

Report about the Quakers United in Publishing (QUIP) Conference, May 4-6, 2014 by Mary Conchelos of Peterborough Monthly Meeting

It was an inspiring assemblage of Friends who gathered at the beautiful Woolman Hill retreat centre for the QUIP Conference in May 2014. A large majority were from New England Yearly Meeting, but also folks attended from North Carolina, the UK, Philadelphia, Arkansas, Albuquerque, Kansas, and Canada. We represented our various yearly meetings, and many professions and skills. Authors, publishers, distributors, editors, translators, booksellers, website publishers and other information technology experts – all deeply into promoting the ministry of the written word.

The weather was warm, the sun shone, and the daffodils were in bloom. Coming from Ontario and Quebec, that alone was a blessing.

Unfamiliar with QUIP, I was particularly impressed by the organization's range of activities. In addition to the annual conference, they include:

- Promotion of Quaker books, journals, blogs, and other media
- Support of Quaker authors, editors, publishers, booksellers, desktop and website publishers
- Education about sound, ethical and effective business practices
- Cooperative marketing and publishing
- Assistance to Friends publishing in less affluent areas including Africa and Latin America.

Begun in 1989, QUIP is an international network of over fifty Friends organizations and individuals. It has a searchable and regularly updated database on the web which lists Quaker publications, authors and publishers, Quaker bookstores, and provides a forum for members to post comments. QUIP also offers its members continuing education opportunities in marketing, publishing, distribution and writing.

QUIP lists "Friendly Reading Lists" on their website, publications that have been ranked by religious educators and librarians. However, these will probably be discontinued, as the compiling is labour-intensive and there are similar resources elsewhere.

As the clerk, Charles Martin, said in his introduction, "Quakers do like to write!" and this was more than evident from the weekend's workshops and plenaries.

A number of people are involved in the dissemination of early Quaker works. Benigno Sanchez-Eppler and Susan Furry have been translating Quaker classic texts for Spanish-speaking readers for many years, hoping to create mutual understanding through better awareness of the roots of Quakerism. They described their unique collaborative translation process, the challenge of making the old texts relevant to the contemporary Spanish reader, and of finding Spanish equivalents for what are often elusive concepts. Benigno mentioned the "aha" moment when

they can agree on the right word – he said it is not unlike coming to unity over a difficult minute in meeting for business.

Charles Martin was led to form his publishing house, Inner Light Books, to meet a need for republishing some of the classic Quaker works. He is issuing selected unpublished manuscripts and out-of-print texts in PDF format online, and makes others available for sale in print or in epub format.

Jan Hoffman talked about the challenges of revising New England Yearly Meeting's (NEYM) *Faith and Practice*. The original 1985 edition is online, as well as draft pages of the new edition in order to get feedback. It was interesting to hear that they decided not to list the traditional testimonies, because "every aspect of our lives, every decision we make and how we make it...is our Testimony." Listing them would appear too much like a creed. They published a paper called "Travels with Testimonies" which outlines their discernment. The reasoning is that all testimonies stem from the original testimony for truth.

An interesting addendum: extracts are seen as ministry that came through that individual, so copyright was not an issue when it came to putting F&P online.

Jan tossed in a few statistics that made me realize the vast scope of Friends' activity in the United States and put the work of Canadian Yearly Meeting in perspective. NEYM has sixty-five monthly meetings with a total of about 3500 Friends! Their yearly meeting attendance is about 750!

Beth Collea, NEYM Religious Education Coordinator, addressed the need for contemporary stewardship of the Quaker message. Some of her ideas that have been tried in NEYM: showing children film clips ("Friends go to the movies") and using them as a basis for discussion; using family vacations as means of education, such as Quaker destinations; working with grandparents to encourage children to find joy in helping. One phrase I really liked was: "prepare Friends to be the leaven in the loaf" – trying to nurture world-mindedness, appreciation of differences, interdependence, and putting service at the heart of spiritual formation. Beth mentioned a racial justice curriculum for Young Friends available at www.lisag.me.

Margaret Benefiel, a published author whose books include *Soul at Work*, *The Soul of a Leader* and *The Soul of Supervision*, said the act of writing is spiritual and a leading. She said many of us shy away from marketing because we would prefer to be spending the time on what we love best, be it writing, editing or translating. However, she said it is possible to make marketing a part of our day to day routines so it doesn't become too onerous. It is important to find the forms of social media that most authentically represent us, and it is equally important to use photos as much as possible. She suggested using the 80-20 rule which allows us to focus on the 20% of the tasks that yield 80% of the results. Keep track of everything such as queries, callbacks, reactions, and use them to determine which forms of marketing have worked best. Margaret has an email newsletter at www.ExecutiveSoul.com.

In “Midwiving a Publication,” Sarah Spencer and Liz Yates facilitated a discussion of publishing from start to finish, from “pregnancy to birth.” Some of the participants had used Amazon’s package, CreateSpace, to self-publish their works. The general consensus was that its real advantage was giving the author access to Amazon’s giant online network, but that some are not comfortable tying themselves to the global giant. Lulu.com was mentioned as a good alternative.

I asked how publishers encourage writers and potential writers to submit manuscripts. Pendle Hill publishes five to six pamphlets a year and does not solicit. Their reasoning is that if they did, and received one that was unacceptable, they would have difficulty in rejecting it.

One good suggestion was to talk to people face to face, after hearing them speak at a meeting such as a regional gathering or half-yearly meeting – and ask them what their passion is. This conversation can sometimes lead to an agreement to write.

The Friends General Conference site gives authors the tools to self-publish their books, through Quaker BridgeMedia – which are then linked to FGC’s bookstore, QuakerBooks.org. From QuakerBooks you can order a print edition, or download an epub (they charge for both.) Quaker BridgeMedia is considered a partnership between the author and FGC, in which FGC contracts for a piece of the service, such as promotion.

In his presentation, “From HTML to Ebook,” Ken Haase demonstrated how he is trying to improve the experience of e-reading. His ebook platform, called sBooks, increases the capacity for inserting notes, thus personalizing the digital experience. He also is building in improved search capabilities, enrichment of documents with context and images, plus better browsing and sharing. He uses mostly open source software with many layers. Ken’s two websites are www.beingmeta.com and www.kenhaase.com.

The final plenary, “Quakers and online media: it’s not about the tech,” was given by Jeffrey Hipp, NEYM communications director. Jeff began by saying the challenge today is how to respond to modernism in ways that are faithful. He said things are similar to the way they were one hundred years ago when Howard Brinton said we were encumbered by dry and empty forms and were no longer able to articulate the Quaker message. But he went on to say there are incredible things happening in Quaker life right now, and different ways that message is being expressed.

For instance, who would have thought Quaker Quest would be so popular today? And “What does George Fox say?” (the Quaker version of the viral hit on YouTube, “What does the fox say?”) received a huge number of hits and drew many people to Friends meetings for the first time!

Jeffrey said it is important to articulate the Quaker message and share it in a way that allows people to connect. Here are the questions that we need to ask.

- 1) What are the audiences we are NOT reaching out to and could be? For example, in NEYM, it might be non-Quakers interested in learning about Quakerism; Friends already involved in business of NEYM; New England Friends in local meetings.
- 2) Can we better humanize institutions and lift them up? QuakerSpeak, the popular weekly video is very popular (its format is based on TedTalks.)
- 3) Can we communicate the essence of our faith visually? Pictures tell so much more yet we show empty meeting houses because of privacy and sensitivity. Can we find ways of showing people worshipping? People read 28% of words on a printed page but pictures raise that to 85%.

Jeffrey ended his presentation by playing "What does George Fox say?"

I feel very privileged to have been able to attend the conference; it was stimulating and enriching, I learned so much, and met some amazing people. I hope that CYM will continue to be an active member of QUIP, because the organization has much to offer our publishing activities.

Mary Conchelos

May 25, 2014