

# World Gathering of Young Friends 2005

"I am the vine, you are the branches"... now what fruit shall we bear?(from John 15)

Report by Devender Sellars

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Dear Friends,

With all the theological, spiritual, and cultural divisions, what unites all Friends as Quakers? We gathered from all around the world 16-24 of August in Lancaster, England to wrestle with what unites us and to seriously consider what fruit the Society of Friends will bear.

We came together and saw the Light in all of us – of all different shades, worship styles, and cultural identities. We did not ignore the different ways we see God and worship, but were enriched by the different perspectives, and worked towards seeing the common ground and ideas. Throughout the 9 days I was amazed at how often I powerfully felt the ministry and truth of a Kenyan evangelical minister, a German Christian, other unprogrammed Friends, and everywhere in between.

We came out of the conference with an Epistle (*you can read online here: <http://www.wgyf.org/specialsarticledisplay.asp?articleid=33>*) that took only hours to approve in the large group (almost 250 of us and much thanks to the epistle committee!). I am happy and honored to have been witness and part showing me that young Quakers are engaging the issues related to the future of the Society of Friends, and speaking truth and bearing our fruit. We hiked up Pendle Hill and truly felt like a great people gathered.



*Jessamyn Doan and me atop Pendle Hill.*

My own journey through the gathering had me wrestling with my own issues. I arrived with anxious anticipation, because in the past few years I had been largely absent from religious life. My time at Guilford College had been fulfilling but I needed some space to find myself in other spheres, and see where playing in a touring rock band would take me. I recognized the conference as a time to become reenergized and challenged about my faith. I was not disappointed, and opened in ways I did not expect.

In the first days, I was happy to see some old friends from Guilford College. I am quite accustomed to traveling, so I settled into a

routine quickly, enjoying the time in-between sessions and taking time to myself to write and play my guitar. Jessamyn Doan and I gave a presentation about SEYM to the large group gathering. As I made notes about some ideas that are

important to SEYM, I found my own resonance with them: how to plant roots in such a "new" place (most Quakers in Florida having



*George Fox's chair at a local meeting.*



*The first of us make it up Pendle Hill with the Italian peace flag, marvelling at the view.*

grown up elsewhere and Florida itself having so much growth in the past 50 years), how do we be religiously viable, finding our identity, writing a faith and practice, affiliation with FUM, among others.

In the past 4 years, I have been feeling discontent about my religious life on top of trying to find a sense of identity turning into an adult. I have been so busy working on practical aspects in my life that it had been easy to push away pressing spiritual matters. I had even gone so far as to avoid spiritual leaders from my Guilford years; ashamed of my inactivity. At the conference I kept on coming back to the Biblical quote, "faith without work is dead," Adding work without faith is blind.

Once I settled into this spiritually rich place with Friends struggling with their own sense of identity and faith, I became clearly moved to no longer avoid but deal with my religious identity and seek the Truth I need to find as an adult and a Quaker.

As I sought the spiritual silence, I was also enriched by the plenary speakers in ways unexpected. Planned vocal ministry helped me find that place and realize that I need a spiritual discipline in order to find what fruit I will

bear with my life. It was Deborah Saunders' impassioned message

on "you are the branches" that brought a sense of immediacy to my spiritual life as something I cannot run away from. And if I am to be a loving, effective, and healthy person, I need work AND faith in religious fellowship to fulfill the leading of my life.

It is no accident. This was the fourth time I heard Deborah's ministry. The first time I was 18, about to enter Guilford College. The beginning of my young adult life and away from home. Now, at the World Gathering of Young Friends, I have turned 26 – no longer a child. I am 3 months away from getting married. My band, my artistic focus for the past 7 years, is breaking up. I am searching for a sense of who I am as these changes are happening in my life.

Her charge was to "know thy self. Know truth." I had realized in a very powerful way, that despite my good intentions, I do not know myself spiritually. In the midst of Pendle Hill, Swarthmoor Hall, and in the 1652 country, I felt the deep Truth in these places and with the Friends gathered in fellowship.

I had been so hung up on Christ-centered language and theological differences in my adolescence and I had also not heard the Truth other Friends bring. In my own seeking, I have never come to any confident spiritual ground, found what I really believe. If I don't know, deep down, where my faith lies, how can I speak my truth and make my faith work?

I am brought back to the relationship of work and faith. If I work without understanding where I am, my work has little grounding. If I do not have and faith, then I will fail to be effective religiously and spiritually. If I am not effective, then my faith will be a dead faith.

I am unable to find my faith and God alone. There are so many ways to keep and hold on to faith. I have been so closed to the various ways in which God speaks to me, only waiting on messages to me directly in meeting, or worse, on my own time and not spending time centering myself at all.

I found clarity at the World Gathering. Amongst the wide breadth of Quaker worship and faith. I saw the undeniable Truth that speaks to all Friends, and that I am convinced Quakers speak to my condition.