

Canadian Yearly Meeting Quaker Education Program Newsletter – May 2013

The GIFT of Community - Conflict among Friends

Conflict is a natural occurrence in our lives and the lives of our Meetings. Yet we struggle with faithful ways to 'be' in conflict. The strategy I hear Friends confess most often is avoidance, and I wonder what might be the unintended outcomes of such an approach. Peter Phillips and the NYYM Committee on Conflict Resolution, writing for Friends Journal March 2013, observe:

"As Quakers, our attitudes towards conflict can be ambivalent. Some aspects of Friends testimonies suggest that we would not be prone to conflict among ourselves. We like to see ourselves as peace loving; we certainly hope to never be violent or coercive. Friends aspire to spiritual tolerance and being open to diverse views and beliefs. We hold that there is that of God in every person, and thus that each person is deserving of respect. Believing this, how could we ever hurt each other, even unintentionally?"

At the same time, our commitment to truth and integrity means that Friends can be strong-minded. What we experience as the truth is the truth to those who experience it, and we can sometimes forget that none of us carries the entire truth. Like all other humans, Friends can be stubborn, accusatory, judgmental, persnickety, eccentric, dismissive, irritatingly over-buoyant, pedantic, and persistent, particularly in matters that we believe arise from the Spirit. Sometimes we behave like bumper stickers that, while sincere, are the quintessential one-way communication, affording neither an invitation nor an intention to engage in dialogue."

Phillips goes on to say, "By tolerating such dysfunction in our meetings, we end up enabling bad behavior, and realize, too late, that we are paying a price: our meeting shrinks; the joy disappears; and our labors become wearisome. We have abandoned the gifts of Light and Spirit."

New York Yearly Meeting has chosen to use the approach of "Conflict Transformation", acknowledging that this will require 'real change in our current ways of relating'.

The article notes two common themes apparent in the literature on Conflict,

"The first common theme is to remember that each disputant in a conflict is usually acting in good faith. No one gets up in the morning with the intention of being contemptible. The differing views are almost always legitimate and, therefore,

deserving of respect and empathy. The second recurring theme is that most people who act out do so because they are not getting something that they need."

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If any of this sounds familiar, and you are interested in exploring ways of 'being the change you want to see in the world', here is a sample of some of the resources available on the CYM Quaker Education Web Pages.

Resources for 'Being' in Conflict –

Queries

1. What might it take for me to think about this situation differently? How am I open to Spirit, and can I be faithful to what I receive? Am I willing to be changed by what I hear?
2. How do I be faithful?
3. What would love have me do?
4. What tells me that I am *willing* to enter conversation about this conflict?
5. How do I understand my own triggers and defenses, and how will I use this awareness to stay centered?
6. Have I reflected on all aspects of this issue?
7. What are or have been my needs in this conflict, in this relationship?
8. Am I able to describe my experience in this matter in terms of my unmet needs?
9. Am I able to listen to others, be curious about and strive to understand what their unmet needs are in this issue?
10. Do I recognize that I have only a small part of the truth, and am I open to an outcome that might be different than I have imagined? Do I trust that there is an answer that will meet everyone's needs?
11. When I go home after the conversation, how do I want to remember myself as having been during the process?

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Vocabulary of Needs

What needs have some Friends identified as being important to them? (a short list)

Acceptance, authenticity, autonomy, belonging, choice, communication, community, connection, consideration, contribution, effectiveness, empathy, equality, growth, harmony, inclusion, inspiration, integrity, learning, nurturing, order, play, peace, purpose, respect, safety, support, understanding

What is 'Not Listening'? (Which is your 'stand-by' response?)

Advising - "Have you thought about doing..."

One-upping - "I remember when something like that happened to me and I was so hurt it took me months to recover"

Educating - "You know, sometimes you can use these situations to learn more about yourself. I have a great book that helped me a lot."

Consoling - "It's OK – that happens to everyone. Sometimes it's good to know you're not alone"

Story-telling - You know I heard about a situation just like this when my friend was hurt and she... and then...

Shutting down - 'Un-Friendly silence', - Uncomfortably lost for words

Sympathizing - 'It's awful when that happens, isn't it? You must just feel terrible'

Interrogating - "What did you say before that happened? How did he/she react? ...and then what?"

Explaining

"I understand that he/she has just had a really tough month. I'm sure he/she was just stressed out."

Correcting – "No, that's not what happened. I was there. That's not what he/she said, and that's not how I remember you answering."

A Resource from AVP-Canada – Alternatives to Violence

Guide to Transforming Power

1. Seek to resolve conflicts by reaching common ground.
2. Reach for that something good in others.
3. Listen before making judgements.
4. Base your position on truth.
5. Be ready to revise your position if it is wrong.
6. Expect to experience great inward power to act.
7. Risk being creative rather than violent.
8. Use surprise and humour.
9. Learn to trust your inner sense of when to act.

10. Be willing to suffer through what is important.
11. Be patient and persistent.
12. Build community based on honesty, respect and caring.

For more information, click here:

<http://www.freewebs.com/avpcanada/transformingpower.htm>

Being Peace, Being Quaker – SKYPE Learning Sessions

A set of six interactive learning sessions on 'Being Peace, Being Quaker', each 90 minutes long, uses an approach integrating Quaker process with a non-violent communications method developed by Marshall Rosenberg. Topics covered include: identifying and naming needs and feelings, speaking truth without judgment, the power of empathy, supporting others in listening and speaking truth and sustaining a practice of Spirit-led peace-full communication. A participant comments:

"In my opinion, the experience we've had using Skype as a form of communications technology has not only not interfered in the way of worship and sharing, but it has facilitated interactions and sharing that would not have been otherwise possible. We literally feel as if we have been physically touched by these interactions."

The next sets of Sunday afternoon (or Thursday evening) sessions are planned to begin in September. Contact the Quaker Education Program Coordinator for more information.

Introduction to Quakers and Friends Ways

A monthly study group via SKYPE will be offered beginning at the end of June. The six-session set uses Canadian Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice and Organization and Procedure as the primary resources. Topics covered include: *Early Friends, Experiencing the Spirit- Our Faith, The Meeting Community – Worship and Ministry, Business and Living the Spiritual Community (Membership, Clearness & Care), and Testimonies–Faith in Action.* Contact the Quaker Education Program Coordinator if you're interested in participating.

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