

Report for Consultation #2 – Living Ministry Communities
World Plenary in Pisac, Peru
January 2016

This consultation explored the conditions for creating Quaker communities that are active, vital and energizing, and that encourage membership and spiritual growth for Young Friends and seekers. The consultation was co-facilitated by Rachel Guaraldi (North America) and Janet Velázquez Hernandez (Cuba).

Attendance at this consultation began with approximately 90 friends, and dropped to approximately 60 Friends at the final session. Un-programmed North American and British Friends, and African Friends made up the majority of the group.

The format for the consultation was consistent throughout the sessions. After one or more initial "ice-breaker" exercises the consultation body broke into smaller groups to consider a query or set of queries. A recorder and reporter were chosen from within each group to bring the smaller group's work back to the larger body at the end of each session.

The queries we considered during the consultation sessions were as follows:

- *How do we create Quaker communities that are active, vital, and full of energy?*
- *What is needed to have a Religious Society of Friends that is vital and growing?*
- *How do we, in spiritual community, open to new Light / to God's direction?*
- *How do we encourage membership and spiritual growth among young people and seekers?*
- *How do we encourage communities to accept generational change?*
- *How do we express the Living God collectively?*
- *How do we respond to the call to live our faith?*

Brainstorming among 6 or more groups during each consultation session resulted in the sharing of many, many good and interesting ideas—far too many to convey in this report. However, several themes seemed to be repeated across the groups and queries, as follows:

1. Thriving Meetings are not about numbers; they are about the Spirit of the Living God. If at least some Friends do not share this experience openly, vitality will be lacking;
2. Meetings must be welcoming and inclusive, where every individual is respected. They must create opportunities to know one another deeply, and to actively nurture the gifts and talents of their members;
3. Meetings must be open to new ways of doing things and be prepared to make changes periodically in order to foster spiritual intimacy;
4. Meetings must orient and "bring along" newcomers. Experienced Friends must share spiritual journeys and experiences, and talk openly about membership in the RSoF and why it is important;
5. Meetings must find ways to create impactful experiences for children, teenagers and young adults. This is critical to retaining their active participation in the RSoF;
6. Be obedient to the voice of God. Responding to God's call may involve stretching and discomfort, but may lead us to the heart of our collective expression of faith.

As I listened to the excellent ideas and observations generated during this consultation I was excited to realize that the SOA's Strategic Plan aligns directly with many of these themes. Traveling ministry, inter-visitation, Quaker leadership development, and cross-branch encounters all have the potential to energize and revitalize our Friends communities, ultimately leading to a stronger and more resilient Religious Society of Friends.