

CALLED TO GO FORTH WITH JOY

**A reflection for Friends attending the
Annual Meeting of Friends World Committee for Consultation
Section of the Americas
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Dear Friends,

I stand before you with great joy and greatest humility to share with you a few reflections which have come to me regarding the theme of this Annual meeting.

During the months preceding this meeting, I was able to visit various groups of Friends in Latin America and get a closer understanding of their realities. My remarks tonight are offered in that context.

Out of respect for my Latin American brothers and sisters, I wish to use my mother tongue to address you. I do it as a witness or symbol that the Section of the Americas is a multicultural and multilingual Section with a great diversity in forms of worship and theological legacies.

Tonight, I wish to invite you to think about where I believe we are right now as the SECTION OF THE AMERICAS OF FWCC, and where it is we are being sent – I hope with joy, as our text says.

The meaning of being sent:

A) In the history of Quakerism, we discover time and again that from the beginning, Friends have always felt linked to God's mission in the world. As part of that, they have raised a prophetic voice again and again, in innumerable circumstances, convinced that they had heard the voice of God, and that it compelled them to announce this or that particular truth, or simply The Truth. They did so under the guidance and care of God, just as the Old Testament prophets or the New Testament apostles did; that is, following a calling, or Divine guidance.

One of the experiences mentioned most often is George Fox's so-called vision on Pendle Hill in 1652, which is linked to the very beginnings of Quakerism. In part, he said:

“The Lord had said unto me if I did but set up one in the same spirit that the prophets and apostles were in that gave forth the scriptures, he or she should shake all the country in their profession ten miles about them...”¹

The theme of our Annual Meeting and the context of the basic text, from Isaiah 55, tells us that the affirmation “called to go forth with joy” means accepting a prior call to make an announcement, to be sent, without even taking into account the following phrase (with joy). In other words, the announcement of the word of the Lord comes directly from God.

The joy referred to in the Old Testament, I dare say, is also the joy of the early Friends on sharing the good news; in their case, that no matter the human being’s condition, *there is one, Jesus Christ, who can speak to that condition*, without mediators of any kind, but solely by the grace of God.

Nonetheless, this joy has many manifestations and implies sacrifices, which are assumed as part of the spiritual experience, which cannot be measured in human terms, but rather in the context of obedience to God.

B) Throughout our history as a Section, and truly as FWCC, there have been some moments when the Section has played a prophetic role within Quakerism, and others when this voice has been raised outside of Friends, in the broader society.

I. THE PROPHETS

I would like to make some general comments about the prophets [**TN:** *all English Bible verses are from the New International Version*]:

In modern terms, we could say that the prophet is God’s spokesperson, or the Lord’s servant. Isaiah affirms in Chap. 50, v. 4 & 5, that it is precisely God who gives him his tongue, that is, the words of wisdom... to know how to speak to the weary; he also says that God awakens his (the prophet’s) hearing daily, to listen like one being taught, and that he (Isaiah) did not turn back from hearing such words.

For his part, Amos, another of the prophets, says in Chapter 8 verses 9b, 10a, & 11, that God had told him:

“I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping... ‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.’”

¹ Fox, George; *The Journal of George Fox*. John L. Nickalls, Ed., Philadelphia, Religious Society of Friends, 2005 (Revised Edition), pp. 103.

Jeremiah 1:9 & 10 tells us that: *“Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.’”* Further on, the prophet Jeremiah announces in poetic form the following about the captivity of Zion:

“How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave. Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is none to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.” (Lam. 1:1 & 2).

Without a doubt, many of the situations described by the prophets have their parallels in our world today; but the ways in which their visions and calls were made concrete, or expressed, happened in a given moment in history.

There are also examples of the prophets’ replies, such as Samuel’s *“Here I am, send me;”* *“Speak Lord, for your servant is listening,”* or Isaiah himself.

Jeremiah, in Chap. 20:7a states: *“O Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed.”*

And an example of a prophet who did not respond immediately to the call, and who actually tried to flee or make the Lord’s offer fail, is of course Jonah, who in the end highlighted the universal mercy of God.

As I understand it, the word “prophet,” in Hebrew *NABI*, means “one who announces;” in more general terms, *“to speak or announce something in place of another,”* and that other is the one who inspires the one who is sent to speak; in other words, the prophet is a messenger. Proclaiming the prophetic word, or words, is done before a community, with reference to the future, and the prophet announces what is revealed to him/her, the words of God to human beings. The mission *par excellence* of the prophet is to “discern the signs of the times.” Therefore, it is not possible to isolate the prophet from his time, since he is part of his age and, as a human being, immersed in it. He offers a message that goes beyond the boundaries of time and looks to the future, and what he sees, he always links with what are the constants, the parameters of the work of God in History, recognizing in Him the God of History. The prophet calls the people to listen to God’s will, and also calls them to repentance for abandoning the Lord’s ways.

For the prophet, this vocation or calling becomes a sort of “exodus,” because it means leaving a place or situation that is familiar, comfortable or even loved,

and taking on an “adventure,” shall we say, in the broadest sense of the word; taking risks with faith in God.²

We can remember calls such as the one to Abraham, when God says to him in Genesis [Chap 12], “*Leave your country and your people...*”

Or to the Apostles as fishermen whom Jesus addresses and to whom he says at the Sea of Galilee, “*Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men...*” What they are called to announce is the good news of the Gospel. [Matt 4:19b].

There are many examples we could use to speak of the prophetic task, in and for the people of God in the Old Testament. Of all these, the ones that most attract my attention are the prophet Elijah and his successor Elisha.

God’s purpose was always to communicate something about the future, but an immediate future, and in that sense we can say that it was for the Here, and to seek a response in the Now.

Some Old Testament scholars talk about a more or less basic classification in which the prophetic calling, and the response to the call the prophet receives, are described as models:

1. A model that they call the military one, because the orders are imperatives: In this model, the prophet only obeys orders, literally carrying out the order received.

[Gen. 12:1-4] To Abraham: “*Leave your land...*” etc.

[I Kings 19: 15-19] To Elijah: “*Go back the way you came, and go to the desert of Damascus...*”

[Jonah 3:1-3] “*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh...’*”

2. Another model is often called the diplomatic one, in which the prophet receives the calling, or an order; expresses his/her objections or doubts; and undertakes a dialogue with the Lord; and in this one, we find many expressions such as: “*I replied,*” and “*The Lord answered me.*”

God always offers his protection for carrying out the prophetic task, for the divine announcement, in each case. Whatever the model, the calling, we are told, is essentially a mission, and the initiative always comes from God. Each prophet, every one, responds according to the nature of his personality, with his sensitivities, and with the diversity of his gifts, and in the end, “*God’s*

² Ravasi, Gianfranco, *Los Profetas*, Colombia, Ediciones Paulinas, pp. 16

*splendor shines exceptionally bright in the prophet*³ or as Isaiah says [Chap. 49, v3]: “*You are my servant, in whom I will display my splendor.*”

For me, the examples of the prophets Elijah and Elisha are interesting because we see two generations of prophets. One is that of Elijah, who is immersed in a series of reprimands to the people of God, and announcements to the wider community in the history of his contemporary world.

Elijah is known for his passion for God and for the truth. He is known as the prophet of fire, and his best-known action was to confront the false prophets of Baal. Many followed him, and we read about a school of prophets, from which came the one who would succeed him in his tasks, Elisha. In fact, many of the early prophets belonged to schools of prophets, which were communities and from which, according to at least one account in II Kings 4: 1-7, women were not excluded. [Bernhard W. Anderson, page 251] Even so, the role of the prophet is a solitary one.

Without going into a lot more details about them, I will say that at the end of their ministry, we see a dialogue between Elijah and Elisha in which we recognize their common commitment to God, and a commitment between two generations of prophets, the second of which, represented by Elisha, asks as an inheritance: [II Kings 2:9] “*Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit.*” Elijah attracted people to him to fulfill his mission and his vision, beyond what his role was in a specific time and place. As a result, we see an Elisha who feels equally committed to God and to Elijah. Both had a vision and a passion to fulfill the mission entrusted to them by God.

II. But, what do these things have to do with us and with FWCC?

Throughout our nearly 70 years of existence (although many of us are younger than that!), FWCC has seen a long series of changes within Quakerism itself as well as in the world, and in fact, I would dare say that FWCC began life as a prophetic voice aimed inside Quakerism.

The Section of the Americas has played a dual role that, at different times, it has assumed with differing emphases, but which has been present since the beginning. Part of this continues to be announcing, or re-announcing to the Quaker world in different ways, according to the times, that it is possible to overcome the historic barriers that have separated us as Friends. There have been many other actions taken, and we are all aware of them. The things that are done, the decisions made to speak in the name of Friends or to take this or that action in our name, are products of the responses to the concerns of Friends, who try to respond to God’s call to pre- or re-announce some truth or another. Among the more recent actions undertaken by the Section, the one

³ Ibid.

that perhaps stands out most for me was the Conference of Friends in the Americas in the 70's. There is no doubt that in the life of FWCC and of this Section specifically, this moment led, against all obstacles, to a new way of relating to one another in this hemisphere and of recognizing each other as part of the common trunk of Quakerism. It was in a sense the foretelling of what we today claim to be as a Section. That conference undoubtedly marked a milestone in the history of the Section; out of it arose COAL, and it was the beginning of work to integrate Latin American Friends a little more fully into the world family of Friends. The latest response is, of course, the peace conference that North American Friends held at Guilford College in January of 2003, which marked a needed change in our approach to the topic of Peace and its implications, within the context of global, regional and national events.

And Friends throughout the Hemisphere, in our diverse environments, travel in the ministry, preach the Word, hold conferences, carry out Alternatives to Violence workshops, run youth camps. Sometimes we share this information (or sometimes we don't), but they are part of our realities. Here in this very meeting, Latin American Friends will share a panel discussion on how Friends witness today in Latin American society, and others will speak of other ways to witness to the Truth that we believe today. In all of this, there is a zeal and a sense of belonging and of obedience to that which some of us call the inner voice, others the Living Christ, or whatever name we give it. These calls are raised within a small nucleus that we also call by different names: church, meeting or group; in other words our spiritual home, and the concern becomes a special responsibility that weighs on us in our present moment. Perhaps this is part of the Quaker jargon of how we name our particular calling; in the end, we recognize as Friends that an authentic *concern* or *leading* comes from God, so that we feel compelled and cannot avoid saying and doing what we feel God calls us to say and do.

According to Thomas Kelly, "A Quaker concern particularizes... cosmic tenderness. It brings a definite and effective focus in some concrete task all that experience of love and responsibility which might evaporate, in its broad generality..."⁴

Kelly also says that "... a concern has a foreground and a background. In the foreground is the special task, uniquely illuminated... in the background is a second level, or layer, of universal concern for all the multitude of good things that need doing."⁵

⁴ Kenworthy, Leonard S., *Sixteen Quakers Leaders Speak*, Dublin, Indiana, U.S.A., 1979, Friends United Press, pp. 95

⁵ Ibid.

There are many examples in the history of the Friends, in this hemisphere and around the world, of how some have carried out unimaginable tasks for others (and I say this with humility and respect). Time after time, the call to raise the prophetic voice has begun with an individual, has been tested in a meeting or church, and Friends have sought in expectant waiting and in the various means we use as Friends, to hear God's guidance, which has compelled us to say or do one thing or another.

And I would venture to say that perhaps our prophetic model today is the diplomatic one, an interaction of seeking-response-seeking for God's will in our lives or in our spiritual communities.

I remember the Cuban Friends, when they were invited to participate in military service, in the midst of all the tensions of that moment, how they spoke firmly, with fear, but with faith in God, offering to work as assistants for the medical services, but not doing the jobs asked of them in case of an invasion, along with their fellow citizens.

There were North American Friends, offering work in Mexico as an alternative to obligatory military service for youth in this country. This was an early form of collaboration between Friends of two countries, decades ago.

And I also remember a Friend, Heberto Sein, in silent worship in the Zócalo [central square] of Mexico City, alone, but with the support of the Monthly Meeting in that city, asking for a cease-fire against the students in 1968.

So many of you in this country and in Canada, individually or as whole meetings, participated in the reconstruction of our brother Central American countries, which passed through decades of civil wars a few years ago.

Or, Canadian Friends supporting the struggle of indigenous peoples for their rights. There are also the Friends who participated in the Sanctuary movement. The Friends in Honduras joined with other pacifist and non-pacifist groups in the 1980s to request the status of conscientious objectors as part of the rights of their citizens.

There is the scholarship program for indigenous people in Guatemala, whose own country makes it difficult for them to study. This program has now existed for more than 30 years.

The Quaker House in Managua, Casa Ridgeway and the Friends Peace Center in Costa Rica, even Monteverde as a community. And each one of us can bring to mind other examples from our own countries of obedience to the call, of being sent inside or outside of Quaker circles to raise our voice, and to act. This is, in part, our collective memory that we should celebrate and keep as points of reference as we continue questioning.

But, does FWCC have a prophetic role today? Where are we going and who is sending us, as the Section of the Americas?

What are our vision and our mission?

Perhaps many of you would say, “Well, we’ve decided what our vision and mission are and have already expressed them many times, especially in recent years.” Nevertheless, I would like to call to your attention some of the statements made in the documents that support the decision to move forward with a fundraising campaign; maybe not the exact words, but the essence, of those with which we define ourselves as a **MULTICULTURAL, MULTILINGUAL** and **MULTI-THEOLOGICAL SECTION**, feeling the need to move beyond where we are at present. What does it mean to affirm this? Without any doubt, it implies many opportunities.

III. A MULTICULTURAL AND MULTILINGUAL SECTION

A few days ago, something happened that I would like to share with you (with apologies for using this example; if the Friends involved are here, please know that I do not mean to criticize, only to use an example at hand).

Among the Section staff are three of us who are bilingual, and we think, and consider, and at times debate the use of terms that we translate, and sometimes we do not manage to agree.

That is what happened with the translation of the English term (and other Latin American Friends may disagree with me on this) **CROSSING BARRIERS**. For the Spanish I suggested **SOBREPASA BARRERAS**. Someone asked about the meaning of the term, and someone else as an example suggested that it meant to cross a dividing line, where I will encounter things on the other side that are different from what I am used to. In our terms, it would be to cross a line where I will find meetings on the other side that are very different from my own, but that does not mean that I have to overcome, defeat or resist the differences, or stop being who I am, just because I crossed that line.

This is an example that clearly illustrates what I see as our fears that we must leave aside, and allow ourselves to be truly **TRANSFORMED** by the Holy Spirit, no matter where we are or where we are going. If you wish, it is an exercise in trust, in accepting that I am not, that we are not in control. I would call it an exercise in spiritual confidence, of faith, because I am allowing God to guide me and because I want to encounter God in this meeting with the one who is different from me. This expression of caution, wanting to know what was implied in the expression **CROSSING BARRIERS**, and the explanation we were trying to give, made me say to myself that it was almost like saying, “Yes, I can cross over but, at the same time, I seem to say ‘You know what? Here is where

I am. I am not part of those others, but rather of these Friends.” This makes me wonder again, ARE WE REALLY A MULTICULTURAL SECTION?

Again, I apologize for using this example.

I would say that we are on the way to being one, but we still have a long way to go. All of us have much to learn from each other.

When I think about also calling ourselves a **MULTILINGUAL SECTION**, I know that is in process also.

Why do I say we are in the process? Because saying that we are multilingual does not just mean that there are meetings in our Section where they speak different languages. (By the way, how many languages are spoken within the territory covered by our Section? I’ve counted at least eight.)

We are multilingual in many other ways. We must approach each other in humility to listen to each other, to listen to the different languages we speak, including spiritual language, with openness, with our hearts’ ears open to understand our spiritual experiences, not merely the religious experiences, that the other, the one different from me, has had, and what it is that God wants to tell me through them. Or, in the words of Woolman, “to hear where the words come from;” what is the center of them. That is to say, not allowing the cultural to impose upon the spiritual, but to go deeper, or as we also say, to that which is eternal.

It is obvious that the minimum that an international organization such as ours must do is to ensure that all of us can understand what is said, as well as being able to read the documents that reflect the life that has transpired during the year in which we have not seen each other, each in our own language. But, the fact that we are an organization of a religious nature, and more strictly, one with a spiritual basis, must keep us moving even further along, from the simple initial courtesy, to other, deeper levels of communication that will permit, I repeat, dialogue in the spirit, about what our faith experiences are, wherever we may be. Then it does not matter if I am a simple pastor out in the mission field in El Salvador or Honduras; or a high-level employee in a university or the UN; or a homemaker, in Canada or in Cuba; we will always encounter the inner space in each other where we all can share, because we speak a common language that will allow us to meet in spite of the external forms, because it is the language of the soul.

While thinking about this, there are two biblical passages about communication that come to my mind; one from the Old Testament and the other from the New.

The first is the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, a passage that is used to exemplify lack of communication, and the ambition of human beings. Desiring to reach the heavens with one single language and a common speech, they failed and had their languages confused because they wanted to build their destiny without taking God into account. The place was given the name Babel because God confused their language [*Babel* sounds like the Hebrew for *confused*].

There are theologians who argue that Babel was a first attempt to build a civilization on the basis of a single language, a proposed civilization from which God is excluded.⁶ Certain phrases in the passage, such as “*so we may make a name for ourselves,*” and “*let us build for ourselves a city*” may indicate this, which is a very different use of language from that which follows, where we are told “*The Lord said to Abram... I will make you into a great nation.*”

Therefore, Babel represents spiritual pride, or an attempt at globalization. In this sense, dealing with a common language is not seen as a way to facilitate communication, rather as the imposition of an ideology, a single power, of the great *polis*, or city-state. There stands the tower as a concrete symbol of the resulting confusion. Babel, for other theologians, means a world of “non-communication” where “the peoples, cultures and races continue to be sources of conflict and violence.”⁷

The second episode, in the New Testament, is a little happier one. I am referring to the story told about the Day of Pentecost, in the Book of Acts, Chap. 2. Unlike in Babel, speaking several languages is not a curse, but rather a blessing, and an expression of life in the spirit; more specifically of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, in order to be faithful witnesses, sent to proclaim the good news, in as many lands and languages as possible, unto the ends of the earth. We are told of these disciples that they were joyful, with one accord in one place. I note with special interest the use of the latter two terms, which in Spanish may sound like synonyms, but are not. “In one place” (“*juntos*” in Spanish) implies physical closeness; “with one accord” (“*unánimes*”) implies unity, though not necessarily uniformity. This is a perfect example of how to counteract the effects of the Old Testament Babel.

As Friends, I feel that we move between these two. Sometimes it may seem that our model is closer to that of Babel, than to that of the Day of Pentecost. *How can we make a space to hear the different voices that also arise from concerns as genuine as ours, but which are not expressed in the language we understand? Have we done enough, or is there still more we must do?*

⁶ Blough, Neal, *Re-articulating the vision: What is a Peace Church?* En: http://Bocs.hu/Chp/osijek/nealblough_a.htm

⁷ Ibid.

IV. We also consider ourselves a MULTI-THEOLOGICAL SECTION.

This is nothing new. One of our great riches is that we belong to an organization that by its own consultative nature can give rise to, initiate, encourage, sponsor dialogue, both between the different branches of Quakerism and with others, an interdenominational dialogue.

At other points in the history of the Section of the Americas, and of FWCC, let us remember the consultations on missions and service, the conferences of the New Call to Peacemaking with other pacifist churches. This makes me wonder, *“What else are we being called to at this level today?”*

Throughout the Americas there exists an infinite number of needs that, in the light of history, demand of us a more decided presence. What may have been seen before as a possible option, or even an “absurd” one, the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means, whether at the personal, community, national or international level, has come to be seen today as *THE SOLUTION par excellence*, and we are lagging behind, or arriving on the scene late in many cases. It only takes opening our eyes, sharpening our hearing, to become aware that people are eager for solutions to their problems that are constructive and respectful of human life.

At times, because we do not dialogue among ourselves due to our different theological legacies, we find ourselves in situations in which we seem more like antagonistic groups instead of Friends who have a common heritage. Sometimes we even come to think that it is not worth the trouble to dialogue with the Friend from this or that branch, because his/her way of thinking does not coincide with our beliefs, or because we are afraid to be contaminated, or because we consider it a waste of time. The peace conference at Guilford has been a great example of what we can achieve, and I believe many of us hope it will not stop there, because there is still much to do ahead of us and above all because it is not an isolated event. That conference arose from a genuine concern in the Section, and involved a corporate process of discernment to follow the call of God; like the prophets, to read the signs of the times. And I wonder, will it stop there, or what comes next?

Are we really modeling that we are a multicultural, multilingual and multi-theological Section?

V. THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

What are the signs of the times that God calls us to discern in this moment of great confusion in the world, if we are to be faithful to our calling?

Fox tells us: “*And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them.*” And he adds, “*Then (and I would say, **only then**) you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one; whereby in them ye may be a blessing, and make the witness in God in them to bless you. Then to the lord God you will be a sweet savour and a blessing.*”⁸

And I wonder; if we took on our calling, today, what would each one of us do? Or, would we try to elude the call, like Jonah, turning our backs on God’s call?

Where are we going? Where are we being sent? I like to be a person with hope, not an optimist, but hopeful, and I like to think that together under God’s guidance we can be sent forth with joy just as the prophets were sent out.

On the wall of the Friends Church in San Ignacio, Chalatenango [El Salvador], where Friend Emma Espinoza is the pastor, the following inscription appears, referring to missions:

*MISSIONS ARE CARRIED OUT BY THE FEET OF THOSE WHO GO,
THE KNEES OF THOSE WHO REMAIN BEHIND,
AND THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO GIVE.*

The Friends who preceded us in the work of FWCC were passionate about their calling and gave their time, their talents, and their money. Many feet walked, but those who stayed behind prayed, and many gave, in cash or in kind. I would like to paraphrase this statement and say that the Mission of FWCC, of the Section of the Americas, needs the feet of those who go, the knees of those who pray, or (if you do not kneel to pray), it needs our prayers, and also needs hands, the hands of those who give. In fact, not only the hands, but the heads, the arms, and above all the hearts.

Just like the prophets, we must discern the “signs of the times” and as human beings immersed in history, offer a message that goes beyond temporal boundaries and looks to the future, recognizing the work of God in History, recognizing in God, the Lord of History.

If our calling is like an “exodus” to leave situations that are familiar, comfortable or even beloved, then let us take risks on an “adventure” toward the future, risking ourselves with faith in God.

⁸ Fox, *Journal*, pp. 263.

Like Elisha, I would ask God for a double portion of the spirit of those who came before us, and I would wish that at the end of the days of the generation of Friends who make up the Section of the Americas, that those who came after us would also ask the same thing. I would follow in the footsteps of Elijah and commit myself to those who preceded me, but above all to God, to continue forward proclaiming His Truth, and the truth that we in the Section have identified as our calling.

I would hope that the young people of whom we speak so much--and there are still not enough of them among us yet--could also see the passion and the surrender to God and to his calling in me, in us, to fulfill our mission; and that they might also exclaim that they want a double portion of our spirit, and that like Elisha they could do greater things than we are doing today.

I see myself, and I hope you all see yourselves, too, as part of a generation that still has much to give, but that must open the way and do more to involve future generations.

I see myself as a generation that urgently and constantly, today more than ever, needs to not be conformed to this age and that needs, just like the early Friends, to raise our prophetic voice inside and outside of Quakerism.

What is going on inside of Quakerism, and what is there in our societies, that God is calling us to respond to right now? Each of us can identify and name where we believe FWCC can do still more and not be conformed to what has been achieved so far.

Friends, whatever our particular situations may be, we are present today at a change of epochs, and not just an epoch of changes. Where else is God calling us to go speak? Our societies, wherever they may be, are full of violence in all its manifestations, exploitation, corruption.

Right here and now, with sorrow in our hearts, as we see what is going on with those who think that the security of their borders lies in "hunting" undocumented workers, I wonder: What are we called to do? Will we have something to say? Are we saying something already? Is what we are saying and doing sufficient? Is it only up to those who are on this side? How can our lives together model alternatives to these types of situations?

If we respond to our call to move ahead, the first steps of a campaign are just that. Let us think of the campaign as a first step resulting from a vital spiritual dialogue, with many challenges that may invite us to leave some things aside; to change others; to leave our material, physical, emotional and spiritual comforts; to not close our eyes and ears to the crying needs of our meetings, our churches, our youth and our children, in each of our countries.

How can we be more open to dialogue between different branches of Quakerism, and think about more corporate witness in today's world? Is our voice strong enough? Does our message have anything to offer to today's Quakerism and today's world?

How can our faith experiences be shared using new models, not just one? Should we give up models or things that we do because it's always been done that way, or because this is the tradition; and explore new forms to revitalize our personal lives, and that of our meetings and churches; to re-encounter principles and ways to apply them today, in order to witness in the midst of our societal upheavals?

In the last two years, we have answered "yes" to many of these things. And by saying yes, we commit ourselves to accepting our responsibility to make them happen.

VI. FINAL

I have a tendency to repeat things over and over, and I wish to end with two things that you may have already heard me say:

1. In order for our corporate witness not to be within just one country, or just a few countries, we should lay aside our fear of the one different from us. We face many possibilities, and we have taken the first step by deciding to carry out a campaign, which is the fruit of a dialogue and a reflection in the spirit to which God has called us.

Meeting in Latin America next year, specifically in Chiquimula, Guatemala, symbolically will send a different, more real message about what the Section of the Americas is as a multicultural, multilingual and multi-theological society.

2. Now is the time to move away from continually trying to test and decide, openly or tacitly, which type of Quakerism is the "real" Quakerism, and rather to recognize the many and varied forms through which Friends witness to their faith locally, nationally and internationally. Today, more than ever, we must promote activities that facilitate encounters that will be transformational, discovering each other further and dispelling once and for all the doubts and false images (or maybe confirming them, who knows?) that we have about each other. And all this is will not just happen by magic; it isn't enough to gather together once a year in these meetings. It will require all our patience, intelligence, creativity, humility, and above all, our absolute belief that this work is the work of the Spirit. We must allow the winds of the Spirit to blow over us, and transform us in order to continue serving God by serving both Friends and others. Only then will we go forth with joy.

Isaiah says: “*You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.*” [Chap. 55: 12 & 13]

I would like to close with a quote from Kenneth Boulding (who was a member of IMYM): “*I believe the evolutionary potential of [Quakerism] is very far from exhausted, and indeed, has hardly begun to show its full effects. I believe furthermore that the Society of Friends has a vital role to play in the future development of mankind, small perhaps in quantity but of enormous importance in quality, and that to refuse to take on this role or to run away from the burden which it may imply would be a betrayal of trust and a tragedy not only for the Society of Friends but for mankind as a whole.*”⁹

May God help us to listen to God’s voice, to God’s call, and to continue forward, being sent forth with joy.

May God bless us all.

⁹ Boulding, Kenneth. *The Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet, p. 17. 1964, reprinted electronically 2003, Pendle Hill Publications

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