

## **Gathering for People of Color and their families 11th month 2013 at William Penn House, Washington, D.C.**

14 Friends of Color and two Friends of European Descent from as far north as Boston, as far west as Pittsburgh and as far south as Alexandria, Virginia gathered at William Penn House in Washington DC on a beautiful and warm November weekend to enjoy fellowship and to seek Spirit together. This was the fourth regional gathering for Friends of Color and their families sponsored by the Committee for Nurturing Ministries of Friends General Conference as part of the Ministry on Racism Program.

Regional gatherings serve the function of bringing people together for support with the expectation that there would be ongoing connections after the gathering was done. In discussions, those gathered shared the hope that those present from various areas might serve as a seed group in those local areas when they returned home.

On Friday evening, after preparing, eating and cleaning up from dinner, Friends shared stories about important people in their life history; some were able to bring photographs, books or other objects to illustrate or support the stories. This provided the opportunity for Friends to get to know one another from another perspective than that provided by the usual introduction and to share significant parts of themselves with one another.

On Seventh Day morning, several Friends worshiped with WPH Friends before breakfast. The group enjoyed the meal provided by WPH and then packed sack lunches and prepared for the walk to The Native American Museum. Time at the museum provided a basis for reflection when the group returned to WPH in the early afternoon.

On First Day morning we joined Friends Meeting of Washington for worship. We enjoyed a period of fellowship with them during their coffee hour.

During the weekend, the group explored two overlapping questions: how might connection and support continue between regional gatherings and how might this group help enhance understanding of the experience of People of Color in the RSF.

As the group considered where they should focus their energies after this gathering, a number of possibilities were lifted up. Friends found others from their general region and several groups planned a time to get together in the coming months.

There was great interest in the idea of Friends of Color generating articles on their experience among Friends and submitting them to Friends Journal, perhaps for a single issue and perhaps for an ongoing column. Additionally, these items could be collected for the CNM website. Friends were interested in inviting others who were not attending this consultation to participate as well recognizing that “silence” and “not knowing” are part of the fuel for racism. When Friends of Color share their experiences of racism with other Quakers, this helps open the door to work for change.

Our tradition is speaking truth to power. The group felt it was important that all Friends understand the importance of gathering for People of Color. The specific benefits identified included:

- Decrease isolation and validation of experiences.
- Mutual support for people of color in a region
- Getting stories out so that European Americans understand the experience of Friends of color.

Those gathered recognize the potential power of coordinated effort for mutual support. Our tradition as Quakers is speaking truth to power. Friends been challenged by their meetings and many have received unconditional support. The group articulated a number of shared concerns they felt it important to publicize:

Challenges for us and our meetings:

- We need and want to live into our testimonies and support others to do that as well.
- We don't like "that *overseer* word" because it has painful associations.
- The statement: "White people are more civilized than Black people," was made to a Person of Color by a member of her meeting. It was a deeply hurtful statement to someone who worked so hard to bring forward the abolitionist history of her meeting.
- We deserve respect, consideration and concern.
- We wish for and appreciate financial support from our meetings and encouragement to take part without any question, without feeling diminished as a person for requesting money.
- We wish our meetings were better at stepping up to offer support, without any diminishment of the person and their self respect.
- We need and want to live into our testimonies and support others to do that as well.
- We realize the need to be more involved, more available to the meeting. The invitation to offer a presentation to the meeting will allow me to do some writing.

Support received from our meetings & FGC:

- The Greeley pre-gathering (prior to the 2014 summer Gathering) was the first time for me to come to know a core group of People of Color from outside my meeting. That gave me people to sit with, people to talk to. This allows a community to form and enhances a sense of belonging.

- We appreciate Friends understanding the need for People of Color to have time together.
- When my dad was seriously ill and had to be hospitalized, members of the meeting came to help remove valuables from his home to create safety.
- When my mother in law was ill, a member of my meeting took on her care.
- When I needed help for caring for my son as a single mother, my meeting helped.
- We want to create the beloved community in each of our Quaker places.
  
- We are planting a seed and we do not know what it will grow into. We are each planted in soil that will make us grow, and may we each see our place so that we can grow, can become a nation. Take this seed back to our meetings. Nourish it and it will grow.