity among Friends today concerning the ultimate source of corporate authority. Evangelical Friends look to the Scriptures, while liberal Friends are more likely to look to the experience of early Friends. Might we find common ground by exploring how early Friends approached the Bible? George Fox often claimed that his mission was "to open the Scriptures," and we will explore what that might have meant for him, and for us. We will also explore key scriptural terms that were important to early Friends: Light, Seed, Spirit, and Covenant. Bring Bibles!

Using several passages from the Journal, we explored what Fox might have meant by "opening the Scriptures," and what he meant by a "spiritual" reading of Scripture. We saw how Fox's language is dense with scriptural allusions which he expected his hearers to understand, but which are easy to miss if we are not familiar with the King James Version. Again and again, we saw that what interested Fox in the Bible was its spiritual meaning; his interest was not so much in the significance of events that happened long ago, but rather in how Scripture could explain to him his own condition and experience.

We also examined at the metaphor of the Light and how in early Friends usage it resonated with three particular passages in the Fourth Gospel (John 8:12, 1:1-14; and 3:19-21). Using illustrations from Fox's Epistles, we saw how early Friends experienced the Light as functional: to make manifest, to reprove, to empower, and to bring into unity. Finally, we looked at contemporary British Friend Rex Ambler's Experiment with Light and how it might help us to further understand early Friends' experience of the Light.

Finally we explored the rich vocabulary that early Friends used to describe their experience of the divine, and how this vocabulary was invariably rooted in certain biblical passages. We paid special attention to the metaphor of the Seed, but also touched on the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit, Christ Within, and the Inward Teacher. We also looked at John 14:6, and how it might be interpreted in a way that was compatible with the universal Christ.
Participant List

Aotearoa/New Zealand YM
Rogan Boyle
Elizabeth Duke
Anna Dunford
Marvin Hubbard
Patricia Macgregor
Thomas Owen
Elizabeth Thompson
Judith Wishart
Esther Malcolm

Australia YM
Abel Sibonio
Callista Barritt
Helen Bayes
Esther Joy Bowles
Susan Addison
Connor Chaffey
Ronis Chapman
Maxine Cooper
Michael Corbett
Thomas Dundas
Valerie Joy
John Michaelis
Jim Palmer
Kerstin Reimers
Michael Searle
Fiona Sharwood Biedermann
Abel Sibonio
Emily Walpole

Baltimore YM
Marion Ballard
Justin Connor
Stephen Willis Dotson
Jason Eaby
Adam Heinz
Gladys Kamonya
Charles Kleymeyer
Mary Lord
Ann Riggs
Samuel Shropshire
Dorothy Walizer
David Zarembka

Bhopal YM
Devdas Shrisunder
Nalini Titus

BMMS
Jai Raj Brown

Bolivia Central YM
Andres Donato Tonconi

Bolivia JA de la IE Central
Absalon Rojas Kado

Britain YM
Catherie Putz
Harry Albright
Jennifer (Jenny) Amery
Robin Arnold
Stephan Ball
Sandra Berry
Lynda Berry
Ken Bramhall
Roisin Brennan
Judi Brill
Margaret Bryan
Jocelyn Burnell
Cathleen Cahbo
Trish Carn
Rosie Carnall
Peter Cheer
Sarah Coote
Abigail Darton
Michael Eccles
Bryony Elias
Rosemary Elias
Ann Floyd
Matthew Gee
Victoria Grainger
Elaine Green
Marigold Gregory
Chrissie Hinde
Ruth Homer
Susan Jappie
Marisa Johnson
Felicity Kaal

Neccy Kikaya
Ruth Lambert
Ethel Livermore
Matthew Loffman
Christina MacInnes
Judith Mason
George Mason
Gordon Matthews
Robert Maxwell
John Malcolm Melling
Rosalind Margaret Onians
Paul Parker
Gillian Parker
Jasmine Perinpanayagam
Hilary Pinder
Madeleine Prager
Gladstone Samuel Providence
Catherine Putz
Euranis Neile
Alastair Reid
Douglas Rennie
John Rouse
Helen Rowlands
Cathy Rowlands
Sally Sadler
Matthew Sammons
Marleen Schepers
Janet Scott
Hazel Shellens
Jez Smith
Chris Stapenhurst
Roger Sturge
Katherine Talbot
Lee Taylor
Alastair Thomas
Leo Vincent
Mary Waldmeyer
Richard Thomas Waldmeyer
Barbara Windle
Anne Wilkinson
Elspeth Wollen
Philip Wood

Bolivia
Maximo Laura Arteaga
Quotes

I loved the Thread Groups immensely and both Noah and Thomas brought tears to my eyes in their plenary speeches. What a life changing week!

The loving tenderness with which we treated our differences as we looked through each others eyes was quite wonderful and they will be in my heart forever.

Worship was a unifying force, even with different forms, we were gathered together, in music and in prayer, both words and silence.

Every activity is unforgettable. Every message is inspiring and every people has become a blessing to me. I'm very grateful for the Lord almighty for the privilege that I am here – this is history. God bless us all.

ALL speakers were so inspiring. Was ‘fed’ so much that I nearly got ‘choked’ with the messages.

It was all inspiring and thought-provoking, sharing and worshiping together across our differences.

The best part was bonding with and learning the customs of Friends all over.

Good opportunity to meet many other Friends and get to know them quite well in a relatively short time, also learning about the wide variety of Quaker worship worldwide.

Thank you so much for such a richly blessed time. I am not leaving the same as I came.

Respect for all was apparent, sharing, giving all done with consideration.

Very inspiring and encouraging, lovely to experience so many different traditions.

All the worship sessions were wonderful spirit filled and I truly felt like I was in the midst of a family gathering.

My experience was wonderful, positive, fulfilling, enriching in many ways by creating-building and strengthening an international community of Friends,