

Epistle - 2023 QLC Quaker Leadership Conference

Friends meetings and churches will face an array of new challenges over the next generation. It will require new sets of skills and abilities for us to sustain faithful communities enabled to do our work in the world. The attenders at this first annual Quaker Leadership Conference have endeavored to make a start on the long process of identifying which skills and abilities will be needed and how to provide opportunities to gain those skills to the Friends in local congregations who will need them.

Over 60 Friends from 15 yearly meetings gathered at the invitation of the new Quaker Leadership Center at Earlham School of Religion to consider how our world is changing and how Friends might best adapt to the new realities of the 21st century. In formal presentations, discussion groups and informal conversations we tried to see our contemporary world with new eyes and to explore how Friends might adapt to the changes we see.

We met together in fear and confusion, hope and trust, love and joy. There are certainly things which seem to be fading away about how Friends have lived and practiced their faith in the past which need to be grieved. But we are hopeful about the new opportunities which are opening up, and determined to find ways to adapt in order to use these opportunities to strengthen the Religious Society of Friends and our witness in the world.

Each of us has brought our own experiences of the challenges we face, and we have discovered how widespread the need is, and that no one has the one final answer. In our sharing, we have opened a space for the Spirit to be at work among us, and have been enveloped by unexpected joy in this community of Friends engaged in similar work. The experience of accompaniment pervading this gathering will continue to energize our efforts after we depart for home. The task before us cannot be accomplished in a month or a year. We invite Friends everywhere to join us in exploring new tools and new ways of keeping our local meetings and churches in the years ahead.

On behalf of the 2023 Quaker Leadership Conference and the Quaker Leadership Center at ESR,

Della Stanley-Green, Director

Andy Stanton-Henry, Associate Director